



Weekend Doctor

By DR. THOMAS F. VAIL

As families hit the beach this summer, I'd like to share safety tips that will help your feet stay healthy and pain-free. Everyone should keep these items in their beach bag:

- Antibacterial cream or ointment for cuts or wounds.
- Bandages that are self-adherent and waterproof.
- Non-refrigerant cold and compression packs.
- Good sunscreen or lotion, SPF30 or higher.

A day at the beach doesn't have to mean a day in the emergency room, so keep these tips in mind.

As always, any injury that doesn't resolve within a few days should be examined by a foot and ankle surgeon.

Wear shoes to protect your feet from sea shells, broken glass and other sharp objects.

If you wear flip flops, try gel toe spreaders. They wrap around the thong to reduce friction and add comfort in flip flops and sandals.

Wear a diver's sock or shoe to protect your feet in the water.

Don't go in the water if your skin gets cut, since bacteria in oceans and lakes can cause infections. Use antibacterial cream or ointment, followed by a waterproof, self-adherent bandage.

To avoid complications, see a foot and ankle surgeon for treatment within 24 hours.

Jellyfish can sting you in water or on the beach, so be careful!

If a jellyfish's tentacles stick to your foot or ankle, remove them, but protect your hands from getting stung. Vinegar, meat tenderizer, baking soda or soaking your foot in a bath can reduce pain and swelling.

Most jellyfish stings heal within a few days. If yours doesn't, seek medical treatment.

Feet get sunburned, too. Apply sunscreen to the tops and bottoms of your feet. Already been sunburned? Use a nourishing lotion with vitamin E and aloe vera to soothe your skin.

Sand, sidewalks and paved surfaces get hot in the summer sun. Wear shoes to protect your soles from getting burned, especially if you have diabetes.

Walking, jogging and playing sports on soft, uneven surfaces like sand can lead to arch pain, heel pain, ankle sprains and other injuries. Athletic shoes provide the heel cushioning and arch support that flip flops and sandals lack.

If injuries occur, use rest, ice, compression and elevation to ease pain and swelling.

Keep a travel-size ice compression pack in your beach bag that doesn't require refrigeration. It's a must when on-the-spot cold compression is needed.

Americans with diabetes face serious foot safety risks at the beach. Diabetes causes poor blood circulation and numbness in the feet, meaning they might not feel pain from a cut, puncture wound or burn.

Any type of skin break on a diabetic foot has the potential to get infected and ulcerate if it isn't noticed right away.

Diabetics should always wear shoes to the beach and remove them regularly to check for foreign objects like sand and shells that can cause sores, ulcers or infections.

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Vail



ERIC RISBERG / The Associated Press

FORMER FDA COMMISSIONER David Kessler holds up a piece of carrot cake at a bakery near his home in San Francisco. Kessler has a new book out on addiction-like overeating. His research highlights a food industry-driven environment that hijacks people's brains with high-fat, high-sugar foods.

Has your brain been hijacked by unhealthy food?

Book highlights studies showing some people really do have a hard time resisting

By LAURAN NEERGAARD
AP MEDICAL WRITER

WASHINGTON — Food hijacked Dr. David Kessler's brain.

Not apples or carrots. The scientist who once led the government's attack on addictive cigarettes can't wander through part of San Francisco without craving a local shop's chocolate-covered pretzels. Stop at one cookie? Rarely.

It's not an addiction but it's similar, and he's far from alone. Kessler's research suggests millions share what he calls "conditioned hypereating" — a willpower-sapping drive to eat high-fat, high-sugar foods even when they're not hungry.

In a new book, the former Food and Drug Administration chief brings to consumers the disturbing conclusion of numerous brain studies: Some people really do have a harder time resisting bad foods. It's a new way of looking at the obesity epidemic that could help spur fledgling movements to reveal calories on restaurant menus or rein in portion sizes.

"The food industry has figured out what works. They know what drives people to keep on eating," Kessler said. "It's the next great public health campaign, of changing how we view food, and the food industry has to be part of it."

He calls the culprits foods "layered and loaded" with combinations of fat, sugar and salt — and often so processed that you don't even have to chew much.

