

Chinese restaurant syndrome

Have you heard the term 'Chinese Restaurant Syndrome' or CRS? This occurs in some people after they eat foods containing the food additive Monosodium Glutamate (MSG) — a common ingredient in Chinese restaurants. This is the salt version of glutamic acid, which is a non-essential amino acid.

In many countries, this commonly used flavour enhancer is sold under the brand name 'Ajinomoto'. It is also found in a variety of foods, other than Chinese dishes.

Symptoms of CRS may include nausea, vomiting and headache. Sometimes there may be burning sensation on the back of the neck, chest, shoulders, abdomen, thighs, and forearms. In some cases, there may be sweating, palpitations, wheezing and chest pain.

Although similar to an allergic reaction, CRS is more of an intolerance to the side effect of MSG. The mechanism of the reaction is exactly not known. True life-threatening symptoms are extremely rare. The intensity and the duration of symptoms are directly related to the amount of MSG ingested.

A person who eats foods containing MSG on an empty stomach increases the amount absorbed into the bloodstream. Symptoms of CRS can sometimes be avoided by eating food prior to eating MSG.

To make food tasty MSG is a common ingre-

redient these days. This is easily available and a short secret to make something palatable. Even sometimes local street restaurants are using it during making snacks like 'shingara' and 'samucha'.

We should eat out, but we need something healthy. All we have to do is look at the presence of MSG and other unhealthy ingredients which includes the cooking oil as well.

Doctors at a meeting of the Society of Neuroscience in 1990 had a split opinion on the issues related to neurotoxic effects from excitotoxic amino acids found in some additives such as MSG.

Recently in 2008, researchers at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, working with Chinese researchers, published a study that found a positive link between MSG intake and obesity in humans.

People with CRS should avoid foods containing high amounts of MSG. Socially responsible restaurants no longer use MSG as a flavour enhancer and have switched to natural seasonings instead.

Unfortunately, some restaurants and food manufacturers still use MSG. The only way to prevent a reaction is to avoid foods containing MSG. However, it is possible to manufacture very tasty and flavorful snack foods without the use of MSG as demonstrated by the food manufacturers already.

Lifestyle & home remedies for dry skin

DR TAREQ SALAHUDDIN

Ordinarily, dry skin (xerosis) is not serious, but it can be uncomfortable and unsightly, turning plump cells into shriveled ones and creating fine lines and wrinkles.

Serious dry skin conditions — an inherited group of disorders called ichthyosis — can sometimes be disfiguring, causing psychological distress. Fortunately, most dry skin results from environmental factors that can be wholly or partially controlled.

These include exposure to hot or cold weather with low humidity levels and excessive bathing. Chronic or severe dry skin problems may require a dermatologist's evaluation. But first you can do a lot on your own to improve your skin, including using moisturisers, bathing less and avoiding harsh, drying soaps.

Symptoms

Dry skin is often just a temporary problem — one you experience only in winter, for example — but it may be a lifelong concern. And although skin is often driest on your arms, lower legs and the sides of your abdomen, this pattern can vary considerably from person to person.

Signs and symptoms of dry skin depend on your age, your health status, your locale, the amount of time you spend outdoors, and the cause of the problem.

If you have dry skin, you are likely to experience one or more of the following:

- A feeling of skin tightness, especially after showering, bathing or swimming
- Skin that appears shrunken or dehydrated
- Skin that feels and looks rough rather than smooth
- Itching (pruritus) that sometimes may be intense
- Slight to severe flaking, scaling or peeling
- Fine lines or cracks
- Redness
- Deep fissures that may bleed in severe cases

When to see a doctor

Most cases of dry skin respond well to lifestyle and home remedies. See your doctor if:

- Your skin does not improve in spite of your best efforts
- Dry skin is accompanied by redness
- Dryness and itching interfere with sleeping
- You have open sores or infections from scratching
- You have large areas of scaling or peeling skin

Causes

Though most cases of dry skin are caused by environmental exposures, certain diseases also can significantly alter the function and appearance of your skin. Potential causes of dry skin include weather, central heating and air conditioning, hot baths and showers, harsh soaps and detergents, sun exposure, Psoriasis, thyroid disorders etc.



Complications

Dry skin that is not cared for can lead to diseases like Atopic dermatitis (eczema), Folliculitis and Cellulitis.

Treatments and drugs

In most cases, dry skin problems respond well to home and lifestyle measures, such as using moisturisers and avoiding long, hot showers and baths.

If home lifestyle and remedies do not work well or your condition is serious, you may consult a dermatologist to get the appropriate treatment.

