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Smoky environment increases risk of high blood pressure

May 4, 2019/Hindustan Times

A non-smoker should leave a smoky room or car until it has been cleared, suggest researchers as secondhand smoke can cause high blood pressure and hypertension. "Avoid exposure to secondhand smoke regardless of whether the smoker is still in the room. Our study in non-smokers shows that the risk of high blood pressure (hypertension) is higher with longer duration of passive smoking - but even the lowest amounts are dangerous," said author, Byung Jin Kim in the details discussed in the Meeting of EuroHeartCare. Passive smoking at home or work was linked with a 13% increased risk of hypertension. Living with a smoker after age 20 was associated with a 15% greater risk. Exposure to passive smoking for ten years or more was related to a 17% increased risk of hypertension. Men and women were equally affected. High blood pressure is the leading global cause of premature death, accounting for almost ten million deaths, and those affected are advised to quit smoking. Previous research has suggested a link between passive smoking and hypertension in non-smokers. But most studies were small, restricted to women, and used self-reported questionnaires in which respondents typically over-report never-smoking. "The results suggest that it is necessary to keep completely away from secondhand smoke, not just reduce exposure, to protect against hypertension," said Professor Kim. "While efforts have been made around the world to minimise the dangers of passive smoking by expanding no smoking areas in public places, our study shows that more than one in five never-smokers are still exposed to secondhand smoke. Stricter smoking bans are needed, together with more help for smokers to kick the habit. Knowing that family members suffer should be extra motivation for smokers to quit," he added.

Blood test to spot Alzheimer's before symptoms occur

May 4, 2019/The Tribune

Researchers have developed a new test that could help doctors detect Alzheimer's disease eight years before the first symptoms occur. Using current techniques, Alzheimer's disease, the most frequent cause of dementia, can only be detected once the typical plaques have formed in the brain. At this point, therapy seems no longer possible. However, the first changes caused by Alzheimer's take place on the protein level up to 20 years sooner. "Once amyloid plaques have formed, it seems that the disease can no longer be treated," said study co-author Andreas Nabers from Ruhr-University Bochum in Germany. In Alzheimer's patients, the amyloid beta protein folds incorrectly due to pathological changes long before the first symptoms occur. But experiments showed that the test was not suitable for clinical applications as the test provided false positive diagnoses for nine per cent of the study participants. In order to increase the number of correctly identified Alzheimer's cases, the researchers have now introduced the two-tier diagnostic method. To this end, they use the original blood test to identify high-risk individuals. Subsequently, they add a dementia-specific biomarker, namely tau protein, to run further tests with those test participants whose Alzheimer's diagnosis was positive in the first step. If both biomarkers show a positive result,

there is a high likelihood of Alzheimer's disease, said the study published in the journal *Alzheimer's & Dementia: Diagnosis, Assessment & Disease Monitoring*. "Through the combination of both analyses, 87 of 100 Alzheimer's patients were correctly identified in our study," Gerwert said. "Now, new clinical studies with test participants in very early stages of the disease can be launched," Gerwert added. — IANS



Completing first-time marathon 'reverses' ageing of blood vessels: Study

May 5, 2019/The Tribune

Training for and completing a first-time marathon reverses ageing of major blood vessels, according to a study which found that the older and slower runners benefit the most. A hallmark of normal ageing is stiffening of the blood vessels, which increases the risk of stroke and heart disease even in healthy people. Compared to their peers, lifelong athletes have biologically younger blood vessels, researchers said. The study investigated whether training for a marathon could modify aortic stiffness even in novice runners. "Novice runners who trained for six months and completed their first marathon had a four-year reduction in arterial age and a four mmHg drop in systolic blood pressure," said Anish Bhuvra, from the University College London in the UK. "By completing training, and getting to the finish line, it is possible to rejuvenate the cardiovascular system of first-time marathon runners," he said. Fitness improved and heart rate dropped after training—both to a modest extent. The participants had been running for less than two hours a week before marathon training and their finish times were slower than average, which was expected as it was their first race. "The study shows that the health gains of lifelong exercise start to appear after a relatively brief training programme," he said. "Training for a marathon can be a good motivator to keep active. Many people enjoy it and continue running, which should increase the likelihood of sustaining the benefits," he added. — PTI