Overeaters must take responsibility, too, and basically retrain their brains to resist the lure, he cautions.

"I have suits in every size," Kessler writes in "The End of Overeating." But, "once you know what's driving your behavior, you can put steps into place" to change it.

At issue is how the brain becomes primed by different stimuli. Neuroscientists increasingly report that fat-and-sugar combinations in particular light up the brain's dopamine pathway — its pleasure-sensing spot — the same pathway that conditions people to alcohol or drugs.

Where did you experience the yum factor? That's the cue, sparking the brain to say, "I want that again!" as you drive by a restaurant or plop before the TV.

"You're not even aware you've learned this," says Dr. Nora Volkow, chief of the National Institute on Drug Abuse and a dopamine authority who has long studied similarities between drug addiction and obesity.

Volkow is a confessed alcoholic who salivates just walking past her laboratory's vending machine. "You have to fight it and fight it," she said.

Conditioning isn't always to blame. Numerous factors, including physical activity, metabolism and hormones, play a role in obesity.

And the food industry points out that increasingly stores and restaurants are giving consumers healthier choices, from allowing

substitutions of fruit for french fries to selling packaged foods with less fat and salt.

But Kessler, now at the University of California, San Francisco, gathered colleagues to help build on that science and learn why some people have such a hard time choosing healthier:

- First, the team found that even well-fed rats will work increasingly hard for sips of a vanilla milkshake with the right fat-sugar combo but that adding sugar steadily increases consumption. Many low-fat foods substitute sugar for the removed fat, doing nothing to help dieters eat less, Kessler and University of Washington researchers concluded.

- Then Kessler culled data from a major study on food habits and health. Conditioned hypereaters reported feeling loss of control over food, a lack of satiety, and were preoccupied by food. Some 42 percent of them were obese compared to 18 percent without those behaviors, says Kessler, who estimates that up to 70 million people have some degree of conditioned hypereating.

- Finally, Yale University neuroscientist Dana Small had hypereaters smell chocolate and taste a chocolate milkshake inside a brain-scanning MRI machine. Rather than getting used to the aroma, as is normal, hypereaters found the smell more tantalizing with time. And drinking the milkshake didn't satisfy. The reward-anticipating region of their brains stayed switched on,

so that another brain area couldn't say, "Enough!"

People who aren't overweight can be conditioned hypereaters, too, Kessler found — so it's possible to control.

Take Volkow, the chocolate-loving neuroscientist. She's lean, and a self-described compulsive exerciser. Physical activity targets the dopamine pathway, too, a healthy distraction.

Smoking didn't start to drop until society's view of it as glamorous and sexy started changing, to view the habit as deadly, Kessler notes.

Unhealthy food has changed in the other direction. Foods high in fat, sugar and salt tend to be cheap; they're widely sold; and advertising links them to good friends and good times, even as social norms changed to make snacking anytime, anywhere acceptable.

Retrain the brain to think, "I'll hate myself if I eat that," Kessler advises. Lay down new neural reward circuits by substituting something else you enjoy, like a bike ride or a healthier food.

Make rules to resist temptation: "I'm going to the mall but bypassing the food court."

And avoid cues for bad eating whenever possible. Always go for the nachos at your friends' weekend gathering spot? Start fresh at another restaurant.

"I've learned to eat things I like but things I can control," Kessler says. But he knows the old circuitry dies hard: "You stress me enough and I'll go pick up that bagel."

Study: Ginger capsules ease chemo nausea

By MARILYNN MARCHIONE
AP MEDICAL WRITER

Ginger, long used as a folk remedy for soothing tummy-aches, helped tame one of the most dreaded side effects of cancer treatment — nausea from chemotherapy, the first large study to test the herb for this has found.

People who started taking ginger capsules several days before a chemo infusion had fewer and less severe bouts of nausea afterward than others who were given dummy capsules, the federally funded study found.

"We were slightly beside ourselves" to see how much it helped, said study leader Julie Ryan of the University of Rochester in New York.

Results were presented at the American Society of Clinical Oncology's annual meeting last month.

