

FOR YOUR HEALTH

Don't become a target for tobacco

It's inevitable. At some point today, I will see a smoking advertisement.

Whether it's at the market or drugstore, in a magazine or major sporting event, this 14-year-old will see a tobacco ad. I'm a tobacco industry target.



Stefanie E. Garcia

of Disease," reveals that if current trends continue, 250 million of today's children will eventually die from tobacco-related diseases.

Sure, the tobacco companies say they have cut back on advertisements and don't market to the youth, yet they do.

Take, for example, sponsorships. If you enjoy the thrill of auto racing, you're sure to see a cigarette brand name written in white across the chest of some driver in a red jumpsuit. Of course, his car is blanketed with the same logo and colors.

Pretty packaging is another sleek marketing technique used by tobacco companies. I must admit, Camel No. 9's slick black box with pink and teal accents appeared attractive when shown to me. However, possessing a pretty black box doesn't impart glamour and is not worth the heavy price of chronic diseases later in life.

There's a reason the number of adult smokers in the country is falling. People are becoming aware of the dangers and consequences of smoking. More adults are quitting, which is why the tobacco industry is targeting teenagers.

It's obvious their marketing teams have done their homework. Today's tobacco advertisements emphasize coolness, fun and sexiness -- characteristics that define being a teenager. They boast that cigarettes have different flavors and present them in boxes designed to lure teenagers. Unfortunately, you can find these ads close to our high schools.

The billions of dollars they invest in advertising, sponsorship and other forms of promotion to entice teenagers like me to smoke are paying off. Every day, approximately 4,000 children between 12 and 17 years old smoke their first cigarette, and an estimated 1,300 of them will become regular smokers. A Harvard School of Public Health study, "The Global Burden

The 1998 Master Settlement Agreement prohibited tobacco companies from advertising their product in markets that target the youth. But, according to the Senate HELP Committee in 2007, the average youth in the United States was exposed to 559 tobacco ads between 1998 and 2005.

Well, tobacco companies, I won't be one of your statistics. I won't help in your mission of targeting the youth, nor will I be one of the 438,000 people in the United States who die annually from tobacco-caused diseases.

It's not cool to smoke. It's not sexy. And, I don't think it's fun to have health problems. I don't want to experience respiratory illnesses, decreased physical fitness or potential retardation in my lung development and function.

Fact is fact: Smoking is a health hazard. It leads to chronic respiratory problems, lung cancer, heart disease and strokes, to name but a few. Tobacco companies know this. Studies have proved the dangers of tobacco over and over again throughout the years. Yet they still promote their product to teenagers like me.

I want to be healthy. I value my life and those around me. These tobacco companies just don't get it. Or worse, they just don't care!

Stefanie E. Garcia is an Armijo High School freshman and a participant in the Solano County Tobacco Prevention & Education Program media project to expose tobacco industry marketing tactics. She wrote this article for the Solano Coalition for Better Health.

Rerouting the body's circuits

Switching nerve endings could help spina bifida patients

BY LAURAN NEERGAARD
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — It's a delicate and daring experiment: Could doctors switch a leg nerve to make it operate the bladder instead?

Families of a few U.S. children whose spina bifida robs them of the bladder control that most people take for granted dared to try the procedure -- and early results suggest the surgery indeed may help, in at least some patients.

With the technique, pioneered in China, the kids are supposed to scratch or pinch their thigh to signal the bladder to empty every few hours. But surprisingly, some youngsters instead are starting to feel those need-to-go sensations that their birth defect had always prevented.

"It feels like this little chill kind of thing in me," marvels 9-year-old Billy Kraser of Scranton, Pa.

"When he goes in there and he's dry and he's clean, it's such a triumph," adds his mother, Janice Kraser. "I'll hear him going, 'Yesss!'"

The U.S. pilot study consists of just nine spina bifida patients and still is tracking how they fare -- no one is finished healing yet. But already desperate families are lining up for a chance at this nerve rerouting, even as William Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak, Mich., is trying to raise money to expand



The Associated Press

A recent study found that rerouting leg nerves to the bladder allowed patients with spina bifida to feel the need-to-go sensations they were previously unable to feel because of their birth defect.

the study and provide better evidence.