Most Indian adults not aware they are suffering from hypertension

May 5, 2019/The Tribune

Hypertension prevalence in India is high, but only 45 per cent of people are aware of their diagnosis, according to a first large-scale population based study of hypertension care in India. Researchers have used National Health and Family Survey (NFHS-4, 2015-16) data of 731864 individuals aged 15-49 years, which covered each district of 29 states and 7 union territories of India. The study published in *PLOS Medicine* suggests that 3 out of 4 individuals with hypertension ever had their blood pressure measured, less than half of individuals (45 per cent) had been diagnosed, 13 per cent reported currently taking hypertensive medication, while 8 per cent had their blood pressure under control. The study was carried out by researchers at the Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI), Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health, the Heidelberg Institute of Global Health, the University of Birmingham and the University of Gottingen. The study also found adults living in rural areas, men, and those who were poorer, were even less likely to receive the care they need. "Control of hypertension prevents future stroke, heart attacks and deaths. However, it is an unfortunate paradox that India does not perform well in any of the measures of detection, treatment and control. I believe the new National Health Mission through the health and wellness clinics has the potential to address the issue," he said. Dr Lindsay Jaacks, faculty at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and visiting faculty at PHFI said, "This

is not just an assessment of health systems. We need demand-side interventions to raise awareness in India that hypertension is relatively easy and cheap to treat, and that keeping it under control can have huge benefits in terms of preventing heart attacks and stroke." PTI



Exercise helps boost heart failure patients' memory

May 6, 2019/Times of India

Heart patients who exercise regularly and have better fitness are likely to have less cognitive impairment, says a study. Fitter patients have better memory, it adds. "The message for the patients with heart failure is to do exercises," said study author Ercole Vellone, Professor at University of Rome Tor Vergata, Italy. The study analysed data from over 600 male patients, aged 67-71 years, with heart failure from six countries. During the research, the "Montreal Cognitive Assessment" test was used to measure cognitive function and exercise capacity was measured with a six-minute walk test. The results showed the younger and better educated heart failure patients with better fitness were significantly less likely to have cognitive impairment. Two-thirds of the patients with heart failure had cognitive problems, showed the study, presented at the EuroHeartCare 2019, a scientific congress of the European Society of Cardiology (ESC), held in Milan, Italy, from May 2 to May 4. According to the study, cognitive dysfunction is a common problem in the patients with heart failure with 67 per cent reporting at least mild impairment "There is a misconception that patients with heart failure should not exercise. That is clearly not the case," Vellone said. "Find an activity you enjoy and which you can do regularly. It could be walking, swimming or any other activities. There is good evidence that it will improve your health and memory, and make you feel better," Vellone said.

World Asthma Day 2019: Early signs of asthma you should know

May 7, 2019/The Times Of India

May 7 is observed as the World Asthma Day across the globe. It is a day to raise awareness and educate the masses about this common respiratory disease. Asthma is a condition in which a person's airways narrow and swell and produce extra mucus causing difficulty in breathing. This disease is not age bound and a person can develop the symptoms any time through their lifetime. As per data, about 15-20 million people are suffering from this chronic disease in India. Here are a few early symptoms of asthma that you should look out for: Coughing is normal when you are suffering from cold and flu. But if your cough keeps coming back after some time and gets worse at the night or in the morning, then it can be a sign of asthma. People suffering from asthma often experience coughing outbursts several times in a day. If you take proper treatment, you can be cough free. Wheezing is a high-pitched whistling sound that comes out while breathing. It is a common symptom of respiratory-related disorders. If you make such sounds, then see your doctor. Some people feel that their problem of asthma is minimal, just because their wheeze comes and goes, but this is not true. If you have just climbed a flight of stairs and are feeling short of breath, then it is time to get yourself diagnosed. You may even struggle to talk, eat or sleep when you are short of breath. Feeling a heavy weight on the chest is a sign of chest tightness. It feels like an elephant is crushing you down. You might feel a dull ache and a sharp stabbing in the chest and find it difficult to take a deep breath. When are you most likely to suffer from asthma?

While asthma can be triggered by anything and can happen to anyone, but your chance of having asthma is high if you have a history of:

- You have eczema and other allergies, like hay fever
- Someone in your family suffered from this disease
- Your mother smoked while she was pregnant with you
- You were born prematurely

