

Good Housekeeping

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Health news

Research updates, diet tips and more to keep you healthy and fit... By Priya K Rana



Tomatoes taste great, keep cancer at bay, and may help you live longer

Tomato POWER

A daily glass of tomato juice can keep you healthy for life. Packed with a vital antioxidant - lycopene - tomatoes help fight against cancerous cell formation and also flush out free radicals from the body. They also offer vitamins C, A and K, potassium, and fibre. In fact one medium-sized tomato may provide almost half of a person's recommended daily amount of vitamin C. Tomatoes also prevent strokes and hypertension - thanks to its potassium content. Plus, one medium tomato has only about 20 Calories. Be sure to pick those with the most brilliant shades of red - these indicate the highest amounts of beta carotene and lycopene. Cook them in a little oil: all the better to release the lycopene in its cell walls. So whether you savour tomatoes in pizza or curry, have them canned or fresh, the redder the better - the protection is in the pigment.

Expert: Ishi Khosla, nutritionist and proprietor, Whole Foods, Delhi

REAL LIFE: "Slipped" disc

Deepa Singh, 43, a Delhi-based company head awoke with a stabbing pain in her lower back. An MRI scan confirmed a stage-2 prolapsed disc (mistakenly known as "slipped" disc). To heal it, her doctor prescribed Crocin, five days of bed rest and limited activity.

Expert speak: Deepa's vertebral disc hadn't really "slipped". 'If a rubber-band ball-like disc (the vertebrae has 32 of these) ruptures, the soft jelly inside leaks out, pinching a nerve and causing pain,' says Dr Sunil Marwah, senior orthopaedic surgeon, Apollo Indraprastha

Hospital, Delhi. 'It can happen at any age, but more likely when you're younger, since the liquid jelly inside exerts greater pressure on the disc.' What triggers it: bending down, sneezing, even an awkward position. 'I blame the "chair-to-car" lifestyle of today. One's muscles aren't strong enough to support the back, exposing the discs to a potential rupture,' says Dr Marwah. The solution? Lots of bed rest, don't overdo the painkillers (pain acts as protection - signalling your body to rest), and when you're better, spinal exercises and back-supporting belts.*

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{ Padmashri Dr Rustom P Soonawala is a specialist in women's health and is a professor emeritus }

What if pregnancy is furthest from your mind? If you've had unprotected sex and fear you may have conceived, don't despair. You can take a special "emergency" pill up to 72 hours after sex, that prevents the sperm from fertilising the egg



When to use the "Emergency" Pill

What Is the Emergency Contraceptive Pill?

The Emergency Contraceptive (EC) Pill is a relatively safe and effective way to prevent pregnancy after unprotected intercourse. Take it up to 3 days (72 hours) after unprotected sex.

You may want the EC if

- The condom broke or slipped off.
- You forgot to take your birth control pills or insert your ring.
- Your diaphragm slipped out of place.
- You miscalculated your "safe" days.
- He didn't withdraw in time.
- You were forced to have unprotected vaginal sex, or were raped.

The EC (also known as emergency birth-control pill, back-up birth control pill and the morning-after pill), is available in India as the I-Pill, Nor-Levo or Pill 72. The I-Pill contains one tablet of 150mcg Levonorgestrel (the rest are 2 tablets of 75mcg Levonorgestrel each). Take the 2 pills in a pack 12 hours apart, within 3 days of intercourse.

Conventional oral contraceptive (OC) pills can also be used as EC. One needs to take 2 tablets of OC pills 12 hours apart for 2 doses (a total of 4) within 72 hours after intercourse, to

achieve the same effect. But the regular OC contains oestrogen, hence 4 tablets in 24 hours causes a fair bit of nausea and vomiting.

How Does Emergency Contraception Work?

The conventional oral contraceptive (OC) pill works by blocking ovulation, and contains oestrogen and the progestagen hormones. Whereas the EC pill contains only the progestagen and

acts not by blocking ovulation, but by making sperm penetration of the cervix (uterine mouth) hostile, making the mucus plug thick and sticky. It also prevents implantation of a fertilised egg in the uterus. Obviously since it doesn't block ovulation, the failures are higher than conventional OCs.

What Are the Disadvantages of the EC?

You may have side-effects with emergency contraception, but this is not common. If you use birth-control pills as emergency contraception, the chances of having side-effects are greater, but they'll go away in a day or two.