Lifestyle and home remedies

Although it may not be possible to achieve flawless skin, the following measures can help keep your skin moist

and healthy:

• **Moisturise your skin.** Moisturisers provide a seal over your skin to keep water from escaping. Thicker moisturisers work best. You may also want to use cosmetics that contain moisturisers.

• **Use warm water and limit bath time.** Hot water and long showers or baths remove oils from your skin. Limit your bath or shower time to about 15 minutes or less, and use warm, rather than hot, water.

• **Avoid harsh, drying soaps.** If you have dry skin, it is best to use cleansing creams or gentle skin cleansers and bath or shower gels with added moisturisers. Choose mild soaps that have added oils and fats.

• **Use a humidifier.** Hot, dry indoor air can parch sensitive skin and worsen itching and flaking. A portable home humidifier or one attached to your furnace adds moisture to the air inside your home. Portable humidifiers come in many varieties. Choose one that meets your budget and any special needs. And be sure to keep your humidifier clean to ward off bacteria and fungi.

• **Choose fabrics that are kind to your skin.** Natural fibers such as cotton and silk allow your skin to breathe. But wool, although it certainly qualifies as natural, can irritate even normal skin. When you wash your clothes, try to use detergents without dyes or perfumes, both of which can irritate your skin.

• **Apply moisturisers immediately after bathing.** After washing or bathing, gently pat or blot your skin dry with a towel so that some moisture remains on the skin. Immediately moisturise your skin with an oil or cream to help trap water in the surface cells.

• **Use a humidifier.** Hot, dry indoor air can parch sensitive skin and worsen itching and flaking. A portable home humidifier or one attached to your furnace adds moisture to the air inside your home. Portable humidifiers come in many varieties. Choose one that meets your budget and any special needs. And be sure to keep your humidifier clean to ward off bacteria and fungi.

• **Choose fabrics that are kind to your skin.** Natural fibers such as cotton and silk allow your skin to breathe. But wool, although it certainly qualifies as natural, can irritate even normal skin. When you wash your clothes, try to use detergents without dyes or perfumes, both of which can irritate your skin.

• **Apply moisturisers immediately after bathing.** After washing or bathing, gently pat or blot your skin dry with a towel so that some moisture remains on the skin. Immediately moisturise your skin with an oil or cream to help trap water in the surface cells.

• **Use a humidifier.** Hot, dry indoor air can parch sensitive skin and worsen itching and flaking. A portable home humidifier or one attached to your furnace adds moisture to the air inside your home. Portable humidifiers come in many varieties. Choose one that meets your budget and any special needs. And be sure to keep your humidifier clean to ward off bacteria and fungi.

• **Choose fabrics that are kind to your skin.** Natural fibers such as cotton and silk allow your skin to breathe. But wool, although it certainly qualifies as natural, can irritate even normal skin. When you wash your clothes, try to use detergents without dyes or perfumes, both of which can irritate your skin.

Improving global health outcomes demands a unified effort

Recently published arguments that increased funding for HIV is to blame for the chronic underfunding of broader health systems are rooted in a simplistic analysis of how global health priorities are established.

Tragically, these arguments risk pitting natural allies against one another, and obscure the very real synergies that exist between the global response to HIV and the push to strengthen health systems in poor countries. Those living with and vulnerable to life-threatening diseases in these countries stand to gain far more by unified efforts to expand overall funding for

as the result of the tireless, frontline efforts of researchers, health care workers, advocates, volunteers, and people living with HIV (PLHIV) over nearly three decades.

While we are seeing the fruit of those efforts in many places, the greatest challenges and the most significant costs are still ahead. An estimated 70% of PLHIV in need of treatment still do not have access to it. Many people at risk for infection have no access to proven prevention programmes, and stigma and discrimination still stymie both treatment and prevention initiatives.

The success of the global

used for non-HIV patients, and by putting health care workers living with HIV back to work.

The creation of new diagnostic laboratories, clinics and medical training facilities has and will continue to have broader, positive effects on public health in underserved communities, as will more aggressive screening and care for pregnant women living with HIV.

The push for universal access has also had a major effect on global health advocacy by galvanising patients to demand their right to health care and combating stigma and discrimination against vulnerable populations. For the first time in decades, global health issues are front and centre on the international agendas of such bodies as the United Nations, the G8 and the African Development Forum.

Many advocates for primary care, pre- and post-natal care, maternal health and sexual and reproductive health recognise the opportunities presented by this momentum and are finding ways, at the country and international levels, to join forces with those working on HIV to develop an even stronger movement for global health.

As the AIDS movement gains traction and recent investments begin to demonstrate tangible progress, it is unfortunate that criticisms from those outside the field are appearing.

Demands for a bigger slice of the global health funding pie, which was never big enough in the first place, is short-sighted, at best. The global response to AIDS provides an opening and a mandate to address the chronic under-financing of health systems in developing countries. We must act as a unified global community to seize this opportunity — it is an opportunity we cannot afford to squander.

