

HEALTH BITES

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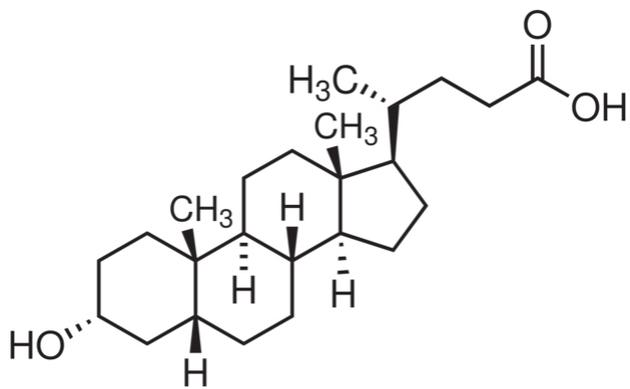
**The truth sucks**

They're meant to help keep your home clean, but some vacuum cleaners actually contribute to indoor air pollution, say researchers from Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane, Australia. They tested 21 vacuum cleaners sold in Australia and made by 11 manufacturers. The machines were aged six months to 22 years old, and cost from less than A\$75 (HK\$600) to A\$800. All were

found to release some fine dust particles and bacteria into the air that could spread infections and trigger allergies, though newer and more expensive cleaners were generally less polluting, the researchers say. Surprisingly, vacuum cleaners with so-called High-Efficiency Particulate Air filters in some cases released only slightly lower levels of dust and bacteria. The study appears in the journal *Environmental Science & Technology*.

Natural born killer

A natural compound in the body has shown potential in the fight against cancer. A research team led by Concordia University in Montreal has found that lithocholic acid (LCA), produced in the liver during digestion, is very selective in killing several types of cancer cells, such as those found in some brain tumours and breast cancer, while leaving normal cells unscathed. LCA could also prevent the entire tumour from growing, and prevent tumours from releasing substances that cause neighbouring cancer cells to grow and proliferate, says senior author Professor Vladimir Titorenko. The research team will next test LCA's effect on different cancers in mice, which they hope will lead to human clinical trials. The study was published in the journal *Oncotarget*.

**Fit body, fit mind**

Aerobic exercise can reverse cognitive deficits in patients with psychosis, new research by University of Hong Kong's Li Ka-shing faculty of medicine has found. The 12-week study involved 35 patients, who either followed an exercise programme (three 40-50 minute aerobic sessions weekly) in addition to their current treatment, or continued with their current treatment. Their learning ability and long-term memory were assessed before and after the 12 weeks. Preliminary results show that patients who exercised had a 26 per cent increase in mean learning test score and 27 per cent increase in memory test score, compared with only 6 per cent and 8 per cent based in the other group. Based on this finding, the medical faculty has worked with the Hong Kong Early Psychosis Intervention Society to design exercises and will launch a FitMind campaign for patients and their support networks.

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Pupils perform a fitness dance at a Yuen Long preschool as part of the Health Department's kids' health campaign

COMMUNITY WELLNESS

Get up and grow: campaign to feed youngsters the healthy habit

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In an attempt to combat the growing obesity epidemic plaguing Hong Kong children, the Health Department will launch a city-wide campaign tomorrow.

StartSmart@school.hk, in collaboration with the Education Bureau and the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, aims to promote the health of children aged two to six by reaching out to them through their schools.

The Health Department will provide pre-primary institutions with resources and training to create conducive environments for healthy eating and physical activity, and help children cultivate a sustainable healthy lifestyle. Schools will be encouraged to formulate policies and practices, and create potent learning activities, based on department guidelines and recommendations.

Preschool children are being targeted as it is believed that is when the problem begins. Although the average birth weight in Hong Kong has remained relatively stable at about 3.2kg, the obesity rate of Primary One students has increased from 11.3 per cent in 1996-97 to 15.3



Childhood obesity leads to a higher chance of premature death and disability in adulthood

HEALTH DEPARTMENT SPOKESMAN

per cent in 2010-11, according to the Health Department.

"Other than family, schools and communities play a crucial role in shaping dietary patterns of children," a department spokesman says. "With about 90 per cent of children aged three to five receiving schooling in Hong Kong, using a pre-primary institution setting-based approach to promote healthy eating and physical activity may be a way to combat the growing epidemic of childhood obesity."

The campaign launch will follow a successful pilot project in 30 schools last year based on studies that pinpointed areas in preschool care requiring attention.

The areas included the universal formulation and implementation of healthy eating and active living policies and practices; improving the quality of food served to young children; strengthening parental engagement in support of children's diet and physical activity practices; and building staff capacity in related matters.

The pilot was rolled out in three stages. The first involved training and providing support to school personnel, food preparation staff, parents and caregivers, to give them the ability and confidence to create a healthy environment and

culture. Workshops were organised and educational materials were issued.

In the second stage, schools designed and implemented practical, lively learning activities according to preset health topics, such as eating a balanced diet with more fruit and vegetables, and drinking more water. Physical activity was also incorporated. The educational resources helped foster co-operation between home and school.

In the third stage, these schools shared their experiences, which were consolidated into a booklet and DVD of good practices that will be disseminated to other schools.

"Childhood obesity is associated with a higher chance of premature death and disability in adulthood," says the Health Department spokesman.

Overweight children are likelier to remain that way into adulthood, which increases their chances of developing cardiovascular diseases (mainly heart disease and stroke), diabetes, musculoskeletal disorders (especially arthritis), and certain types of cancer (endometrial, breast and colon).

The World Health Organisation estimates that the number of overweight children under five years of age worldwide was over higher than 43 million in 2010.

"A good and healthy start in life creates a strong platform for the health of later life," the Health Department spokesman says. "It is far easier to establish desirable patterns of activity and eating than to change unhealthy habits that have become ingrained."

For more information about the StartSmart@school.hk campaign, go to www.startsmart.gov.hk

15.3

Percentage of Primary One students considered obese in 2010-11, according to Health Department figures