



Get some sun

Urbanisation cuts off adequate vitamin D supply

INCREASING URBANISATION IS cutting off people from adequate sunlight, which helps the skin produce vitamin D, facilitating the absorption of calcium, says a study.

About two million years ago, permanent dark skin colour imparted by the pigment - melanin - began to evolve in humans to regulate the body's reaction to ultraviolet rays from the sun, said Nina Jablonski, professor of anthropology at Penn State University.

Melanin helped humans maintain the delicate balance between too much sunlight and not enough sunlight.

The pigment allowed enough ultraviolet radiation to produce vitamin D, while protecting the skin from the intense ultraviolet radiation in the equator. Too much sunlight can cause the destruction of folate, which is also critical to cell division.

Unlike their ancestors, modern humans are more mobile. "We move around a lot now," said Jablonski.

"People can move across 90 degrees of latitude in a single day whereas early humans generally only went a few kilo-



metres in the same time."

Most people now live in cities with limited exposure to the sun. Nearly 60 per cent of people across the world live in cities now, she said.

Most of these people spend more time indoors, further reducing their ability to make enough vitamin D in their skin, according to

Penn statement.

"Think about a farmer who lived in northern England and worked outside," said Jablonski.

"In the past, that farmer had the right amount of light pigmentation to make it possible for him to produce enough vitamin D in his skin in the summer to satisfy most

of his yearly needs."

However, Jablonski said a typical worker who lives in England today is rarely exposed to that amount of sun, which only compounds health problems.

"This can lead to a vitamin D catastrophe for many people," Jablonski added. *IANS*

Diet drinks may not fuel appetite

TAKE ANOTHER SIP of that Diet Coke without fear that it may be spurring your appetite. Apparently, diet soda drinkers don't eat any more sugary or fatty foods than people who stick with water instead, according to a U.S. study.

Some researchers have proposed that drinks sweetened with artificial sugar might disrupt hormones involved in hunger and satiety cues, causing people to eat more. Others hypothesised that diet beverages could boost the drinker's preference for sweet tastes, translating to more munching on high-calorie treats.

"Our study does not provide evidence to suggest that a short-term consumption of diet beverages, compared with water, increases preferences for sweet foods and beverages," wrote lead researcher Carmen Piernas in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition.

Piernas, from the University of North



Carolina at Chapel Hill Gillings School of Global Public Health, and her colleagues, looked at 318 overweight or obese adults in North Carolina, all of whom said they consumed at least 280 calories' worth of drinks each day.

Six months in, the only differences were that members of the water group ate more fruit and vegetables, and people randomized to diet beverages ate fewer desserts, compared to their diet habits at the study's onset.

"That's sort of the opposite of what you would expect if consumption of diet soda increased the preference for sweets," Vasanti Malik, a nutrition researcher from the Harvard School of Public Health said.

Some studies have suggested an increased risk of cancer tied to certain artificial sweeteners, but convincing evidence is lacking, Malik said. *Reuters*

ALIGN YOUR LIFE

The Laughter Cure

A FEW YEARS ago during one of my trips to India I tumbled upon a funny sight one morning in the park. I saw a few people laughing loudly while doing simple yoga exercises. It looked so funny that I myself started laughing loudly and suddenly felt lighter and better. I remember that whole day just the thought of what I had witnessed early that morning brought a smile to face. Upon digging deeper, I realised that what I had witnessed was something unique and very popular. My own mother was part of the laughter group.

The idea of starting a laughter club was the brainchild of Dr. Madan Kataria, a Physician from Mumbai, India. He launched the first Laughter Club at a park on March 13, 1995, with merely a handful of people. Today, it has become a worldwide phenomenon with more than 6000 Social Laughter Clubs in about 60 countries. So what is the main principle of this club? Laughter Yoga combines unconditional laughter with some breathing exercises known as pranayama in Yoga. The main idea behind this is that anyone can laugh for no reason, without relying on humour, jokes or comedy.

Laughter is simulated as a body exercise in a group; with eye contact and childlike playfulness, it soon turns into real and contagious laughter. The concept of Laughter Yoga is based on a scientific fact that the body cannot differentiate between fake and real laughter. One gets the same physiological and psychological benefits. The best part about this unique club is that it's completely free. There are no membership forms to be filled or interviews to be given. Run by yoga teachers and volunteers, the aim of the club is to re-introduce laughter as one of the main ingredients in your everyday life.

From a scientific point of view, there has been multiple clinical researches on Laughter Yoga methods, conducted at the University of Graz in Austria; Bangalore in India; and in the United States that has proved that laughter lowers the level of stress hormones (epinephrine, cortisol, etc.) in the blood. It fosters a positive and hopeful attitude. It is less likely for a person to succumb to stress and feelings of depression and helplessness, if one is able to laugh away the troubles.

So far Laughter Yoga has been introduced to people from all walks of life; from prisoners to mentally challenged children, housewives and senior citizens. And the results are amazing. Look for a Laughter Club near your home and laugh your way to good health.

Shivani Adalja is an Abu Dhabi-based well-being expert. She runs the Alignment Institute which offers effective solutions that focus on stress management and overall wellbeing