The article is a Media Statement from Julio Montaner, President, International AIDS Society, Director, BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS.

Wheat germ: Nutrition in a crunch

Why eat wheat germ? Wheat germ is the center of the wheat seed that is responsible for the development and growth of the new plant sprout. Though only a small part of the wheat seed, the germ is a highly concentrated source of nutrients, including niacin, thiamin, riboflavin, vitamin E, folate, magnesium, phosphorus, potassium, iron and zinc. The germ also contains protein, fiber and some fat. Wheat germ adds a healthy crunch to virtually any recipe, from breakfast pancakes to fruit smoothies.

Taming menstrual cramps in teens

DR MD RAJIB HOSSAIN

Every month it is the same old story. You feel like someone is stabbing in your lower abdomen and back. There is nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, headache, irritability while nervousness are also associated. It compels you to spend most of the day curled up in the bed from the first day of your menstrual period. Cramps in your lower abdomen get worse with time and it happens again in next month.

If you are experiencing the condition, you are not alone. Millions of adolescents and teens are living with this painful condition called menstrual cramping or dysmenorrhoea (painful menstruation).

Dysmenorrhoea — a menstrual disorder that is characterised by painful cramps in the lower abdomen, sometimes accompanied by vomiting, diarrhoea, dizziness or fainting — affects 20 to 90 percent of adolescent girls in some way and severely impacts another 14 to 42 percent. Many teenagers suffer for years before they seek treatment because they think painful periods are just part of growing up.

But simply nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs and low-dose oral contraceptives can help alleviate debilitating cramps.

Despite an era of sophisticated drugs and diagnostic tests, dysmenorrhoea remains the leading cause of

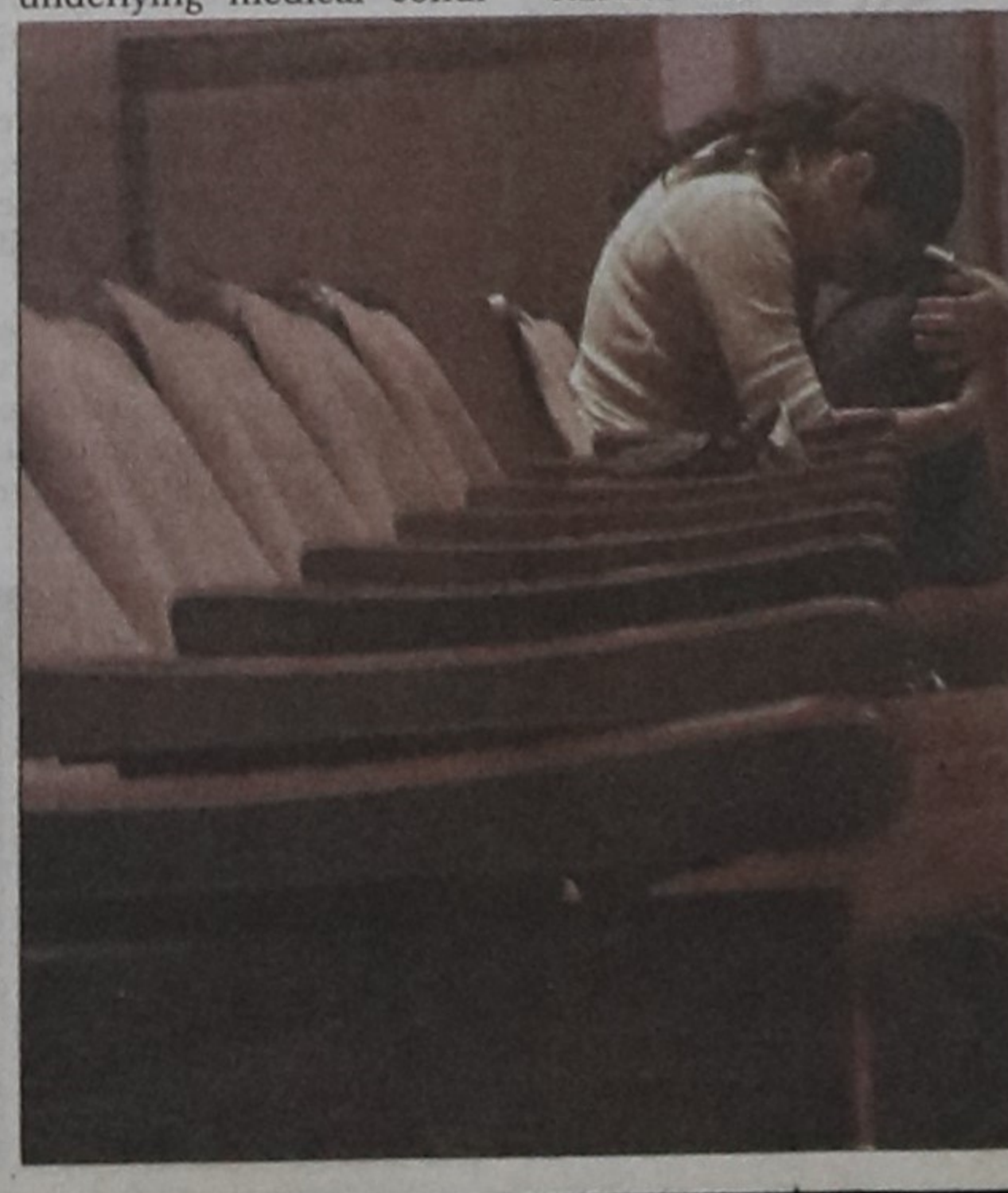
school absences among teenage girls, beating out even the common cold. Only a small percentage of those affected actually seek medical treatment.