World Asthma Day 2019: How Ayurveda can help treat asthma

May 7, 2019/ The Indian Express

Some symptoms of asthma include chest tightness and pain due to increased coughing, breathlessness, anxiety, uneasiness in the body, palpitation and fainting. Growing industrialisation has polluted the environment to such an extent that many people have developed breathing problems in the recent years. Trees, which are an important source of oxygen, are being rapidly cut down for man's increasing greed leading to an infinite number of health hazards. Owing to these factors, asthma, a respiratory ailment has also registered as increase in the recent years. The degree of attack varies from person to person, but it has been noted that children are getting more prone to asthma attacks. On the occasion of World Asthma Day, an annual event which aims to create awareness about the ailment, Dr Ashwini Konnur, in-house ayurvedic consultant, AyurUniverse shares the symptoms of asthma and lists out the ways Ayurveda can help treat the same. Yoga is also beneficial in calming down the mind and strengthening the body. Since there is synchronised body movements with breathing it helps in clearing the lungs with accumulated or stored carbon dioxide. Yoga helps to utilise all the lobes of the lungs for better breathing and helps relieve congestion, and thus ease asthma. Asanas that are useful for patients of asthma are Pavanamukta Asana (wind relieving pose), Setubandhasana (bridge pose), Bhujangasana (cobra pose), Adhomukhasvanasana (bownward facing dog), Ardhamatsyandriyasana (sitting half spine twist) and Shavasana (deep relaxation), Pranayama – Kapalabhati, Nadishuddhi pranayama (alternate nostril breathing). 20 minutes of yoga practice increases physical and mental energy. Pranayama increases lung capacity and clears the airway passages.

Arsenic in drinking water may change heart structure, says study

May 8, 2019/ The Indian Express

Drinking water contaminated with arsenic may lead to thickening of the heart's main pumping chamber in young adults, increasing the risk for future heart problems, a study warns. People are most frequently exposed to arsenic, a toxic metalloid, through drinking water in areas where groundwater is contaminated. "People drinking water from private wells, which are not regulated, need to be aware that arsenic may increase the risk for cardiovascular disease," said Gernot Pichler from Hospital Hietzing/Heart Center Clinic Floridsdorf in Austria. "Testing those wells is a critical first step to take action and prevent exposure," said Pichler, lead author of the study published in the journal *Circulation: Cardiovascular Imaging*. "The stronger association in subjects with elevated blood pressure suggests that individuals with pre-clinical heart disease might be more prone to the toxic effects of arsenic on the heart," Pichler said. The study is limited by having only one measure of arsenic exposure, and by the lack of long-term follow-up of the participants. Although the study was performed in tribal populations in the north, central and southwestern US, the results are likely to be generalisable to

millions of people in other rural locations exposed to low or moderate levels of arsenic in their water, said Pichler. “The study raises the question of whether the changes in heart structure are reversible if exposure is reduced. “Some changes have occurred in water sources in the study communities, and it will be important to check the potential health impact of reducing arsenic exposure,” Pichler said.

World Thalassemia Day 2019: How to manage thalassemia during pregnancy

May 8, 2019/The Indian Express

Thalassemia (or Mediterranean Anaemia) is the most common monogenesis disease affecting people across the world. This debilitating disorder, characterised by abnormal production of haemoglobin in the body, is a silent killer. Annually, nearly 70,000 babies worldwide are born with Thalassemia Major, out of which, around 10,000 are born in India. The tragedy is that most of these children succumb to cardiac complications at an early age. The heartbreak suffered by their families is another tale of anguish. Added to this, is the significant economic burden on the families as conventional treatment such as life-long blood cell transfusion, iron chelation therapy or splenectomy (surgical operation to remove the spleen) are hugely expensive. To prevent the above, Dr Rahul Bhargava, director, blood disorder clinic and bone marrow transplant at Fortis Memorial Research Institute, Gurugram says it is critical to understand thalassemia and its management during pregnancy. In the case of high-risk parents, invasive prenatal diagnosis is the way forward. This must be followed by a close management and monitoring of maternal and foetal condition during pregnancy, in consultation with the obstetrician, haematologist, cardiologist and other concerned specialists. Blood transfusion for pregnancy patients, based on foetal growth, maternal general and cardiac status and total haemoglobin level is done. Patients with a history of recurrent abortions or increased risk of thromboembolic events (where clots may develop in the brain, lungs or kidneys) may be considered for stroke prevention or anticoagulant therapy all through pregnancy. Prophylactic dose anticoagulant therapy is also very important. Thalassemia free India is a very real possibility. To achieve it, focused, backward planning and awareness generation is the need of the hour.

Chemicals in sunscreen may seep into the bloodstream: FDA study

May 8, 2019/The Indian Express

Dermatologists always advise people to apply sunscreen before stepping out in the sun, but the results of a small clinical trial by researchers at Food and Drug Administration in the US have indicated that the UV-blocking chemicals in sunscreens seep into the blood cells. Though, there’s no evidence as to what the molecules do inside the body, it is understood to have serious repercussions for sunscreen manufacturers going forward, and may change the options found in drugstore shelves. “Everyone had always thought that because these are intended to work on the surface of the skin that they wouldn’t be absorbed, but they are,” mentioned Theresa Michele, director of the FDA’s division of nonprescription drug products, and co-author on the FDA-funded study. Her team found that it took only a few hours after the application of sunscreen for the photoprotective chemicals to infiltrate the bloodstream. The fact that these sun-filtering molecules do penetrate into the circulation system does not on its own mean that such ingredients are unsafe. “There might be nothing, and that would be great,” said Kanade Shinkai, a dermatologist at UC San Francisco and editor in chief of JAMA

