

HEALTH BRIEFS

ARE YOU GETTING ENOUGH SLEEP?

HOUSTON—One of the most prevalent sleep problems in America is insufficient sleep. "People try to do too many things in 24 hours. When push comes to shove, sleep gets shoved," said Dr. Max Hirshkowitz, a sleep researcher at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston. To avoid sleep deprivation, he recommends that adults get a minimum of seven hours sleep. Other ways to promote good sleep include: • A comfortable mattress that is not too old. • Going to bed when sleepy instead of fighting sleep. • Maintaining a regular sleep schedule. • Exercise, but not right before bed. • A light snack before bed if you tend to awake hungry in the night. "Adopting a regular bedtime ritual, like having decaffeinated tea each night, gives people a chance to unwind and think before going to bed," he said.

LASER UTILIZED IN HAIR REMOVAL

HOUSTON—Improvements in laser technology are making hair removal more effective. "The long-pulse Alexandrite laser emits a single wavelength of light that is absorbed by the brown color found in melanin, the dark pigment causing brown hair and tanned skin," said Dr. Martin Moskovitz, a plastic surgeon at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston. Since the skin does not have as much melanin, the laser beam passes through the skin and targets the brown-colored hair bulbs. The laser's reaction with the melanin damages the hair bulb, causing it to wither and later fall out. The best candidates are fair-skinned people with dark hair, Moskovitz said. Most patients require three or four treatments for permanent hair removal.

STUDYING TREATMENT FOR VERTIGO

HOUSTON—Baylor College of Medicine researchers are evaluating treatments for benign paroxysmal positional vertigo (BPPV). People with BPPV have the sensation of moving around or spinning when they are not. The feeling often occurs when bending down, looking up or rolling over in bed. "BPPV is the most common disorder of the vestibular system. This sensory system has receptors located in the inner ear and is needed to control balance, eye movement, and to give people a sense of up and down," said Dr. Helen Cohen, a Baylor assistant professor of otolaryngology. "BPPV can seriously affect a person's ability to function in everyday life." The study involving 300 patients will investigate a number of different non-surgical treatments to help people overcome the problems associated with the condition.

STOMACH INFECTION MORE COMMON IN CROWDED HOUSEHOLDS

HOUSTON—People living in crowded, dirty households are at greater risk for contracting *Helicobacter pylori*, an organism that can cause stomach ulcers, gastric cancer and gastritis. If untreated, *H. pylori* can remain in a person's system for life. Researchers at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston and medical institutions in Sweden studied the incidence of *H. pylori* in 300 identical twins. The study found that those living in poor households were three-to-four times more likely to acquire *H. pylori* than those in affluent households. "Heredity plays no part in acquiring the infection, but there is a genetic susceptibility," said Dr. Hoda Malaty, a digestive disease specialist at Baylor. "The research points to the importance of improving personal hygiene in poorer, more crowded households." Malaty says the simple act of making sure children wash their hands thoroughly before eating or handling food can make a big difference in preventing *H. pylori* infection.

ADVICE FOR WORKING MOTHERS WHO ARE NURSING

HOUSTON—Breast-feeding mothers need not give up nursing when they return to work. "Dedication and careful planning can help nursing mothers overcome many of the challenges," said Dr. Judy Hopkinson of the USDA/ARS Children's Nutritional Research Center at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston. She suggests that breast-feeding mothers ease into the work force, returning to work on a Thursday or Friday and taking off the first few Wednesdays. Hopkinson also recommends mothers begin pumping and saving milk at least two weeks before returning to work. "Many women find that the added stress of work tends to reduce their milk supply. Pumping twice a day in addition to nursing will increase the milk supply gradually, and a good supply is essential at the start," she said.

HEALTH

Mothers, daughters work out weight issues together

Jennifer Hays, Ph.D.
Special to Sentinel-Voice

If you're the mother of a preteen or teenager who is dissatisfied with her body, you're not alone.

