



## STAR HEALTH REPORT

represented a failure of the Libyan justice system.

Both Luc Montagnier, the co-discoverer of HIV, and Vittorio Colizzi of Rome University have testified that the HIV infections pre-dated the defendants' arrival at the hospital. In addition, a study of the children's blood conducted by Oxford University has shown that the sub-type of HIV involved was present in the blood of patients long before the arrival of the defendants. However, this testimony was disregarded during the trial, said Dr Cahn.

Dr Cahn said he continued to hold out hope that the reported negotiations between the European Union and the Libyan government would result in the release of these health workers.

Nurses from more than 80 countries represented at the global conference of the International Council of Nurses (ICN) also called for a just, fair and expeditious treatment of the five Bulgarian nurses and the Palestinian physician.

## Did You Know

## Late-starters can benefit from healthy habits: study

REUTERS, Washington

lifestyle habits and gain almost immediate benefits.

King and his team set out to find if late-starters could reap the rewards of habits like eating vegetables and walking 30 minutes a day.

## Living longer

When they had picked up all four habits, they enjoyed a sharp decline in heart disease risk and in death from any cause.

It took all four — having just three of the healthy habits yielded no heart benefits and a more modest decrease in overall risk of death.

Still, said Dr. Nichola Davis at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, "these benefits are on a continuum. The more of the healthy habits that you can adapt, the better....These are modest changes that they're talking about."

King's team took age, gender, race, and other risk categories for cardiovascular disease into account, although King said the converts likely took up other healthy life changes — such as cutting down on salt or upping their calcium intake — that might have contributed to their health benefits.



## Small turtles may carry salmonella: CDC

In a report, investigators from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and elsewhere describe several cases of salmonella infection, including one fatality, linked to exposure to small turtles.

Turtles and other reptiles are well-known reservoirs for Salmonella. Small turtles are particularly risky because they are often given to children as pets and handled like toys.

In the CDC's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report for July 6, twenty-two cases of turtle-associated infection with Salmonella in young children are described.

The fatal case involved a 3-

week-old infant and testing confirmed that the type of salmonella present was indistinguishable from the one found on the family's small pet turtle.

Hand washing with soap and water after touching reptiles or their cages and keeping them out of food-preparation areas is critical in preventing Salmonella infection, the researchers emphasise.

Still, "prohibiting the sale of small turtles likely remains the most effective public health action to prevent turtle-associated salmonellosis."

Source: Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, July 6, 2007

# Sleeping pills: A prescription for better sleep?

DR TAREQ SALAHUDDIN

You know the tips for a good night's sleep. Stick to a regular sleep schedule. Exercise regularly. Avoid caffeine and daytime naps. Keep stress under control. Relax before bedtime. But what if sleep remains elusive?

Treatment is available — but it depends on what is causing your insomnia. For occasional sleepless nights, sleeping pills may be helpful. Although sleeping pills do not treat the underlying cause of insomnia, they may help you get some much-needed rest.

## The options

Today's sleeping pills do not carry the same risks of dependence and lethal overdoses as sleeping pills of the past. But risks remain — especially for people who have certain medical conditions, including liver and kidney disease. Here is the lowdown on some of the most common types of sleeping pills used today.

**Over-the-counter medications:** Various over-the-counter sleeping pills are available in any pharmacy. Many of these medications contain antihistamines, which induce drowsiness by working against the central nervous system chemical histamine. They are most effective for an occasional sleepless night. The more often you take them, the less effective they become.

**Nonbenzodiazepine hypnotic medications:** Nonbenzodiazepine hypnotic medications are the newest class of sleeping pills. They quiet the nervous system, which helps induce sleep. They are metabolized quickly, which helps reduce the risk of side effects the next day.

**Benzodiazepine hypnotic medications:** Benzodiazepines are an older class of sleeping pills. They are more likely than newer types to cause drowsiness or headaches the next morning, and they may become habit-forming.



**Sedating antidepressants:** Sometimes drugs used mainly to treat depression may ease insomnia when taken in lower doses. When insomnia is secondary to depression or anxiety, antidepressants can improve both conditions at the same time. Antidepressants are available by prescription only.

**Dietary supplements:** Various dietary supplements have been touted as effective insomnia treatments. The most widely publicized may be the hormone melatonin.

**Take it one day at a time:** Sleeping pills are a temporary solution for insomnia. Most over-the-counter varieties are intended to be used for only two to three nights at a time. Taken

ing insomnia.

## Taking sleeping pills

If your best attempts to get a good night's sleep have failed, over-the-counter or prescription sleeping pills may be an option. Use them safely.

**Start with your doctor:** You do not need your doctor's OK to take an over-the-counter sleeping aid, but it is a good idea to check with your doctor anyway.

He or she can make sure the sleeping pills will not interact with other medications or medical conditions. Your doctor can also help you determine the best dosage.

In some cases, your doctor may recommend prescription sleeping pills. If you and your doctor decide further evaluation is needed, you may be referred to a sleep specialist.

**Watch for side effects:** If you feel sleepy or dizzy during the day, talk to your doctor about changing the dosage or discontinuing the pills. Everyone deserves a good night's sleep. If you continue to have trouble sleeping, consult your doctor for additional help.

too often, some sleeping pills may cause rebound insomnia — sleeplessness that returns in full force when you stop taking the medication.

**Avoid alcohol:** Never mix alcohol and sleeping pills. Alcohol increases the sedative effects of the pills. Even a small amount of alcohol combined with sleeping pills can make you feel dizzy, confused or faint.

**Quit carefully:** When you are ready to stop taking sleeping pills, follow your doctor's instructions or the directions on the label. Some medications must be stopped gradually.