Dermatology. “But the problem is that we just don’t know.” The bottom line, she said, is that although the evidence is irrefutable that the sun causes skin cancer, scientists know a lot less about sunscreen chemicals’ relative risks and benefits. Like other over-the-counter drugs, the FDA are trying to study sunscreens to make sure they don’t mess up people’s hormones, affect their reproductive systems, or cause cancer. Such safety testing has never been done on the active ingredients in sunscreen, because those chemicals were approved decades ago, before anyone suspected they could be absorbed into the body. But now, they suspect that it could be a problem if they do seep into the bloodstream.

WHO for eliminating industrially produced trans fats by 2023

May 9, 2019/The Hindu

Trans fat, also called the worst form of fat in food, responsible for over 5,00,000 deaths globally from coronary heart disease each year, could be eliminated from the industrially produced global food supply by 2023 if the World Health Organization (WHO) has its way. The WHO has welcomed its partnership with the International Food and Beverage Alliance (IFBA) to achieve this target. It said: “Eliminating industrially produced trans fat is one of the simplest and most effective ways to save lives and create a healthier food supply.” WHO Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, in a statement, said they had met the IFBA representatives, including chief executive officers from several of the 12 companies comprising the alliance on May 2 to discuss actions to eliminate industrial trans fats, and reduce salt, sugar and saturated fats in processed foods. Dr. Ghebreyesus said, “The commitment made by the IFBA is in line with the WHO’s target to eliminate industrial trans fat from the global food supply by 2023. Of particular note was the decision by IFBA members to ensure that the amount of industrial trans fat in their products does not exceed 2 gram per 100 g fat/oil globally by 2023.” Speaking about the relevance of this meeting and deadline for India, Medanta Hospital founder and heart surgeon Naresh Trehan said, “India has among the highest number of coronary heart disease cases in the world and we must try to beat this deadline.”

How to spot the symptoms of ADHD in children

May 9, 2019/The Indian Express

With the recent upsurge in awareness and education about mental illnesses, especially amongst parents and teachers, it is increasingly common to hear the word ADHD being used in daily parlance. However, despite such an awareness, it is important to ensure that the term is used accurately, and not to misdiagnose or to overlook any such symptoms. Some of the signs being displayed by a child with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) would include pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity, which is likely to be significantly interfering with the child’s academic, social as well as daily life functioning. While inattentiveness and hyperactivity are commonly observed in many children, a diagnosis of ADHD would require a persistent display of such a pattern of behaviour for at least a period of six months; and such a behaviour would be developmentally inappropriate, typically being observed during school years before the age of 12 years. It is essential to note that, first and foremost, ADHD is an identifiable neurobiological condition that affects children globally, and is not a label for ‘bad behaviour’ or ‘laziness’. But it requires timely intervention, or it can lead to more severe behavioural, emotional and academic difficulties. Until recently

it was believed that ADHD did not continue into adolescence, based on the assumption that hyperactivity often diminishes during the teen years. However, we now know that children do not always 'outgrow' symptoms of ADHD, because such symptoms can actually persist into adulthood as well. In fact, ADHD is by far one of the most common yet grossly misunderstood neurological disorders that are found in children. Therefore, let us look at some of the common signs and symptoms to help us identify ADHD accurately.

Stress in early life may up depression risk, says study

May 10, 2019/The Indian Express

The findings, published in the journal *Neuropsychopharmacology*, provide biological and psychological evidence to support work first proposed in the 1960s. Facing adversities in early life may put people at the risk of developing negative thinking, which could lead to major depressive disorder, a study has found. The findings, published in the journal *Neuropsychopharmacology*, provide biological and psychological evidence to support work first proposed in the 1960s. Researchers from the University of Bristol in the UK used a rodent model of early life adversity to show that offspring are much more sensitive to negative biases in their cognition when treated with the stress hormone, corticosterone. The research has shown a dose of corticosterone had no effect in normal rats but caused a negative bias in the early life adversity animals. The study also found that the early life adversity rats were less likely to anticipate positive events and failed to properly learn about reward value. Studies in patients have shown that depression is linked to changes in how the person processes information particularly emotional information. People with depression have a negative view of the world which can be measured by looking at how they process information such as emotional faces and words. However, whether this causes the illness or is a consequence is not known. The researchers developed a method to use in rodents where similar neuropsychological processes were measured. One of the tasks, the affective bias test, looked at how simple associations between a specific cue, a bowl with a specific digging substrate in it, and a reward, a food pellet, could be biased by the animal's affective state when they learn about it.

With regards,

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