



Sunday, Nov. 26, 2006

The Year In Medicine From A to Z

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AIDS

Hoping to sharply cut HIV/AIDS transmission rates in the U.S., the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) took the unusual step of recommending that doctors ask all patients from ages 13 to 64 whether they want to be tested for the virus. One in four Americans living with HIV don't know they are infected; for them, early diagnosis could mean early treatment and longer lives. Antiretroviral drug therapy has already saved nearly 3 million years of life in the U.S. alone. Meanwhile, the number of people living with HIV/AIDS around the world continues to grow, to 40 million, according to estimates released last week by the U.N.

ANOREXIA

When Madrid barred ultrathin models from the city's fashion week in the aftermath of a model's death, it was clear acknowledgment that culture can fuel unhealthy body images. But genes play a role too. Researchers studying 31,406 identical and fraternal twins born in Sweden from 1935 to 1958 found that if one identical twin suffered from anorexia, the odds were significantly higher that the other did as well. Just because someone is genetically predisposed to anorexia, however, doesn't mean she or he will develop the disorder. The next step will be to figure out which genes are involved and how they affect the brain.

ANTIBIOTICS

Bacteria are on the march. Researchers found that nearly 75% of serious skin infections treated at clinics in Atlanta were resistant to the antibiotics that are normally used to cure such infections. The bacteria responsible, known as methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA), used to be seen mostly in hospitals but are now turning up all across the U.S. MRSA can still be treated with other antibiotics, but the Infectious Diseases Society of America has called for Congress to pressure the pharmaceutical industry to develop new, stronger drugs to fight the superbugs.

ASTHMA

Nearly 5,000 deaths a year in the U.S. are attributed to asthma. But on the basis of a statistical analysis of 19 trial

involving some 35,000 patients, researchers believe that 4,000 of these deaths are actually being triggered by two drugs found in inhalers sold under the names Serevent, Advair and Foradil. The drugs relieve symptoms but can, without warning, increase dangerous bronchial inflammation. Asthma, on the rise since the 1980s, afflicts more than 20 million Americans.

BACON

Bacon may be a staple of the American breakfast, but it's probably not a terrific idea to eat it every day. Or sausage or corned-beef hash, for that matter. Researchers from the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm pooled data from 15 studies and found that eating just over an ounce of these smoked and processed delicacies each day increased the risk of developing stomach cancer from 15% to 38%. The culprit may be the high salt content of such meats, which could irritate the lining of the stomach, or perhaps the nitrate and nitrite additives, which are known to have cancer-promoting qualities.

BREAST CANCER

Women who put on pounds as adults have new reason to be worried about breast cancer. A study of 44,161 postmenopausal women linked adult weight gain to a higher lifetime risk for all types, stages and grades of breast cancer, particularly advanced malignancies. The risk for women who gained more than 60 lbs. was three times as great. Reason: breast-cancer risk is linked to lifetime levels of the hormone estrogen. Fat tissue increases circulating estrogen, thereby adding to the risk.

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CAVITIES

Cough syrups can damage children's teeth, and it's not necessarily the sweeteners in them that do it. Many over-the-counter remedies that contain antihistamines are slightly acidic in nature, and a new study showed that this acid can cause cavities in healthy tooth enamel. Fortunately, fluoride counteracts the problem, so make sure your children brush their teeth after swallowing cough syrup. Also try giving the medication with meals, when the body's natural production of saliva helps protect the teeth.

CELL PHONES

Think you're safer because you talk on a hands-free cell phone while driving? Think again. Using either type of phone while trying to drive a car is roughly equivalent to driving with a blood-alcohol concentration of 0.08%, which is high enough to get you arrested in any of the 50 states and the District of Columbia for driving under the influence. Folks who use hands-free cell phones in simulation trials also exhibited slower reaction times and took longer to hit the brakes than drivers who weren't otherwise distracted. Data from real-life driving tests show that

cell-phone use rivals drowsy driving as a major cause of accidents. SUV drivers, it turns out, are more likely to talk on a cell phone--and to resist wearing their seat belt.

