

## HEALTH

# Innovative embryo test finds Sickle Cell gene

CHICAGO (AP) — Parents who carry the gene for sickle cell anemia can now ensure their children will be free of the disease by using test-tube fertilization and having the embryos genetically analyzed before they are implanted.

The procedure allows parents to use an embryo free of the devastating gene, guaranteeing they will not pass on the disease.

Without the genetic diagnosis, children of two sickle cell carriers have a 25 percent chance of developing the disease and a 50 percent chance of being a carrier.

The technique is already used to prevent other

hereditary disorders such as cystic fibrosis and Tay-Sachs disease.

It was successfully applied to sickle cell carriers for the first time last year. Two embryos screened through the process are now healthy twins free of sickle cell disease and the gene defect that causes it, according to researchers.

They reported their findings in Wednesday's *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

Previously, parents who were sickle cell carriers had to wait until 10 weeks into pregnancy for a test to indicate whether their fetus inherited the defect and would develop sickle cell anemia.

The disease can be passed on only if both parents are carriers.

"Up to now, couples who had affected fetuses could only deal with it by having an induced abortion," said Dr. Zev Rosenwaks, the study's principal investigator. Rosenwaks directs the Center for Reproductive Medicine and Infertility at Cornell University's Weill Medical College, which collaborated with Dr. Mark Hughes of Wayne State University in Detroit on developing the test.

Sickle cell anemia, which mostly affects blacks, is one of the most common inherited genetic disorders. One in 625 black children is afflicted.

The life-shortening disease results from an abnormality in hemoglobin, the oxygen-carrying pigment in blood. The defect distorts red cells into the shape of sickles.

Symptoms start as early as six months after birth and include fatigue, headaches, organ damage, seizures and strokes. Sickle cell anemia also increases a person's vulnerability to infections. No cure has been found.

The technique the researchers used is called pre-implantation genetic diagnosis, or PGD. It allows researchers to study genetic traits in embryos even when they are made up of only six

to eight cells.

The procedure has been used for about 10 years in parents with gene traits for similarly inherited disorders, such as cystic fibrosis, Tay-Sachs disease and thalassemia, which also involves hemoglobin.

"We've done at least 12 different diseases," said Dr. Charles M. Strom, medical director of the Reproductive Genetics Institute at Illinois Masonic Hospital in Chicago. He was not involved in this study.

Strom said his institute also used PGD to prevent sickle cell disease in a baby born last October.

The technique is

expensive and performed at only a few medical facilities. In vitro fertilization costs \$8,000 to \$12,000 per attempt, and the PGD test is \$2,000.

Dr. Oswaldo Castro, director of the Sickle Cell Disease Center at Howard University in Washington, said he is opposed to using PGD to select embryos because it means other embryos are passed over. Some are destroyed, and others are frozen for possible future implantation.

"As I treat a lot of patients with sickle cell, it's difficult for me to put a judgment, 'Well, this one should never have been born,'" Castro said.

# Aromatherapy makes more than just good scents

Marilyn Johnson Kondwani  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Visualize the last time you inhaled the scent of a rich, vibrant rose in full bloom or visited a flower garden. Take a moment to relax as memories of that beautifully fragrant occasion wrap your spirit, and emotions with joy and contentment.

The benefits of aromatherapy are 100 percent natural without the side effects associated with chemicals and drugs. And the best part is that you can enjoy its benefits, simply by breathing through your nose.

Aromatherapy is the art and science of using pure essential oils from plants and flowers to improve the quality of life. It has been in use for thousands of years throughout India, China, Africa, and other parts of the world.

The ancient Egyptians treasured rose, chamomile, hyssop, basil, and other aromatic substances for everything from childbirth to the preservation of mummies.

Frankincense, myrrh, cedarwood and spikenard are among the scents referenced in

scriptures for their effectiveness as wound healers while creating an atmosphere conducive to prayer or meditation.