But don't reach for the ginger ale. Many sodas and cookies contain only flavoring — not real ginger, Ryan said. Her study tested a drug-like ginger root extract, and it's not known if people could get the same benefits from ginger teas or the

powdered ginger sold as a spice.

Still, ginger capsules may offer a cheap, simple way to fight nausea, which is far more than just a quality-of-life issue, doctors say. Some cancer patients cut treatment short or refuse chemo altogether because of nausea, hurting their chances of beating the disease.

Medicines do a good job of curbing vomiting, but nearly three-fourths of chemo patients still suffer nausea, which can sometimes be worse, Ryan said.

"Patients ask all the time, 'What else can I do?'" said Dr. Richard Schilsky, a cancer specialist at the University of Chicago and president of the oncology society.

Ginger has long been touted for stomach upsets, ranging from motion sickness to morning sickness during pregnancy. Studies have had mixed results.

The new one used a specially formulated gelcap containing concentrated, purified ginger root extract made by Aphios Corp. of Woburn, Mass.

The study involved 644 patients from cancer centers around the nation who had suffered nausea in

a previous round of chemotherapy. Two-thirds had breast cancer and the rest, other forms of the disease. They were placed in four groups and given one of three doses of ginger (the equivalent of one-half, 1 or 1½ grams of ginger per day) or dummy capsules in addition to standard anti-sickness medicines.

Patients took the capsules for six days, beginning three days before chemo treatment. They rated their nausea symptoms on a seven-point scale on the first day of each of three treatments.

All of the ginger doses significantly reduced nausea, and the middle and lowest doses gave the best results. Patients taking ginger scored their nausea an average of two or more points lower on the nausea scale, about a 40 percent improvement over their previous chemo treatments without ginger, Ryan said. Those given dummy pills reported hardly any difference.

Timing may have been key to success: An earlier study found ginger did no good when patients waited until the day of treatment to start taking it. In the new study, researchers wanted to see if having

ginger in the system ahead of time would help.

"It was just a different way of thinking to treat nausea, to try and pre-empt it," Ryan said.

Ginger caused no side effects in the study, but doctors say people should talk with their doctors before trying it because it can interfere with blood clotting, especially during cancer treatment or if taken with the blood thinner Coumadin or other commonly used medicines. It's also a risk for people having surgery, the American Cancer Society warns.

The National Cancer Institute paid for the study, and researchers had no ties to the ginger capsules' maker, Aphios. The company already sells a different type of ginger capsule as a dietary supplement, but hopes to seek federal Food and Drug Administration approval to sell its new ginger formulation as a drug to treat nausea, said chief executive officer Trevor Castor.

As dietary supplements, 50 to 100 ginger capsules sell for \$6 to \$30, Ryan said.

"We can't specifically say if any other form besides the form in our study would work," she added.

Doctors warn about camphor poisoning

By LINDSEY TANNER
AP MEDICAL WRITER

CHICAGO — Doctors are warning parents to avoid using imported camphor products after poisonings in several New York City children.

The alert was in a report in the May issue of the journal *Pediatrics* about three toddlers who suffered seizures in January 2008. They had either eaten camphor products, inhaled camphor or had it rubbed on them as a cold remedy. The products included folk remedies, pesticides and air fresheners. The children were treated at a Bronx hospital and recovered.

Several other children developed similar symptoms but authorities were unable to confirm if camphor was the culprit, said Dr. Hnin Khine. She is an emergency room physician at Children's Hospital at Montefiore in the Bronx who treated the three youngsters described in *Pediatrics*.

The products are made from the wood of evergreen camphor trees that are native to Japan and China, or from synthetics.

Camphor has a strong odor and is used in mothballs. Vicks Vapo-Rub also contains camphor, in low, government-approved doses, although the label advises against use in children younger than 2.

The products implicated in the poisonings were imported white cubes or tablets and contained doses higher than U.S. regulations allow, Khine said.

They're widely available in ethnic pharmacies and discount stores, sometimes labeled "alcanfor," the Spanish word for camphor.

Camphor is easily absorbed by the skin and nose. Young children are especially vulnerable. Poisoning symptoms can include stomach aches, nausea, vomiting and irritability.

On the Net:
Pediatrics: www.aap.org/