COFFEE

Is coffee destined to be the next health food? Researchers found more evidence that drinking coffee--with or without caffeine--decreases the risk of Type 2 diabetes in those who are prone to develop the condition, perhaps by boosting the body's metabolism a bit. (Exercise is, of course, even more effective, but maybe you need that extra jolt to get yourself moving.) Coffee also seems to decrease slightly the risk of liver damage in patients with a history of alcoholism, perhaps because coffee contains lots of antioxidants. But the news isn't all good. Drinking lots of coffee during pregnancy increases the risk of having a stillborn child.

COLON CANCER

Nobody looks forward to a colonoscopy, but there's still no better way to detect and prevent colon cancer. There may, however, be a less intrusive alternative to the dreaded test. Researchers at Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York City tested a newly improved version of a noninvasive fecal DNA test to screen for early signs of the deadly cancer. Fecal samples from 162 patients who had undergone colonoscopies in the previous 14 days revealed 35 cases of cancer (compared with 40 detected in the colonoscopies). That translates into an impressive 88% sensitivity rate. The fecal screen, however, also mistakenly indicated cancer in 22 individuals who had been properly given a clean bill of health by their colonoscopy. Not perfect yet, but still potentially lifesaving.

COLORADO

Not only is the air cleaner in the Centennial State, but the people there also live longer. A Harvard study showed that the seven U.S. counties with the greatest average life expectancy--81.3 years--were all in Colorado. (Clear Creek, Eagle, Gilpin, Grand, Jackson, Park and Summit, for those of you thinking about packing a U-Haul.) Exactly what's so special about Colorado is not entirely clear, since the study authors controlled for any bias caused by race or income. Perhaps the residents' good fortune has to do with the fact that they all live in mountainous areas, where being physically active is easy, as opposed to more lowland, sedentary portions of the U.S.

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DDT

Nearly 30 years after phasing out the widespread use of DDT to control malaria, the World Health Organization (WHO) has reversed itself. But instead of authorizing indiscriminate spraying of fields and ponds--which had a disastrous effect on wildlife--the WHO is focusing this time on spraying DDT on the inside walls of homes once or

twice a year in malaria-prone areas. Why? DDT is particularly effective at repelling and not just killing mosquitoes, which helps protect enclosed spaces. Environmental organizations aren't thrilled by the idea, but two of the largest have endorsed limited spraying, figuring that some risk to the environment is justified to save human lives.

DEPRESSION

Researchers still don't understand why severely depressed teenagers are more likely than adults to commit suicide while taking antidepressant drugs like Paxil, but a major study out of UCLA concluded that the drugs do more good than harm. Starting in the early 1960s, the annual U.S. suicide rate held fairly steady at 12 to 14 instances per 100,000--until 1988, when the first of a new generation of antidepressants, the selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors, was introduced. The suicide rate has been falling ever since, to around 10 per 100,000. The investigators estimate that nearly 34,000 lives have been saved.

DIABETES

Doctors have long held that an active lifestyle and sensible eating habits can help keep people who are at high risk of Type 2 diabetes from developing the condition. But taking diabetes medication before you have symptoms also helps. A study of more than 5,000 prediabetic men and women found that treatment with rosiglitazone, a drug that controls blood-sugar levels, decreased their risk of progressing to diabetes 62%. About half the participants who were given the drug returned to normal blood-sugar levels, compared with 30% of those who relied on diet and exercise alone. About 41 million Americans are thought to be prediabetic.

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ESTROGEN

Things got even more confusing for women considering hormone-replacement therapy. Studies had shown that a combination of estrogen and progesterone increased the risk of breast cancer, heart attack, stroke and blood clots. A new study found that estrogen-only treatments appear safer, with no increase in breast-cancer risk but some increased risk of stroke or clots. A later study found a breast-cancer risk from estrogen therapy, however, among some postmenopausal women. If you must have hormone therapy, get it in small doses for short periods.

