



## Passive smoking increases risk of developing diabetes

Being exposed to second-hand smoke increases an individual's chances of developing diabetes, according to results from a 15-year-long US-based study, published in the *British Medical Journal*.

The 4572 participants were divided into four groups: current smokers, former smokers, people exposed to smoke only passively and people never exposed to smoke.

Seventeen per cent of the people who had only been exposed to second-hand smoke went on to become glucose intolerant, compared with only 12% of those not exposed to smoke.

The highest risk was seen in the current smokers, of whom 22% developed the condition over the 15-year study period.

The researchers stated: 'If confirmed by further research, these findings provide further documentation of the deleterious effects of tobacco smoking, and policy makers may use them as additional justification to reduce exposure to passive smoking.'

Neil Raftery, a spokesperson for Forest (a pro-smoking group), said: 'There are so many conflicting reports about the effects of passive smoking... that there is no conclusive evidence that there is any effect on health.'

*BBC News, 6 April 2006*

## GPs instructed to advise overweight people to lose weight

GPs have been told to advise overweight people that they should lose weight, in a move by Caroline Flint, the Public Health Minister, to curb obesity in Britain.

In doing so, however, it is recommended that GPs are not too blunt or bossy with people, especially children. With this in mind, guidance on approaching this potentially difficult topic of conversation have been sent out to GPs.

Among other recommendations for GPs are encouraging families to become members of a leisure centre and warning people about faddish diets, such as the Atkins diet, for which long-term outcomes are not clear.

In addition to the guidance issued to GPs, leaflets will be given to adults and children at practices and at schools.

This move comes at a time when it has been suggested that the weight gap between England and the US could begin to close.

While a study published in *JAMA* has confirmed that middle-aged people in England are much healthier than their counterparts in the US, Professor James Banks, of the University College London Department of Economics and Institute for Fiscal Studies, commented: 'the gap between England and the US [could] begin to close.'

*The Times, 3 May 2006*

## 'New avenues' open for research into lower limb complications

Changes in skin tissue that precede leg ulcer formation have been identified by a team from Bristol.

Skin samples were taken from 14 people who had undergone below-knee amputations; comparisons were made between the amputated tissue and skin from the healthy leg. It was discovered that damaging changes were taking place in the connective

tissue of the amputated limb.

Understanding what is going on in the tissue could lead to treatments being developed that reduce ulcer formation. Speaking of the results, team member Dr John Tarlton said they have 'opened up new avenues' and their 'ramifications are far reaching'.

*BBC News, 9 April 2006*

## Teenagers could gain a stone in a year with a sugary drink a day

Research published in *Pediatrics* suggests that drinking one 330ml can of a sugar-sweetened drink every day could lead to weight gain of 1 lb (450g) in 3 or 4 weeks for teenagers. This works out at roughly 1 stone (6.4kg) over a year.

In the study, which was conducted by researchers at Children's Hospital Boston, US, 103 teenagers were followed for

6 months. Around half of the group received low-calorie drinks and were told to avoid sugar-sweetened drinks; the others acted as control participants.

After the 6 months, the intake of sugar-sweetened drinks was said to be unchanged in the control group but had dropped by 82% in the intervention group.

*The Times, 6 March 2006*

## Obesity in English secondary school pupils tops 25 per cent

Over a quarter of English secondary school pupils are clinically obese, according to figures from the National Health Survey for 2004.

Among boys and girls aged 2–10 years, 15.9% and 12.8% were found to be obese, respectively. For boys and girls aged 11–15 years, the respective prevalences were 24.2% and 26.7%. This figure of 26.7% for the prevalence of obesity in girls aged 11–15 years reflects a rapid rise from 22.1% in 2003 and 15.4% in 1995.

These numbers were said to portray a 'public health timebomb' by Professor Colin Waine, Chair of the National Obesity Forum.

He added that 'obesity in adolescents is associated with the premature onset of type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular diseases.'

A report published by the National Audit Office in February stated that without clearer leadership from the top, the Government would fail in its quest to stop the rise in the prevalence of obesity.

Moreover, Caroline Flint, the Public Health Minister, has acknowledged that the Government is aware that it has more to do to meet its target – set in 2004 – of halting this rise by 2010.

Amanda Eden, Care Adviser at Diabetes UK, said: 'A firmer line needs to be taken to force the food industry to adhere to food labelling guidelines, so people know what's in the food they buy.'

'They also need to ban junk food advertising to kids, and find more ways of encouraging people to exercise.'

*The Guardian, 22 April 2006*

## DIABETES LITE

### Cross-country walking: America's new exercise plan?

Sixty kilograms lighter and over a year older than when he set off on foot from his home in San Diego, California, Steve Vaught is nearing his destination of New York City.

The motivation behind his cross-country walk was weight loss: he was 186kg and closing

in on 40 years of age. Steve wanted to regain his life.

Remarking on the amount of weight he has lost, he said: '130 lb – that's a whole girlfriend.'

Only one question remains: will his journey reach Hollywood?

*The Guardian, 18 April 2006*

### French schools may move from haute cuisine to oat cuisine

It might come as a bit of a shock to hear that France is taking tips from Scotland's school dinner scheme. One country is famed for *dégustation*, the other for its deep-fried Mars bar. That, however, was the purpose of a visit to Edinburgh

for a delegation from the French Education Ministry.

This could have something to do with the Scottish Executive's commendable £63 million plan to improve school dinners.

*The Times, 4 May 2006*

### An upward trend in energy expenditure at school?

Conspiracy theorists may suspect that this an elaborate cover-up of a new way to reduce overcrowding in schools, but it has been suggested that chair-free classrooms could be introduced in Britain where children take lessons standing up. And this is no tall story...

Dr James Levine, of the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota, believes that the increased rate of calorie burning standing up (three times that of the rate sitting down) could have significant effects on children's waistlines.

Children could rightly feel like sitting ducks being given a standing order in a scientific experiment, but there are

plans to extend the fat-fighting philosophy to the adult work place. The proposal could be dismissed as being high-minded.

*Telegraph, 27 March 2006*