You can use anti-nausea medicine such as Dramamine an hour before taking the emergency contraception if you're concerned about nausea; some women may even feel drowsy. Several women find it helpful to take emergency contraception pills on a full stomach. Side-effects of the morning-after pill may include: breast tenderness, irregular bleeding, dizziness and headaches. If you use the morning-after pill frequently, it may cause your periods to become irregular.



HOW EFFECTIVE IS EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTION?

The morning-after pill is an effective form of back-up birth control, and is not a substitute for regular birth control. It is also not as effective as the OC pill used to block ovulation, or the IUD when used correctly.

The EC Pill reduces the risk of pregnancy by 89 percent when taken within 72 hours – or three days – after

unprotected intercourse. Only 1 out of 100 women will become pregnant after taking the EC if started within 3 days. Of course, the sooner you take it, the better.

You need to use the EC to prevent pregnancy after each time you have unprotected intercourse. The EC will not prevent pregnancy for any unpro-

tected intercourse you may have had after taking the pills. Don't use it frequently as regular birth control, since it becomes less and less effective.

The EC offers no protection against sexually transmitted infections. You may want to get tested for infections if there is a possibility that unprotected sex put you at risk.

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A NEW KNEE?

You've seen it before: An elderly relative with arthritis shuffling around, stick in hand, complaining of "bad knees". Arthritis affects millions, yet only a fraction will opt for knee-replacement surgery, citing limited movement post-surgery as the biggest reason. Here's some know-how on the new Scorpio NRG knee (replacement) system:

■ **How flexible is it?:**

Compared to traditional knee systems, the Scorpio NRG system's "single-radius" design and large spherical arc allow for a 0-150° movement of the knee (a full range of motion, like a normal knee). It has a longer lever arm that reduces stress on the muscle, and needs a minimal cut in the bone when the surgeon inserts it. Says Dr O N Nagi, senior consultant, Department of Orthopaedics, Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, Delhi, "The surgical technique in knee replacement needs to be accurate. The skill of the surgeon is crucial."

■ **Who benefits?:**

Anybody suffering from degenerative rheumatoid- or osteo-arthritis, between the ages of 40-90 can opt for knee-replacement surgery (if your knees turn stiff and painful, or are deformed, once the cartilage is destroyed).

■ **How long does it take to recover?:**

You're given a spinal anaesthesia during the operation, which means that you are fully awake. You can begin walking the next day; by the seventh day you can resume your activities. 'You regain total normalcy in three weeks, and can do brisk walking, even squatting,' says Dr Nagi.

■ **Where is it available?:**

You can opt for the Scorpio NRG knee system at leading government or private hospitals in metros and mini-metros across India. The device costs between Rs 80,000 to Rs 1 lakh.

A SIMPLE PLAN

TO LOWER YOUR BP



Losing weight is still the number one dietary way to bring blood pressure numbers down. But after that, comes raising your potassium intake while cutting down on sodium, reports a new review of studies from the Vanderbilt University School of Medicine, USA. Most of us, however, get only about half the potassium we need. To meet your daily quota (about 4,700 mg), eat plenty of veggies, fruits, low-fat dairy, nuts, seeds and beans. Sound daunting? This sample 1,800 Calorie plan shows how simple it can be. (Potassium-rich items are in bold type.)*

MEAL	TOTAL POTASSIUM
Breakfast 1 cup low-fat milk, 2 slices wholewheat toast with 2 tablespoons peanut butter, and 1 medium banana	895mg
Mid-afternoon Snack fruit platter (orange/pineapple/apple/sweet lime/pomegranate) + Lemon water	380mg
Lunch Mixed vegetable pulao; palak paneer; rajma; grilled fish; plain yoghurt	1,687mg
Evening Snack Tomato soup; kiwi fruit	427mg
Dinner Salad made with steamed broccoli, cauliflower, carrot, cucumber, yellow and red bell pepper, lettuce with roasted chicken, chopped tomatoes - drizzled with balsamic vinegar	1112mg
Dessert ½ cup chocolate pudding	199mg

DAY'S TOTAL potassium = 4,900mg

"MOVE" THOSE blues away

Studies have shown that exercise can boost your mood. Now a 20,000-person British health survey reveals that any kind of physical activity can lift your spirits. Researchers also noted how little activity it took to make a difference - just one to three 20-minute sessions a week reduced the chances of suffering from distress such as depression. The biggest impact came from doing anything - even mopping or gardening - for at least 20 minutes every day. 'When choosing your activity, make sure you opt for something that you find fun (maybe simply playing ball with your children), as then it won't be difficult to stick to it and the benefits multiply with regularity,' suggests Dr Ashima Puri, consultant psychologist at Aashlok hospital, Delhi.

