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Health

Financial hardship and obesity
Economics & Human Biology | http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ehb.2013.12.004
Trouble paying bills may make women fat
It has been found that individuals with less healthy lifestyles are more likely to hold debt, yet there is little evidence as to whether this is merely a correlation or if financial hardship actually causes obesity. This study, published in Economics & Human Biology, investigated the effect of financial hardship on body weight. Results showed that there is no relationship between credit card debt and being overweight or obese for neither men nor women. However, there is suggestive evidence that having trouble paying bills may be a cause of obesity, particularly for women.
Aminorex, a metabolite of the cocaine adulterant levamisole, exerts amphetamine like actions at monoamine transporters

*Neurochemistry International* | [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.neuint.2013.11.010](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.neuint.2013.11.010)

“Cutting” agents pose additional health risks in street drugs

There are many issues related to drugs in society, one concern is the contamination of drugs that are being sold on the streets. This study, published in *Neurochemistry International*, quantified adulterants, known as “cutting” agents, found in street drugs sold as cocaine. Results showed that over two-thirds of samples that were being sold as cocaine not only contained the drug itself but also a veterinary worming medicine, levamisole; this substance is being used to prolong the effects of cocaine, but is harmful to humans as it cause a number of different blood disorders such as neutropenia, agranulocytosis and vasculitis.

Reciprocal effects of alcohol and nicotine in smoking cessation treatment studies

*Addictive Behaviors* | [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2013.11.018](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2013.11.018)

Consuming alcohol may make it harder to stop smoking

This study, published in *Addictive Behaviors*, investigated whether alcohol use is associated with failure in smoking cessation attempts. Participants in two smoking cessation programs were studied; one alcohol dependent and one control group. It was found that the use of one of these substances predicted the use of the other substance. This led to the conclusion that alcohol plays a significant role in relapse in smoking cessation attempts.

Plasma oxytocin concentrations are lower in depressed vs. healthy control women and are independent of cortisol


Oxytocin – the love/stress hormone?

The brain hormone oxytocin, also known as the love hormone, promotes social behaviour and reduces stress responses in mammals. This study, published in the *Journal of Psychiatric Research*, investigated whether plasma oxytocin levels differed between depressed and healthy control subjects. Depressed female patients had a decreased level of oxytocin compared to healthy controls. One explanation for this link could be that the lack of oxytocin (which promotes social bonding), could result in a feeling of social isolation or loss, as frequently occurs prior to the onset of depression. In contrast, depressed males showed an increase in oxytocin levels. This increase could be linked to stress, as males may produce more oxytocin in order to feel more social supported.

Science and Technology

Why shopping pals make malls different?


Shopaholics – take your friends with you to stop impulse buying

Many of us are a victim of impulse buying. This study, published in the *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services* looked at the effect of shopping companions on the emotional attachment an individual had to a shopping mall. The presence of a shopping pal, either a friend or family member, draws the shopper away from their routine process, making them more cognitively and emotionally alert. This triggers feelings of apprehension and may create a feeling of competition or social comparison, worrying about what their pal will think of their purchases and changing their behaviour. Whereas, when shoppers shop alone, they are more likely to have reduced inhibitions, make impulse purchases and even lie about their purchases to other individuals, such as their parents.
Getting inked: Tattoo and risky behavioral involvement among university students

The Social Science Journal | http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.soscij.2013.09.009

Tattoos are linked to risky behaviour in students

University life often brings with it the chance to experience new things and students often take part in more spontaneous activities. This study, published in The Social Science Journal, looked at the relationship between students with tattoos and other risk-taking behaviour. Results showed that almost 30% of the students had a tattoo (obtained at some points before the survey, not necessarily at university) and that females were more likely to have a tattoo than males at university age. Further, results showed that students with tattoos were more likely to engage in substance use and risky sexual behaviour than those who did not have a tattoo.

Characterisation of bifidobacteria with immunomodulatory properties isolated from human breast milk


Probiotic bacteria could help to improve allergy symptoms

A growing body of research has revealed that breast milk provides a continuous supply of probiotic bacteria to an infant's gastrointestinal tract; playing a vital role in maintaining gut health and reducing allergies. This study, published in the Journal of Functional Foods, investigated the different bacteria groups passed through breast milk, in order to establish whether they could be used to regulate the immune system outside of breastfeeding. Results showed that three Bifidobacterium strains are suitable and promising functional food ingredients, especially to introduce to infant nutritional supplements designed for improving allergy symptoms.