"If it works, it'll be a huge improvement in the management of patients with spina bifida," says Dr. Kenneth Peters, Beaumont's urology chairman, who has a waiting list of nearly 100 would-be patients.

But, "it's imperative that we prove whether this works or not" before accepting all-comers, he stresses. "I have many patients who would pay cash and have it done. I refuse to do that."

Spina bifida occurs when the spinal column fails to close properly.

It's a birth defect that affects about 1,300 babies a year, with varying degrees of leg paralysis and other problems.

Because bladder and bowel function depend on nerve messages zipping to and from the brain via the spinal cord, most spina bifida patients have trouble. Some are totally incontinent, some partially.

Others have the opposite problem and must empty the bladder with catheters every few hours, leaving them vulnerable to urinary tract infections and life-threatening kidney damage.

There are few good treatments. Enter Dr. Chuan-Gao Xiao of China's Huzhong University of Science and Technology.

The U.S.-trained surgeon developed a way to bypass the brain: Cut open a spot on the lower spine and sew two normally unrelated nerves together -- a lumbar nerve that acts in the thigh to a sacral nerve that would normally squeeze the bladder.

If they fuse well, then scratching the thigh can send a signal directly to the bladder side of the new nerve bridge, Xiao's early research found.

Earbuds could scramble heart devices

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW ORLEANS — Have a pacemaker or an implanted defibrillator? Don't keep your iPod earbuds in your shirt pocket or draped around your neck -- even when they're disconnected. A study finds that some headphones can interfere with heart devices if held very close to them.

They might even prevent a defibrillator from delivering a lifesaving shock, say doctors who tested them.

"Headphones contain magnets, and some of these magnets are powerful," said the study's leader, Dr. William Maisel, a cardiologist at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston and a heart device consultant to the federal Food and Drug Administration.

"I certainly don't think people should overreact to this information," but it's smart to keep small electronics at least a few inches from implanted medical devices, and not let someone wearing headphones lean against your chest if you have one, he said.

"The headphone interaction applies whether or not the headphones are plugged in to the music player and whether or not the music player is on or off," he added. Maisel's research was presented Sunday at an American Heart Association conference.

Nearly 2 million people worldwide have pacemakers, defibrillators or other devices to help their hearts beat faster, slower or more regularly. Tests by the FDA earlier this year concluded that iPods or other music

players posed no threat to these devices as long as they were used properly.

Maisel and other doctors wanted to know if the same was true of headphones. They tested eight models -- earbuds and those that hook over the ear -- in 60 people with heart devices.

When headphones were about an inch from the device, interference was detected nearly one-fourth of the time -- in four of the 27 pacemaker patients and 10 of the 33 with defibrillators. A pacemaker reset itself in one patient. Patients having such interference might not feel anything, or may have heart palpitations. But the interference could temporarily deactivate a defibrillator, keeping it from delivering a lifesaving shock if one were needed.

The magnet's effect falls

off rapidly with distance from the device, and heart device function returns to normal as soon as the headphone is out of range.

A separate study presented at the heart conference found no danger to heart devices from cell phones equipped with Bluetooth wireless technology.

Cell phones, anti-theft security devices and a host of other electronics have sparked fears in the past, but studies generally find no danger to heart devices with ordinary, prudent use, said Dr. Douglas Zipes, past president of the American College of Cardiology and professor of cardiology at Indiana University.

"Reassurance to the public is what's warranted. I still get questions, what about my microwave?" he said.

HOROSCOPES

BY HOLIDAY MATHIS

ARIES (March 21-April 19). You could see worries in your life, but you choose not to. There will always be fearful things to place your attention on, if that's what you're into, but you're not into that.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20). It's easy to see what's working. You change your tune and strike a chord that draws people near you.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21). You're socially driven today. You're only daring when there's someone calling out the dares.

CANCER (June 22-July 22). To admit that you were wrong, to say that you are sorry and to intend that you will never do it again -- it all seems so simple, doesn't it? **LEO** (July 23-Aug. 22). You've been over-thinking things, but that changes. When you have an impulse to do something, you follow through.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22). You're popular. One friend needs you more than all of the others do, though. You're wise to carve out a block of one-on-one time so that you can give your friend uninterrupted, undivided attention.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23). Feeding your creativity is not the selfish act that some people would have you believe it is. Move toward the places that interest you the most.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21). Spiff up the atmosphere around you, including the environment of your body, clothes, home and car.

