Health Briefs

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Sunglasses save sight

Prolonged sunlight exposure is as dangerous to children’s unprotected eyes as to their skin, an article in the June Contemporary Pediatrics reported.

Infants, and children younger than age 10, are at increased risk for retinal sunlight injury because their eyes permit greater amounts of damaging visible blue and ultraviolet (UV) light to enter, researchers stated. Visible blue and UV rays might create oxidizing reactions in the retina that later cause loss of central vision in both eyes (macular degeneration). Also, lens absorption of UV sunlight causes cumulative photo-oxidative stress, creating a predisposition for cataracts.

As children get older, light-retaining chromophores accumulate in the lens, protecting against retinal visible blue and UV absorption. Also, dark eyes have more protective pigment than light-colored eyes. However, researchers recommended sunglasses for all children, and cautioned against looking into the sun, which can cause blindness, even with sunglasses.

Effective sunglasses must absorb at least 99 percent of UV radiation, researchers stated. Sunglasses should be labeled: “Blocks 99 percent of UV rays;” “UV absorption up to 400 nm,” “special purpose;” or “meets ANSI UV requirements.” Lens darkness does not indicate UV protection, researchers stated.

Measles vaccine and egg allergy

Children allergic to eggs can safely receive a single dose of measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine, a study in the May 11 New England Journal of Medicine concluded.

Fifty-four previously unvaccinated children, with an average age of 18.5 months and a history of egg allergy were studied. Twenty-eight children were confirmed egg-allergic based on skin or food-challenge testing. Twenty-six children had a history of anaphylaxis after eating eggs. All were injected with a single subcutaneous MMR vaccine dose. Although three children of 17 given MMR vaccine skin tests had a positive reaction, not a single child of the 54 studied had an immediate or delayed adverse reaction to vaccine injection.

Pregnancy stress and birth outcome

Stress during the final trimester of pregnancy can result in premature birth or low birth weight, according to a study funded by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

Ninety married, upper middle-class women were asked to complete a questionnaire detailing their economic status, health habits, medical history and perceived stress level. For each unit increase on the questionnaire’s stress scale, researchers noticed a 55.03 gram decrease in infant birth weight. Women who were anxious about their pregnancy were also more likely to give birth prematurely. Each stress-scale-unit increase was associated with a three-day decrease in infant gestational age at birth.

Access to adequate medical care did not counteract stress effects, leading researchers to recommend that physicians teach pregnant women coping strategies, while providing accurate, clear information to calm pregnancy fears and anxiety.

Low-fat diets for children

Children on low-fat, low-cholesterol diets still receive adequate nutrition, a study in the May 10 Journal of the American Medical Association reported.

Researchers randomly split a group of 663 children, ages 8 to 10, with elevated low-density lipoprotein cholesterol (LDL-C), into intervention and control groups. Intervention group children received a diet providing 28 percent of energy from total fat, 8 percent from saturated fat, 9 percent from polyunsaturated fat and less than 150 daily milligrams of cholesterol.

Three years later, although both groups showed lowered LDL-C levels, the intervention group had significantly lower dietary total fat, saturated fat and cholesterol levels than the control group. LDL-C levels decreased by 15.4 milligrams per deciliter (mg/dL) in the intervention group, compared to 11.9 mg/dL in the control group. Appropriate growth rates, nutritional adequacy, iron stores and psychological well-being were maintained in both groups.

Fatal baking soda

Baking soda used as a children’s home remedy can be fatal, according to a report in the April issue of Pediatric Emergency Care.

Reported ages for baking soda-poisoning have ranged from 6 weeks to 9 years, researchers stated. The home remedy was given to treat gastrointestinal symptoms, inflammatory mouth diseases and upper respiratory problems. In some cases, baking soda poisoning was abuse-related.

Poisoning symptoms include hyperventilation, seizures, metabolic alkalosis, dehydration, lethargy, poor respiration, tetany, apnea and acute gastroenteritis. Recommended adult doses on baking soda boxes far exceed daily sodium requirements for infants and small children, researchers warned.

Behavior problems and affluence

Affluent children are as likely as poor youth to commit minor crimes, abuse substances and have delinquency and other behavioral problems, according to a report in the April Pediatric Annuals.

Children from wealthy families often experience eating disorders, social isolation and unrealistic academic and vocational achievement expectations, researchers stated. Affluent children with “silver spoon syndrome” feel emotionally deprived, have low self-esteem and often feel confidence to cover insecurity. This is the result of parents who give money instead of time to their children (hence the syndrome name), using substitute, transient care-givers, researchers stated. These children are often overly dependent, have difficulty concentrating and expect immediate needs gratification.

Associated with “silver spoon syndrome,” wealthy children often have an exaggerated sense of entitlement, disregard rules, are insensitive to others and believe that their parents’ resources will take care of their problems.

Delinquency results from rebellion against unrealistic parental expectations, boredom or a lack of consequences for illegal behavior, according to researchers. Substance abuse also is a result of boredom, a large disposable income, com-bating perceived meaninglessness and a rejection of conventional values. Previous studies have