Today experts say that the problem is simply a lack of awareness among teenagers, parents, school nurses and even some physicians that dysmenorrhoea is a condition that needs medication attention, rather than just a natural part of growing up.

An estimated 5 to 10 percent of women with severe pain who suffer from what doctors refer to as secondary dysmenorrhoea — painful periods that are caused by an underlying medical condi-

tion like uterine fibroids, pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) or most commonly endometriosis.

Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAID) like ibuprofen and naproxen are more effective. When over-the-counter medications fail, most physicians recommend a low-dose oral contraceptive, which can prevent the production of prostaglandins altogether. But many parents are concerned about putting their daughters on the pill at such a young age and some consider it as a license to have sex. But the pill, which experts say is medically safe, can also work wonders.



Obesity fuels fears of faster diabetes rise

TAN EE LYN, Reuters, Chennai

The prevalence of diabetes worldwide will far outstrip even the sharp increase currently projected unless rising trends of obesity are controlled, health experts said.

Adult-onset diabetes has been linked to risk factors like aging, an inactive lifestyle, unhealthy diets, smoking, alcohol and obesity. The silent, chronic disease damages the heart, blood vessels, eyes, kidneys and nerves and was responsible for 3.8 million deaths worldwide in 2007.

The International Diabetes Foundation estimates a current prevalence of 246 million diabetes cases worldwide and projects it will hit 380 million by 2025, but experts say these figures may well be an underestimate.

"The projections are conservative because they take into account only aging and urbanisation but not obesity, which if unarrested, will lead to more cases," Gojka Roglic of the World Health Organisation's diabetes programme told a regional diabetes conference in Chennai, southern India.

Roglic said not a single country in the world had shown any signs of a plateau for obesity.

"It's the responsibility of governments to enable populations to create the conditions where (healthy) lifestyle is an easy choice rather than something that's very difficult to achieve," Roglic told.

"If you don't have a park to walk in, if the traffic is too dangerous, then people won't be encouraged to walk or ride bicycles. Or if there is crime and someone will kill you for your bike, then you won't be encouraged to cycle."

Double jeopardy

Anthony Harries, senior adviser with the London-based International Union Against Tuberculosis (TB) and Lung Diseases, warned of the increased risks of developing active tuberculosis that come with diabetes.

"It was recognised even in

ancient Roman times that people with urine that was sweet had increased risk of tuberculosis," he told the conference, adding that a diabetic was three times more likely to develop active TB than a non-diabetic.

One in every three people in the world is infected with TB bacilli. But not everyone who is infected with TB gets sick. Chances of developing active TB rise when one's immune system is weak, for example when compromised by a chronic illness.

India carries the highest diabetes burden in the world, with 41 million cases in 2007, projected to hit 70 million by 2025.

The problem is worsening in rural India, which now has a prevalence of 9.2 percent among people aged 20 years and older, up from 2.2 percent in 1983. The rate in urban areas is 18.6 percent, compared with 11.2 percent in 1998.

Apart from a more sedentary lifestyle, experts say the propensity for diabetes among Indians may also be due to a switch, linked to rising affluence, to eating polished rice which has much more sugar than crude, unpolished rice.

Genetics may also play apart

"Years ago, people had famines and then they had plenty. During times of plenty, food will be stored, so when there is little food in the next three months, they burn off all that," said Viswanathan Mohan, a diabetes specialist who runs a programme to reduce diabetes and its harms in the countryside.

"Now the famines are gone, it is feasting all the time but the genes have not changed because this has just happened over 30 years. So when you overeat and reduce physical activity and when you have 'thrifty genes' (geared toward storing energy), you are heading toward diabetes," Mohan said.