Today's birthday

You're confident in your skills. All you have to do this year is consistently apply them and you'll make one of your major goals. Your heart tells you to take a risk in December. Family life takes fanciful turns in January. In December you'll travel to sate the curiosity of a captivating interest. Gemini and Scorpio adore you. Your lucky numbers are: 9, 30, 11, 14 and 6.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21). You don't mind going overboard to please someone, as long as it's the right "someone." The concessions you make might seem extreme to the casual observer, and yet are perfectly natural to you.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19). Everyone is looking for a fresh take, something exciting to use in small talk. You have the new spin that brightens the moods of those around you.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18). Venus-ruled, you're blessed with superb taste. If you aren't careful, you might be characterized as a snob!

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20). Friendships take effort and lately that effort seems to come in the form of money. Your generosity may exceed your means, but don't worry -- it's all coming back around to you.

ANNIE'S MAILBOX

I think my husband's best friend and I have a future together -- I could be wrong

Dear Annie: A year ago, I fell hard for a very good friend of my husband. I love my husband, but I think it is simply out of habit rather than anything real.

"Tony" is single and I believe he cares for me more than he is willing to admit. But he says he wouldn't take me out in public even if I left my husband. I love him beyond words and thought I was willing to give up everything for him, but now I'm not sure. I stayed away from Tony for over two months, but then he contacted me, yet still says we can't be more than we are now.

We both have a lot to lose by pursuing this, but I can't go on living with one man and being in love with another. Tony has admitted he cares for me, but that's as far as he'll go. What happens now? — Daytime Friends and Nighttime Lovers

Dear Daytime: Nothing. Your fantasies are getting in the way of reality. Tony isn't interested in marrying you. He doesn't want you to leave your husband. He is-

n't willing to give up his friendship with your husband for you. But he enjoys the attention and will continue to string you along if you keep permitting it. This isn't love. This is infatuation and you can get over it, but you must make the effort. Otherwise, in a year, you'll be kicking yourself. Tony was available when you were emotionally needy. Now you must channel that neediness by reconnecting with your husband. Remember what you love about him and focus on rekindling your romance. If you can't do that on your own, please get counseling.

Dear Annie: Could you please settle a dispute over manners between my son and me? He recently told me of a dining experience he had with his new girlfriend and her family. They had gone to a nice restaurant and my son ordered a T-bone steak. He went on to tell me how he picked the bone up and chewed the remainder of the meat off of it.

He sees nothing wrong with this. I, on the other

hand, think he had a lapse in good judgment and manners. Please settle this for us. — Tried To Raise Him Right

Dear Tried: In an informal setting, perhaps at his girlfriend's home, it would be OK to pick up the mostly clean bone of a lamb chop, pork chop or small steak and chew to your heart's content. But in a restaurant, your son should have cut as much meat as possible from the bone and eaten it with his fork. You win this one, Mom.

Dear Annie: This is in regard to the letter from "Confused Out West," whose husband volunteers to travel to officiate sporting contests, etc.

I have been an official for 28 years. All of my mileage, uniforms, laundry, hotel bills, association dues, related phone calls, partial cell phone costs, etc. are tax-deductible business expenses. Do I love it? Yes. Would I do it for free? No. I officiate some games for free because they are for good causes, like tournaments

that raise funds for student scholarships, medical bill fundraisers, etc.

When I was younger, this part-time business was a vital part of our family income. Now, I simply love the camaraderie and the physical and mental challenges. The extra money goes to vacations, nights out, etc.

This woman is sadly mistaken thinking her husband volunteers to do this. Maybe she needs to ask what is really going on. If they are "in the hole" because of his officiating, he should stop. — Greg the Zebra

Dear Greg: We aren't sure whether he's getting paid or not, and several readers questioned the financial aspect of this arrangement. We do know that he is spending too much time away from his family and that needs to be corrected.

Please e-mail your questions to anniesmailbox@comcast.net, or write to: Annie's Mailbox, P.O. Box 118190, Chicago, IL 60611.