

News & Views

Sweetness and light?

Americans are starting to wise up to the dangers of the artificial sweetener NutraSweet[®], chemically known as aspartame. The bad news is that they seem to be falling for a new sweetener, Splenda[®] (sucralose), created by tweaking sugar with chlorine. The structure of the sugar molecule receives three chlorine molecules in place of three hydroxyl groups.

An Associated Press article told how McNeil Nutritionals, a Johnson & Johnson company, wants consumers to use Splenda in baking as it browns nicely and sweetens foods with no calories.

"No calories" sounds tempting, but Dr. Joseph Mercola warns that animal studies on sucralose have shown:

- Shrunken thymus glands (up to 40 percent shrinkage)
- Enlarged liver and kidneys
- Atrophy of lymph follicles in the spleen and thymus
- Reduced growth rate
- Decreased red blood cell count
- Aborted pregnancy
- Decreased fetal body weights and placental weights
- Diarrhea

And there are no long-term human studies for this chemical concoction. Starbucks has announced it will offer Splenda to its customers, and baking enthusiasts can purchase a 2-pound bag of a Splenda/sugar mixture for a mere \$6.29. Chlorinated sugar? We'll pass!

Drug scandals reported by the *British Medical Journal*:

England's premier medical journal was tsk-tsking about a new Harris Poll survey reporting that only 13 percent of Americans believe that pharmaceutical companies are "generally honest and trustworthy." The poll found that the public's confidence in drug companies took a deeper and sharper nosedive than any other industry.

The *BMJ* also noted spreading distrust of U.S. academic/research journals heretofore highly respected. The article linked this distrust to recent controversies over the new lower guidelines for cholesterol issued by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute and the American Heart Association. Word leaked out that eight out of nine authors of the guidelines had financial ties to manufacturers of cholesterol-lowering drugs.

Authors of medical studies in journals often failed to disclose conflicts of interest. *BMJ* cited this example: "One of the authors of a study on the sources of lead in children living near a smelter failed to acknowledge that her husband owned the smelter in question."

A congressional hearing was scheduled to investigate pharmaceutical companies for concealing damaging data on children's use of antidepressants. The hearing was set to take place on July 20, 2004, but was cancelled the day before because the subcommittee's chairman, Congressman James Greenwood of Pennsylvania, became the president of BIO, the largest trade organization for bio-pharmaceutical companies.

The *BMJ* also noted that the FDA has come under fire for possible involvement in concealing the data showing adverse reactions in adolescent antidepressant use. *BMJ*, Volume 329, July 31, 2004 bmj.com.

Take two Tylenol® and call me in the morning: Or how to have a "therapeutic misadventure"

Remember that highly dangerous dietary supplement ephedra? Some people misused it, causing 155 deaths over an unspecified length of time, so the FDA banned its use. (Young Living never included ephedra in any of its products.)

Well, there's another dangerous substance out there that makes ephedra look tame. Every year three times the total number people who died due to ephedra die because of acute liver failure caused by acetaminophen, popularly known as Tylenol. An article in *Hepatology* (Vol. 40, No. 1, 2004) reported that "Acetaminophen overdose is the leading cause for calls to Poison Control Centers (more than 100,000/year) and accounts for more than 56,000 emergency room visits, 2,600 hospitalizations, and an estimated 458 deaths due to acute liver failure each year."

Overdoses occur because acetaminophen is used in more than 600 products that treat pain, coughs, cold and flu. Tylenol is among a group of painkillers called "nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory painkillers" (NSAIDs) that also have been found to diminish bone healing, formation and remodeling. Ironically, NSAIDs are often prescribed for patients as part of recovery for healing fractures.

The FDA approved Tylenol for public use in the 1950s. When hepatotoxicity began to be recognized in the 1980s, Tylenol deaths from acute liver failure were called by the delicate term, "therapeutic misadventures." (The most recent figures state that 49 percent of all 2003 acute liver failures were acetaminophen-related, according to unpublished data from the ALF Study Group.)

Reuters reported on July 26, 2004, that some women can experience a decline in kidney function from long-term use of Tylenol.

Taking Tylenol for a headache can give you a headache? A study published in the May 2004 issue of *Neurology* confirmed that frequent use of analgesics (like aspirin, acetaminophen or ibuprofen) for chronic headaches or body pains "may be the cause of headache pain in as many as half of the patients who suffer from chronic headaches." *Health Sciences Institute e-newsletter*, July 28, 2004. Since Tylenol brings a Johnson & Johnson subsidiary more than \$1 billion a year, don't hold your breath

waiting for the FDA to issue even a warning label for over-the-counter pain relievers. (Even though that was the recommendation of its own scientific advisors).

The Associated Press, Jan. 22, 2004.

Double whammy of bad health news

July brought word that a study reported "as many as 195,000 people could be dying in U.S. hospitals because of easily prevented errors." *Reuters, July 28, 2004*, (It would be a very good idea to check medications while hospitalized.) This figure is double previous estimates of the Institute of Medicine's 1999 study reporting that 98,000 people die each year from medical errors.

The news on the mental health horizon is even worse. Illinois passed an all-encompassing bill called "The Children's Mental Health Act of 2003" which states that "screenings, testing, and treatments will be offered in homes, pre-schools, daycare, and throughout the public school system. A child over 12 will be provided two mental health sessions without parental consent." *The Illinois Leader, July 21, 2004.*

Reaction from the public has been heated. One citizen wrote in, "The Psychiatric/Pharmaceutical cartel has brainwashed the Illinois legislature into funding their fraudulent practice of labeling children and adults with manufactured mental illnesses and then using mind damaging drugs to drive them crazy." Another writer wondered "how the elected officials would feel about passing a law for compulsory ethics screening for political candidates."

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