Between the ages of 12 and 20, most girls hit a natural and healthy growth spurt that results in a gain of 20 pounds of fat, which enables them to bear children in later years.

Unfortunately, we live in a culture that values the preteen shape more than that of the mature female body. While there are far more solid, lumpy, and imperfect people than there are tall and lanky super models, the "average" shape is not featured in magazines, commercials, television shows, and movies targeting teenage girls. As a

result, young girls often go to extremes to avoid the normal weight gain during adolescence.

We hear about the most tragic cases on the news; however, many "normal" girls put themselves at nutritional and emotional risk to achieve an unrealistic goal.

While our society puts tremendous pressure on girls, we as mothers can have a strong impact on our daughters as well.

Whether we realize it or not, our behavior constantly sends messages to our daughters.

It is absolutely essential that we address our own issues with weight, body image, eating, and fitness. Most of us have to accept the

fact that we're not going to be asked to pose for *Vogue*, and make the most of what we've got.

We all need to aim for reasonable weight goals based on good health, and achieve or maintain them through a balanced diet and regular exercise. This conveys to our daughters the importance of loving our bodies as they are and taking care of them for the long term.

In addition to setting a good example, you can provide your daughter with accurate information on her maturing body, on the changes she will go through during adolescence, and on good nutrition. Rather than dictate food choices for your daughter, teach her to make

wise choices, and then grant her the independence and sense of control that teenagers crave. Have her make a grocery list that includes healthy snacks and menu items, and then go shopping together.

Something else you can do together is watch 30 minutes of television and count the number of women who are thin, average, and heavy. After the program, talk about the message this conveys to all of us and the unrealistic standards it sets.

By setting a good example and communicating with your daughter early and often, both you and she should be able to reap the benefits of shared goals and sensible habits.

Nutrition review helps kids' diets 'make the grade'

Special to Sentinel-Voice

HOUSTON—Does your child's nutrition report card read 'needs improvement'? If so, you're not alone.

"Although American children aren't exactly failing nutrition, there aren't many making the healthy-diet honor roll," said Dr. Debby Demory-Luce of the USDA's Children Nutrition Research Center at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston.

The food groups in greatest need of attention are fruits and vegetables, dairy products and whole grains.

"Busy lifestyles can make ensuring the quality of children's diets very challenging. Parents, daycare providers, school cafeterias, restaurants and fast food, playmates' families, and children themselves influence the nutritional soundness of their diet," said Demory-Luce, a registered dietitian. Eating on the run, skipping meals and junk-food snacking can also be a problem.

To help your children's diets improve, Demory-Luce offers these nutrition 'study' tips:

- Tutor children on using the food groups as a daily guide and reinforce good eating habits by being a good role model. Most children need about six servings of grain-based foods, five servings of fruits and vegetables, the equivalent of three to four glasses of milk, and six ounces of meat per day.

- Make breakfast a priority. Studies show that breakfast eaters have a better overall diet and have less trouble concentrating and fewer behavior problems in school. An ideal breakfast

include some protein, a little fat, plenty of carbohydrates and a good source of calcium. Even a peanut butter sandwich and box of calcium-fortified orange juice in the morning is good.

- Think smart snacks. Keep ready-to-eat vegetables and low-fat dip, raisins or other dried or fresh fruit, ready-to-eat fortified cereal,

fig-type or oatmeal cookies, whole grain crackers, and calcium-rich snacks like low-fat yogurt, mozzarella 'string' cheese and calcium-fortified juices in easy reach. Also, work with your childcare provider or after-school program to make sure nutritious snacks are available.

- Increase the nutritional

'punch' of meals eaten at home. Use dark green and deep yellow/orange vegetables to make pumpkin-raisin bran muffins and other fruit breads; add finely minced, cooked vegetables such as zucchini, spinach, carrot, and broccoli to soups, casseroles and pasta sauces; and replace the water in some recipes with vegetable juice.

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