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Health news in brief

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Piercing problems

US researchers from the University of Buffalo have discovered that people with tongue piercings risk developing a gap between their front teeth, explaining those with a tongue stud are likely to press it against the back of the teeth, pushing them apart. Sawsan Tabbaa, professor of orthodontics at the university, led the research after looking at the case of a young patient who had to wear braces to correct her teeth after having a stud in her tongue for seven years. The research also linked tongue piercings to more serious ailments such as haemorrhages, infections, gum problems and even brain abscesses. The results were published in the Journal of Clinical Orthodontics.

Obesity levels hit plateau

According to new data presented at the International Congress on Obesity in Sweden last month, childhood obesity levels in wealthy countries have stopped rising. Fifteen countries around the world were included in the research, which examined childhood obesity rates over the past decade. Countries found to have falling levels of obesity among their young people included Japan, Denmark and England (albeit marginal drops in the latter two). Co-author of the review, Benjamin Rokholm, from the University of Copenhagen's Institute of Preventive Medicine in Denmark, noted, however, that the research might not be representational of the poor inhabitants of the countries examined.

New genes linked to heart disease

A team of scientists appear to have discovered the genetic secrets of high cholesterol, possibly paving the way for new drugs to help combat heart disease – the number-one killer in the developing world. Over 100 researchers from 17 countries studied the DNA of over 100,000 people of European ancestry, discovering 95 genes (59 of which were new) that could be linked to heart disease. The study, the biggest of its kind to be carried out to date, will allow scientists to look at each gene individually in order to assess how they give rise to life-threatening illness.

Hugs breed confident adults



Being lavished with affection by your mother while you are a baby breeds a confident adult, according to a report in the Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health. The results were carried out on nearly 500 people, from the US state of Rhode Island, who were studied over a 30-year period. According to the study authors, led by Dr Joanna Maselko, hugs, kisses and expressive declarations of love all have a positive affect on children, providing them with emotional resilience in later years. But researchers also warned of the dangers of over-mothering, which they said can be intrusive and embarrassing to children.

Low-fat, low-carb diets work the same

A study carried out by researchers from three US-based universities has concluded that low-fat and low-carb diets are equally good for weight loss. Funded by the US National Institutes of Health, the study followed 307 obese people (whose Body Mass Index was between 30 and 40) who were put on either low-fat or low-carb diets over a two-year period. Both groups of participants lost an average of seven kilos

during that time, which has been determined to be enough of a weight-loss to improve the health of overweight individuals.

Education fights dementia

A team of scientists from the UK and Finland have found the longer someone stays in education, the more effective their brain is at fighting dementia. Those with more education were just as likely to show the signs of dementia on their brain at death as their less-educated counterparts, but were less likely to have developed symptoms during their lifetime. Researchers examined the brains of 872 participants from three large aging studies and found that for each year someone spent in education, their risk of developing dementia decreased by 11 per cent.

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