EYES Tired of glasses or contact lenses but too nearsighted for laser surgery? You might--if you dare--consider implanting a contact lens directly in your eye. Doctors can now surgically place an artificial lens in front of the eye's natural one. The lens is approved only for nearsighted people and works best if you're under 40 and don't need reading glasses. What's more, while 95% of subjects enjoyed improved vision, the sample group was small--not the best data when you're making decisions about your eyesight.

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FATHERS

The biological clock may tick louder for men than anyone thought. Researchers at Columbia University found that pregnant women are as much as three times as likely to miscarry when the father is over 35 as when he's 25 or younger. And a very large study of fathers in Israel found that the risk of autism among children is up to six times as great when the father is 40 or older, as opposed to when he is 29 or younger. In both studies, the mother's age was not relevant. The cause of the problem, researchers say, probably is changes in sperm that occur as men grow older.

FISH

People seeking the heart-protective powers of omega-3 fatty acids in fish have been warned about the mercury, dioxins and PCBs that they might be consuming with their meal. But a study from the Harvard School of Public Health showed that while those contaminants pose a danger, particularly for women of childbearing age, for most people the benefits of fish outweigh the risks. Eat modest servings of fish each week--particularly salmon and bluefish--and you may reduce your risk of coronary heart disease 36%. Elsewhere, researchers at Louisiana State University reported that omega-3s can help protect cells in the retina, slowing the damage caused by such blinding diseases as retinitis pigmentosa and macular degeneration.

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GUM

Want to get out of the hospital quicker? Chew gum. People who undergo abdominal surgery often suffer from post-op ileus, essentially an intestinal shutdown, leading to pain, vomiting and other problems. The sooner the digestive engine gets up and running, the sooner patients can go home. Researchers at Santa Barbara Cottage Hospital in California found that chewing sugarless gum can help things along, probably by stimulating nerves and hormones associated with eating. No word on whether any flavor works better than others.

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HEART

News from the frontiers of heart research was mixed. Researchers discovered two genes that appear to contribute to early heart attacks, in part by causing blood to clot abnormally. A small emergency-room study found that drugs used to break up clots may help revive cardiac-arrest patients when such methods as CPR and electrical shock have failed. There were murkier findings regarding people with high levels of homocysteine, an amino acid

linked to heart disease. Folic acid and B vitamins help bring homocysteine down, but one study cast doubt on whether this actually improves heart health.

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INFLUENZA

Science fought back against an avian flu with a successful test of a new vaccine. In a study of 451 subjects, the preparation caused no significant side effects and produced antibodies at a level that is usually sufficient to protect against common strains of flu--a good sign that it will work against the avian variety too. It's the common strains, of course, that ought to cause us concern, since avian flu has yet to kill anybody in the U.S. and the common flu kills 36,000 each year. Girding for this winter's assault, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved a new vaccine against several flu strains likely to cause infections in North America, bringing to five the number of vaccines in this season's anti-influenza arsenal.

IVF

Would-be mothers who fear time is running out can take comfort from a Finnish study that showed that it's the quality of the embryo--not the age of the woman--that determines the success of in vitro fertilization. The study found that the pregnancy rate for women in their late 30s who had a single, top-quality embryo transfer was as good as that of younger women. What makes a grade-A embryo? Belgian researchers found that the transplant of a single fresh (not frozen) Day 5 embryo in infertile women under age 36 led to pregnancy and delivery in 47% more women than with a less mature, Day 3 embryo

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LAUGHTER

We've all shared in the pain of a bad joke, but can a good laugh help the heart? Watching 15- to 30-min. clips of comedies--one used by researchers was *There's Something About Mary*--increased blood flow to the heart up to 50%, compared with, say, the opening battle scene of *Saving Private Ryan*. Watching a funny film was like a jolt of aerobic activity; a sad film triggered the same vascular response as doing a math problem or remembering an incident that made one angry.