With the advent of synthetic drugs in the early 19th century, the precious healing powers of plants and flowers were pushed into the shadows.

Fortunately, the demand for natural health and beauty treatments has been reborn. Versatile and non-toxic when properly used, essential oils like clove and cinnamon have been proven to kill bacteria and virtually no type of fungus will live in the presence of pure tea tree oil.

Essential oils are very popular in the cosmetic industry because they also calm the nerves and slow down the aging process by deeply penetrating the skin to regenerate and nourish new skin cells.

Without even realizing it, smell affects every aspect of our lives. Many of the old sayings such as: "something smells like a rat, it smells fishy to me, or they came out smelling like a rose," illustrates the subtle yet profound influence scents have on our health, emotions

and well being.

Because smell is so dependable, it is undoubtedly the most overlooked, underrated, yet arguably the most efficient of all of our senses. The nose is the only direct passageway to the brain. And everything we smell is immediately processed through the limbic system, the oldest part of the brain. That system governs memory, along with the parasympathetic and sympathetic nervous systems.

Fight or flight responses are triggered, in humans and animals, whenever there is a perceived or real threat of danger. This explains why the familiar aroma of flowers and food trigger positive memories and emotions, while the smell of the dentist office often trips feelings of fear and alarm.

The pure essential oils used in aromatherapy are obtained by steam distillation, cold pressing, or various other forms of extraction from the leaves, bark, roots or petals of flowers, plants or trees. To experience the healing benefits of aromatherapy, only the highest quality and

most pure essential oils must be used.

Unfortunately, the market is flooded with synthetic inexpensive duplicates that lack healing properties. So it is best to look before you leap. For the most beneficial experience, read a few books and/or consult with a professional before embarking upon your journey into natural healing.

Essential oils are like human hormones in that they contain the essence or life force of the plants and flowers. Extremely potent, and versatile, just a few drops of a pure essential oil such as Lavender will help fight infections, soothe burned or chapped skin, and calm the environment at home or in the office with its fresh floral aroma of eternal spring.

A word of caution: aromatherapy can be very effective in preventing disease and when used for health and beauty. However, it is not a substitute for the care and advice of your physician.

Questions? Contact "The Natural News" at 414 S. Craig Street #206, e-mail at mkondwani@hotmail.com or call 1-888-890-0002 ext. 02992.

# Dieters should check nutrition labels

Special to Sentinel-Voice

HOUSTON — Weight-conscious consumers might find nutrition labels easier to understand if they check just three numbers.

"Serving size, calories per serving and total fat per serving are the items most people look at if they're concerned about gaining weight," said Lynne Scott, a registered dietitian at The DeBaKey Heart Center at

Baylor College of Medicine and The Methodist Hospital in Houston.

"Nutrition labels can be very helpful, but the variety of information can be overwhelming to dieters," she said.

USDA dietary guidelines recommend limiting fat consumption to 30 percent of calories. Scott, a Baylor assistant professor of medicine, advises patients to

select foods that have no more than three grams of fat per serving.

"But even if a food product meets this standard, you need to check the serving size," she said. "If the amount of food you will eat is twice the size used as a reference on the nutrition label, you'll need to double the amount of fat when calculating total fat grams in your diet."

(See Dieters, Page 16)

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## Get your free breast cancer screening!

Until May 29, the Rite Aid Women's Health Foundation is offering free mammograms for low-income and uninsured women.

Mammograms can sometimes detect signs of breast cancer and many believe that early detection can mean the difference between surviving the disease or dying.

According to the National Cancer Institute, breast cancer is the most common

cancer diagnosed in African-American women and black women have the highest mortality rate after the onset of the disease.

In 1999, an estimated 44,000 women will die of breast cancer. But, according to ACS statistics, when breast cancer is diagnosed in its early stages, the survival rate is 95 percent. To find out if you qualify for a free mammogram, call toll free, 1-888-7488-3669 or 1-888-RITENOW.

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