**Take it one day at a time:** Sleeping pills are a temporary solution for insomnia. Most over-the-counter varieties are intended to be used for only two to three nights at a time. Taken

## Experts create cholera vaccine using rice protein

REUTERS, Hong Kong

Japanese scientists have engineered an oral cholera vaccine encased in rice protein that has proved to be effective in mice, raising hopes it will offer humans better protection against the disease.

The vaccine in capsule form gives it an advantage over other oral cholera vaccines, the scientists said in the latest issue of the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

"One advantage is refrigeration is no longer required, and it's

more friendly (and safe) without the use of needles," said Hiroshi Kiyono at the University of Tokyo's Department of Microbiology and Immunology.

"It has proven effective in producing antibodies in mice, which have neutralising activities against toxins," he said.

Rice protein is also stable in an acidic environment and can withstand digestion in the stomach. This ensures the vaccine is delivered into the intestine where it is needed to trigger an immune response to fight cholera bacteria.

Cholera is an acute intestinal

infection caused by the bacterium *Vibrio cholerae*, which has a short incubation period from less than a day to five days. It causes copious, watery diarrhea and vomiting that, without prompt treatment, can quickly lead to severe dehydration and death.

Currently there are oral and injectable vaccines, but most of them require refrigeration, which is prohibitively expensive in the places that need the vaccine most.

Kiyono and his colleagues plan to test the efficacy of their vaccine next in primates.

## Dental care of children from now onwards



DR LORNA

the development of permanent tooth. Baby tooth decay is known as early childhood carries, baby bottle tooth decay or nursing mouth syndrome.

## Why should we worry about baby tooth decay?

1. Healthy baby teeth are crucial in helping the baby to learn to chew, to speak and to pronounce properly.

2. Baby teeth are important in building their self-confidence and self-esteem.

3. Baby teeth serve as spacers that help maintain the proper spacing and alignment of the permanent teeth. Early removal of baby tooth can damage

alignment of the permanent tooth.

4. Baby teeth are very important in proper feeding and nutrition. Studies have shown a potential link between the number of dental carries a child has and the probability of the child being underweight.

## How to reduce the risk of your baby's tooth decay

1. Never allow your baby to fall asleep with a bottle containing milk, formula, fruit juices or sweetened liquid.

2. Wipe your baby's gums with a wet washcloth or a clean gauze pad after each feeding.

3. Begin brushing your child's teeth with a little water as soon as the first tooth appears.

4. Supervise tooth brushing and make sure your child is 2 years old to use the pea-size amount of toothpaste with the brush.

5. Teach your child to spit out the toothpaste and rinse with water after brushing.

6. Finally make sure your child is taken to a dentist regularly starting by age 1.

It is crucial to note that the proper care of baby teeth is not only important now but for the future as well. Early dental care gets a child accustomed to a clean cavity free mouth which help them to ensure this clean feeling in the future as well.

All of you have to keep them in brushing two times a day and floss regularly.

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## Eating disorders may disrupt menstruation



Any type of eating disorder can boost a woman's likelihood of having irregular menstrual periods, a new study confirms.

Based on the findings, "when someone's got irregular menstruation, eating disorders should be on the radar screen," Dr. Cynthia M. Bulik of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the study's lead author, told.

Missing periods raises a woman's risk of osteoporosis, Bulik noted, and may also impair fertility.

According to current diagnostic criteria, anorexia nervosa is the only eating disorder subtype associated with menstrual irregularities, Bulik said. A woman must have absence of menstrual periods for at least three months to be diagnosed with anorexia nervosa.

But in a survey of 1,705 women participating in a genetic study who met strict diagnostic criteria for eating disorders, Bulik and her team found menstrual irregularities

associated with menstrual dysfunction included a person's body mass index (BMI), her calorie intake, and her level of exercise. Women who menstruated normally had the highest maximum and minimum lifetime BMIs, the researchers note, but even some women of normal weight reported menstrual irregularities.

The findings suggest to Bulik and her colleagues that menstrual status "might not be an informative criterion to distinguish among eating disorder subtypes."

Doctors currently only screen patients for eating disorders if they are underweight, Bulik said. But based on her findings, she added, "menstrual irregularities should be a red flag for all physicians to ask about eating disorders."

Babies are born with no visible teeth. The 20 primary teeth (also called baby teeth or first teeth) erupt over the age from 6 months to one year. The primary teeth are replaced by the permanent teeth from age 6-12.

Baby teeth may be temporary, but they also deserve good dental care. In this country, most children come to the dentist with dental carries.

Baby teeth should be kept clean and healthy so that a child can remain free of dental carries and oral pain. Infections from decayed baby tooth can damage

the development of permanent tooth. Baby tooth decay is known as early childhood carries, baby bottle tooth decay or nursing mouth syndrome.

Why should we worry about baby tooth decay?

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## SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF LIFE



Poverty, social exclusion, poor housing and poor health systems are among the main social causes of ill health. Differences in the quality of life within and between countries affect how long people live. A child born in Japan has a chance of living 43 years longer than a child born in Sierra Leone. The probability of a man dying between the ages of 15 and 60 is 8.2% in Sweden, 48.5% in the Russian Federation, and 84.5% in Lesotho. In Australia, there is a 20-year gap in life expectancy between Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and the Australian average. Low- and middle-income countries account for 85% of the world's road deaths. In 2002, nearly 11 million children died before reaching their fifth birthday — 98% of these deaths were in developing countries. Inequality in income is increasing in countries that account for more than 80% of the world's population.

PHOTO: DR TAREQ SALAHUDDIN