LUNG CANCER

Doctors diagnose 173,000 cases of lung cancer in patients each year, 95% of whom will die from it--more than from breast, prostate and colon cancer combined. But New York--Presbyterian Hospital/Weill Cornell Medical Center researchers found that low-dose, spiral-computed-tomography (CT) screening drastically improved the

odds. In a study of 31,567 people, annual CT screening (about 600 images per scan) detected Stage 1 lung cancer in 412 patients, and when the cancer was surgically removed within one month of diagnosis, their 10-year survival rate was an impressive 92%.

LONELINESS

Americans may be meeting more people online, but the number we count among our closest friends--the ones with whom we discuss important matters--shrank over the past 20 years, from three friends to two. At the same time, the number of Americans who have no one at all to confide in more than doubled, to 1 in 4. Sociologists from Duke University and the University of Arizona report that we increasingly rely solely on family members (80%) and spouses (9%). There could be health consequences: other studies link robust social networks to lower blood pressure, reduced risk of Alzheimer's disease and greater longevity.

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MEDITERRANEAN DIET

The fact that the diet favored by the Greeks is good for the heart seems as ancient as Greece itself. But now the Mediterranean diet--high in fruit, vegetables, cereals, fish, olive oil and topped with a glass or two of wine daily--has been linked to a lower risk for Alzheimer's, even in patients with vascular disease. When researchers from Columbia University Medical Center scored the diets of nearly 2,000 subjects on a 0-to-9 scale--depending on their adherence to a Mediterranean-style food plan--each additional point on the scale corresponded to a 19% to 24% lower risk of developing Alzheimer's. The one-third of patients with the best score reduced their risk 68%, compared with the bottom third.

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NUTRIENTS

Chocolate

Chocolate in small quantities is known to be good for the heart and blood vessels, but in a new biochemical analysis, researchers have identified a component in cocoa that reduces platelet clumping, helping blood flow smoothly.

Cinnamon and cloves

Two related studies suggest cinnamon and cloves can reduce risk factors for diabetes and heart disease up to 30%

by controlling glucose levels in Type 2 diabetics and reducing inflammation and cholesterol levels.

Fruit juice

Antioxidants in the skins of fruits and vegetables seem to have reduced risk of Alzheimer's 76% among Japanese Americans who drank juice more than three times a week.

Ginger

Known to reduce inflammation and ease nausea, ginger powder was also found to kill ovarian-cancer cells in the laboratory at a rate comparable to conventional chemotherapy drugs.

Turmeric

Turmeric (a spice used in curry sauces) and phenethyl isothiocyanate (a phytochemical found in broccoli, kale and cabbage), alone or in combination, significantly reduced prostate-tumor growth in mice.

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OBESITY

The epidemic shows no sign of abatement; in fact, it's spreading. The Chinese government reports that 60 million Chinese people are overweight--in a country that never had that problem before. The culprit: prosperity, which permits Chinese people to eat more fats and junk food, fewer grains and vegetables. In short, they can now eat just as irresponsibly as Americans. High blood pressure and diabetes are also up. In the U.S., the epicenter of the problem, a study in the Journal of the American College of Cardiology offered the disturbing news that heart problems can be seen in obese teens, in the form of reduced pumping ability and coronary enlargement. Another study, meanwhile, in Annals of Internal Medicine, found that being overweight at age 18 correlates with a higher risk of early death in young and middle-age women.

OSTEOPOROSIS

Most women know that osteoporosis, or thinning of the bones, is a big risk after menopause. Probably most don't know that drinking cola increases the risk. A study in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition looked at 1,125 men and 1,413 women ages 29 to 86. Among the women--but not the men--there was significant loss of bone density in cola drinkers, whether they drank diet or regular. It's not the first evidence, but it's the strongest to date linking cola to bone loss.

