

Keeping your health and wellbeing in the know

MyHealthTALK

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Courtesy of Asset Health



West Nile Threat Grows

Watch out for those pesky mosquitos! Never have the irritating bugs given so many Americans the West Nile virus so early in the year. In fact, this summer's West Nile outbreak may end up being the worst in U.S. history. In August, public health officials reported 66 deaths and 1,850 cases of West Nile, compared to 300 in an average year. Nearly half of the reported cases, 889, involved serious neuroinvasive diseases. West Nile—transmitted when mosquitos bite infected birds and then bite us—can cause inflammation of the brain, paralysis, nervous system illnesses and West Nile fever.

Did you know that mosquitos are the deadliest animals (yes, they are technically animals) in the world? The tiny pests carry some of humanity's most deadly illnesses. Mosquitos are responsible for the deaths of more than 2 million people each year from diseases such as malaria, encephalitis, yellow fever, dengue and West Nile.



Fortunate for us, only 1 percent of the 200 or so species of mosquitos in the U.S. carry the West Nile virus. Fortunate for them, the fragile, flying nuisances don't even get sick from the virus—they just make us sick. The blood-sucking female mosquito is to blame for

transmitting West Nile—male mosquitos feed on flower nectar and plant juices. Fortunately, only 1 percent of us bitten by an infected mosquito get seriously ill from West Nile. Nearly 80 percent of us will have no symptoms. The remaining 9 percent bitten by a West Nile carrier will have mild, flu-like symptoms including fever, headache, nausea, fatigue, body aches, joint pain, dizziness, sensitivity to light, diarrhea and/or a rash.

Still, West Nile has sent hundreds of people to the hospital this year, taking lives and leaving some people with neurological damage that could last for months or a lifetime. Children and the elderly have higher risks for getting and fighting off the virus. Currently, there are no medicines or vaccines to treat it.

Health officials and scientists are trying to figure out why West Nile cases are escalating. They say that this year's mild winter, wet spring and hot, dry summer created the ideal breeding ground for mosquitos. Excessive heat speeds up life cycles for the potentially deadly insects and the virus they carry. Scientists think the disease-prone Asian Tiger mosquito, a newcomer in the U.S., may be contributing to the rise of West Nile. They are also investigating whether the virus has mutated.

To reduce chances of getting bitten, wear long sleeves and long pants at dawn and dusk, use repellent with DEET, consume garlic or garlic supplements (not odorless), and empty standing water around your house.

Officials said this year's outbreak would worsen since most West Nile cases are not reported until August or September.

Lie Less and Feel Better

It turns out that your mother was right all along. Honesty is the best policy. Now, psychologists at the University of Notre Dame are reinforcing your mom's advice. Researcher Anita Kelly, PhD, psychology professor, reports that people who lie less have better relationships and fewer health complaints.

The "Science of Honesty" study involved 110 participants. Half were told to stop telling major and minor lies for the 10-week duration of the study. The other half were instructed to count the number of lies they told each week.

Polygraph tests measuring lies, health and relationship issues were performed weekly on both groups. During the study, all participants progressively reduced their number of lies told. Results showed the link between fewer lies and better health was most significant in the truthful group. When participants lied less in a week, they reported significantly better physical and mental health.

"In a given week, if they told fewer lies, they also reported their health was better," Kelly said. "We found that the participants could purposefully and dramatically reduce their everyday lies, and that in turn was associated with significantly improved health."

Personal relationships also benefit from truthfulness, the study showed. "What we are suggesting is, not violating others' expectation of honesty is likely to build trust, which may be key to good health through improving our relationships," said Kelly.

The researcher said average Americans tell about 11 lies per week.

Making a Smarter Smoothie

Whipping up a smoothie at home is as simple as tossing a bit of fruit, dairy and a few ice cubes in a blender. Making a delicious smoothie is easy, but a smoothie is only as healthy as its ingredients.

"Smoothies give you a fantastic nutritional bang for the buck," says Wendy Bazilian, R. D., author of *The SuperFoods Rx Diet*.

The problem with most smoothies is that they are loaded with sugar. Keep in mind that many typical smoothie ingredients—yogurt, fruit, sweetened fruit juice, honey, etc.—are already sweet. Blend them together and you have a sugar rush in a glass.

With a little creativity and planning, you can make a nutritious and delicious smoothie. There are a limitless number of healthy ingredients that you can add to the mix. Try adding a splash of coconut water, rich in potassium and electrolytes. Almond milk is another good choice, low in fat, calories and a good source of calcium. Instead of adding bananas, a better option is adding one-quarter of an avocado, rich in antioxidants, B vitamins, potassium and fiber. Cinnamon is another healthy ingredient that has antimicrobial properties, helps control blood sugar, and is kind to your digestive tract.



You can find a vast number of smoothie recipes online with ingredients that are beneficial for a variety of health problems. This month's recipe is for a stomach-friendly Tummy Love Smoothie, with ingredients that have a calming effect on your digestive system. The enzyme papain from papaya, potassium and fiber tame an upset stomach. Ginger and mint curb nausea, reduce gas and freshen breath. The healthy bacteria in yogurt helps fight infections and settles down an unhappy digestive tract.

Tummy Love Smoothie

Ingredients

1 cup peeled, seeded, cubed papaya
1 cup frozen, sliced peaches
1 medium pear, cubed, skin optional
1 Tbsp ground flax seed
1 tsp sliced ginger
6 mint leaves
½ cup low-fat, Greek yogurt
6 ice cubes

Directions

Blend ingredients together. Garnish with mint. Makes three servings.

Nutritional value per serving: 109 calories, 4 g protein, 2 g fat (0.5 g saturated), 21 g carbs, 15 mg sodium, 4 g fiber

School Junk Food Rules Lead to Leaner Kids

A new study finds that students at schools with tougher junk food rules are more likely to have healthier body weights. Schools in states restricting junk food in vending machines, the cafeteria and student stores have students gaining less weight than those at schools without such rules.

Dr. Daniel Taber, a postdoctoral research associate at the University of Illinois at Chicago, studied health and weight data from 6,300 students in 40 states. Body mass index (or BMI, measuring weight relative to height) was recorded for students in fifth grade and it was recorded three years later, when students were eighth graders. Students attending schools restricting junk food gained an average 0.25 fewer BMI units in three years than students in schools without junk food rules.

In 1979, a federal standard was adopted that prevents schools from selling items such as gum and candy in the cafeteria during lunch. In recent years, more states have passed laws regulating junk food in schools.



If you are a parent with children in schools and/or states that do not have tough laws against junk food, you may have some options. School districts participating in the federal school food program are required to establish a wellness policy committee. Parents can ask to serve on this committee.

"We have found that kids eat less junk food when there is less junk food in schools," said Dr. Marlene Schwartz, deputy director of the Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity at Yale University. "This is the first big national study that looked at the laws."