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PARKINSON'S

When Rush Limbaugh accused Michael J. Fox of going off his Parkinson's meds to make a political ad in favor of embryonic-stem-cell research--and against Republican candidates who oppose it--the insult backfired. A pro-stem-cell law passed in Missouri, and Democrat Claire McCaskill was elected to the Senate in a tight contest. But it isn't just celebrity endorsements that make people favor embryonic cells as a possible treatment for Parkinson's (and a long list of other diseases): clinical results are starting to come in too, including those from a 10-year study of implanted embryonic cells in human patients. Preliminary findings suggest the cells can survive, divide and moderate symptoms, without rejection--although significant clinical trials have yet to be done.

PLAN B

After years of back-and-forth deliberations, the FDA finally approved over-the-counter sales of Plan B, a contraceptive that can be taken after sex to prevent a fertilized egg from implanting in the uterus. The drug has been available by prescription since 1999. In a 2003 ruling, the agency refused to change the drug's status, over the objections of its own scientific advisory committee. That ruling angered pro-choice groups. The reversal predictably infuriated right-to-lifers, but those who favor reproductive rights weren't thrilled either: the FDA allowed over-the-counter sales only to women over 18. Anyone younger will still need a prescription. Barr Pharmaceuticals, which makes Plan B, had proposed prescription-free purchases for girls over 16, and will challenge the latest ruling.

POLLUTION

You might think riding in a taxi would expose you to less air pollution than you would get walking down a city sidewalk, but that doesn't seem to be the case. Researchers at Imperial College London gave volunteers particulate detectors and had them walk, bike, drive, bus or taxi their way up and down streets in central London, taking a total of 584 individual trips. To everyone's surprise, riding in a taxi resulted in the worst exposure--nearly twice as much as walking. The suggested explanation: taxis tend to get stuck in traffic surrounded by other pollution-belching vehicles; pedestrians are a little farther from the exhaust pipes.

PRAYER

In an attempt to nail down the question of whether prayer really can heal, six hospitals had strangers say prayers for 1,800 coronary-bypass patients and then studied the postoperative complications. Patients who were told they might or might not be prayed for had roughly the same complication rate, whatever their prayer status turned out to be. But those who were told for certain that they were in someone's prayers actually did worse. The doctors' tentative explanation: people who knew they were being prayed for might have thought they were sicker

than they realized, which could have made their outcomes worse. But anyone tempted to think this study disproves the power of prayer should think again. The doctors and clergy who ran the study had no control over whether friends and family were also praying for the patients--and they certainly couldn't have forbidden personal prayers even if they knew about them. Beyond that, the prayers said by strangers were provided by the clergy and were all identical. Maybe that prevented them from being truly heartfelt. In short, the possible confounding factors in this study made it extraordinarily limited.

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RESVERATROL

Studies have suggested^Â that drinking modest amounts of red wine can help the heart. The key appears to be an antioxidant called resveratrol found in grape skins (and, in fact, grape juice seems to be just as effective if not as much fun). Now researchers at Harvard Medical School and the National Institute on Aging say that high doses of resveratrol fed to obese mice seemed to prevent problems usually seen in chubby rodents (and people), including diabetes, liver damage and premature death. But you would need more than 100 glasses of wine a day to get that much resveratrol. And even if you took it in supplement form, there's no proof it would work as well in humans as in mice.

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SIDS

Nobody has ever fully explained what used to be called crib death and is now known as sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), but a report in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* may point to at least part of the answer. In a study of 31 babies who died of SIDS and 10 who died from other causes, the SIDS babies had many more abnormalities among the neurons in their brain stem than did the other infants. The defects involved the processing of serotonin, a neurotransmitter that, among other things, controls arousal from sleep. When SIDS babies get into a position in which their access to fresh air is blocked, they can fail to wake up and move.

SMELL

That morning^Â cup of coffee^Â might smell better after you get up from bed. It has been shown that lying down can dampen such senses as hearing and spatial perception, and now researchers have found that reclining can also smother your ability to pick up odors. More than 60% of test subjects sniffing rose odor had decreased sensitivity to the smell when recumbent. The phenomenon could be the body's way of turning off potential distractions while you're trying to fall asleep, or it might be the result of fluids that rush through the brain while you're supine. Either way, the stifling effect may be an important consideration for reading MRI or PET scans, which take images of the body while you're lying down.

SMOKING

First, the bad news. After dropping over the past eight years, rates of smoking in the U.S. leveled off in 2005 at 1 in 5 adults, according to the CDC. The good news is that the FDA has approved a new drug--only the second to get its O.K.--to help smokers quit. This one, Chantix, was designed specifically to address nicotine cravings that make the habit so hard to break. Chantix mimics the active ingredient in nicotine and can fool the brain into thinking it has had its nicotine fix--without nicotine's addictive qualities or all the damage smoking does to the heart and lungs. But don't assume that simply popping a few pills will make you kick the habit; the most successful long-term quitters also participated in counseling and cognitive behavior therapy.

SPORTS INJURIES

Staying physically active is a good idea, especially for kids, but too much exercise can be harmful to young joints and tender muscles, particularly at the team-sports level. In the first Internet survey of injuries, sponsored by the CDC, researchers recorded 2.4 injuries for every 1,000 practices or competitions. That's why Little League Baseball, for one, instituted new pitching rules for the 2007 season. Kids 10 years or younger have to stop after 75 pitches, and anytime a Little Leaguer throws more than 21 times, he has to give his arm at least one day to recover.

SPINACH

Arnold Schwarzenegger may soon have a new role on TV and print ads: pitchman for Popeye's favorite power food. It's part of an effort to bolster the sagging spinach industry, which got bruised this fall when bags of the leafy green were found contaminated with E. coli O157 bacteria. Nearly 200 people became ill-- and three died--after eating the tainted spinach, which was traced to California-based Natural Selection Foods. The company is now testing its produce for bacteria, and kids will just have to start eating their greens again.

STATINS

Statins have earned a reputation lately as a wonder drug. Not only do they protect against heart disease by controlling the amount of cholesterol the liver churns out, but they can also dampen the inflammatory flare-ups that contribute to everything from arthritis to heart attacks. Early studies even hint that statins may also work on the plaques and tangles that cause Alzheimer's disease. But all drugs have their limits. An analysis of 12 trials found that patients who had taken statins within two weeks of having a heart attack or angina did not reduce their risk of dying or having another heart attack or stroke in the following four months.

STEM CELLS

Using his first veto since he entered office, President George W. Bush rejected a bill that would have partially

lifted his 2001 ban on the use of federal funds for human embryonic-stem-cell research. The measure would have allowed government-funded scientists to use embryos left over from IVF procedures to generate stem cells, a potential source of new treatments for everything from diabetes to Parkinson's. At a press conference this summer, Bush surrounded himself with "snowflake babies," born after couples adopted frozen embryos, and argued that such research was morally questionable. Still, U.S. scientists are pushing ahead, thanks to private funding. Those at Harvard's Stem Cell Institute began recruiting egg donors for studies that could generate customized stem cells from individual patients, while Advanced Cell Technology reported some success in creating stem cells without destroying embryos.

STENTS

In recent years, the use of stents has allowed millions of heart patients to put off open-heart surgery and buy a few more years of life. But reports on patients outfitted with the latest form of stents, which are coated with a drug that fights scar formation, show that the tiny pieces of metal scaffolding may increase the risk of potentially deadly blood clots in the heart. For now, doctors still believe that the benefits of the stents outweigh the small chance of clot formation, especially for patients who have just had a heart attack. Stents inserted in the first 12 hours after an attack (preferably within the first 90 minutes) had the best chance of restoring blood flow and preserving heart muscle.

STRESS

When you take your work home with you, the whole family feels the effects--especially your kids. A Canadian study analyzed the employment history and psychosocial work conditions of nearly 30,000 sawmill workers and found that there was a direct correlation between the stress fathers felt on the job and their children's mental health. The most striking result: 252 of the approximately 20,000 children in the survey whose fathers had stressful jobs attempted or committed suicide from 1985 to 2001. Girls were more likely to attempt suicide when their fathers had little control over their work; boys when fathers had jobs that didn't last long and demanded a lot of them psychologically. 252 OF 20,000

Number of children in a survey whose fathers had a stressful job who attempted or committed suicide between 1985 and 2001

SUDAFED

If you have tried browsing your local drugstore shelf for a box of Sudafed to clear up those autumn sniffles, you may have discovered that it's MIA. One of its active ingredients is pseudoephedrine, widely used in backyard labs to make methamphetamine. Several states had already ordered pseudoephedrine off pharmacy shelves, but in October the Federal Government expanded those rules and put them into effect across the country. Now allergy sufferers looking for relief have to ask a pharmacist or salesclerk for their Sudafed, show photo ID and sign a

logbook. Unfortunately, the most common alternative, phenylephrine, isn't as effective.

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VACCINE

In June the FDA approved a vaccine to protect against cervical cancer, the second most common cancer in women. The vaccine, called Gardasil, immunizes against four of the most prevalent strains of the human papillomavirus (HPV), the most common sexually transmitted infection and the cause of 70% of cervical-cancer cases. Because the vaccine is most effective when administered before girls become sexually active, a government committee recommended that it be given routinely to girls ages 11 and 12--which immediately triggered cries of alarm from pro-abstinence groups that feared doing so would encourage promiscuity. Some health advocates were also worried that women might see the vaccine as a substitute for yearly screenings like Pap smears.

VIRGINITY

Teenagers aren't exactly forthcoming when it comes to talking about sex--or very good at avoiding temptation. More than half of adolescents who sign a virginity pledge--vowing not to engage in premarital sex--recant within a year, according to a survey of nearly 14,000 adolescents by the Harvard School of Public Health. Nearly three-fourths of adolescents who broke their vow denied ever pledging to remain abstinent. But progress is still being made. Last week the CDC reported that the teenage birthrate in the U.S. has fallen to the lowest level ever recorded.

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WITHDRAWAL

Do babies feel antidepressant-withdrawal symptoms? Researchers at the Rabin Medical Center in Israel think they do. A study of 120 newborns found that among those whose mothers took the antidepressants known as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), nearly one-third experienced neonatal-abstinence syndrome--drug withdrawal characterized by such symptoms as tremors, gastrointestinal distress and sleep disturbances. Depression will affect between one-tenth and one-fourth of women and is often exacerbated by pregnancy. Doctors aren't telling severely depressed mothers-to-be to stop taking antidepressants, but they should be aware that doing so poses certain risks for newborns. The researchers recommend that newborns exposed to SSRIs in utero be monitored for at least 48 hours.

WEALTH

Money can't buy happiness, but it can buy health. A Princeton University study found that Americans who make

the most money are no happier than those who make less, but a survey of 335,000 Americans published in the New England Journal of Medicine reported that the rich are healthier. Seniors ages 55 to 64 who live below the poverty line were six times as likely to have a long-term condition that severely limits their activity as wealthy Americans of the same age whose earnings were at least seven times as high as the poverty line. In another study, nearly 16% of low-income families included individuals with high levels of an inflammation marker linked to an increased risk of heart attack, compared with only 9% of families living above the poverty line.

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Nothing is more refreshing than a good night's sleep. But what really goes on when our head hits the pillow? New studies provide several clues.

We exaggerate Most of us think we are getting more sleep than we actually are. A study published in the American Journal of Epidemiology showed that while participants spent an average of 7.5 hr. in bed, they really slept for only 6.1 hr.

We get depressed A study in the Archives of Internal Medicine showed a causal relationship between depression and sleep-related breathing disorders like sleep apnea. Patients with moderate to severe breathing disorders are 2.6 times as likely to become clinically depressed as normal sleepers.

Waking up is hazardous The morning haze you experience when the alarm clock goes off is known as sleep inertia, and it clouds your brain more than sleep deprivation. The impairment is most severe in the first 10 minutes but can linger for up to two hours.

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