ADHD Linked to Industrial Chemicals?

In recent years, the prevalence of developmental disorders such as autism, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and dyslexia has soared. While greater awareness and more sophisticated diagnoses are partly responsible for the rise, researchers say the changing environment in which youngsters grow up may also be playing a role.

In 2006, scientists from the Harvard School of Public Health and the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai identified five industrial chemicals responsible for causing harm to the brain - lead, methylmercury, polychlorinated biphenyls (found in electric transformers, motors and capacitors), arsenic (found in soil and water as well as in wood preservatives and pesticides) and toluene (used in processing gasoline as well as in paint thinner, fingernail polish and leather tanning). Exposure to these neurotoxins was associated with changes in neuron development in the fetus as well as among infants, and with lower school performance, delinquent behavior, neurological abnormalities and reduced IQ in school-age children.

Now the same researchers have found six additional industrial chemicals that can hamper normal brain development. These are manganese, fluoride, chlorpyrifos, dichlordiphenyl-trichloroethane, tetrachloroethylene and polybrominated diphenyl ethers. Manganese, they say, is found in drinking water and can contribute to lower IQ scores or hyperactivity, while exposure to high levels of fluoride from drinking water can contribute to a seven-point drop in IQ on average. The remaining chemicals, which are found in solvents and pesticides, have been linked to deficits in social development and increased aggressive behaviors.

Most control of such substances, they note, occurs after negative effects are found among adults; in children, the damage may be more subtle, in the form of lower IQ scores or hyperactivity, that might not be considered pathological or dangerous. “Our very great concern is that children worldwide are being exposed to unrecognized toxic chemicals that are silently eroding intelligence, disrupting behaviors, truncating future achievements and damaging societies, perhaps most seriously in developing countries,” they write. “A new framework of action is needed.”

Source: Time Health & Family

Alcohol and Energy Drinks

Drinking alcohol with an energy drink is more dangerous than drinking alcohol alone, according to a recent study conducted by Megan Patrick of the University of Michigan Institute for Social Research and Jennifer Maggs of Penn State University.

“College students tended to drink more heavily and become more intoxicated on days they used both energy drinks and alcohol, compared to days they only used alcohol,” said Patrick. While manufacturers are no longer permitted to premix high-caffeine products with alcohol, mixed drinks such as vodka Red Bulls and Jäger bombs, made by dropping a shot of Jägermeister liquor into a glass of Red Bull, are becoming increasingly popular.

The researchers warn that drinking alcohol with energy drinks poses physical risks, such as blacking out and alcohol poisoning. The trend also exposes the community to young adults who are “wide awake drunk” after a night of partying.

“Our findings suggest that the use of energy drinks and alcohol together may lead to heavier drinking and more serious alcohol-related problems,” Patrick said. “We should think about prevention strategies for reducing the negative consequences of combining energy drinks with alcohol.”

Source: Science Daily
Inhalant Abuse

One in five students in America has used an inhalant to get high by the time he or she reaches the eighth grade. Inhalant use refers to the intentional breathing of gas or vapors with the purpose of reaching a high. Inhalants are legal, everyday products which have a useful purpose but can be misused.

Parents are familiar with many of these substances - paint, glue and others - but probably do not know that there are more than 1,000 products that are very dangerous when inhaled - things like correction fluid, air-conditioning refrigerant, felt tip markers, spray paint, air freshener, butane, gasoline and even cooking spray.

Few parents know the deadly effects the poisons in these products have on the brain and body when they are inhaled or “huffed.” Huffing is like playing Russian Roulette. The user can die the first, tenth or one hundredth time a product is misused as an inhalant - known as Sudden Sniffing Death Syndrome. Other effects include damage to the heart, kidney, brain, liver, bone marrow and other organs. This type of damage is long term and cannot be easily reversed.

Teaching your children about the dangers of inhalants can never be done too early. Do not just say “not my kid.” Inhalant use starts as early as elementary school and is considered a gateway to further substance abuse. Parents often remain ignorant of inhalant use or do not educate their children until it is too late. Inhalants are not drugs. They are poisons and toxins and should be discussed as such.

Source: National Inhalant Prevention Coalition

Risks for Teen Depression

Researchers at the University of Texas Health Science Center in Houston tracked the habits of more than 4,000 adolescents over a year. They found that teenagers who do not get enough sleep are four times as likely to develop a major depressive disorder as their peers who sleep more, and already depressed teens were four times as likely to lose sleep.

“That is a pretty strong reciprocal relationship,” says behavioral scientist Robert Roberts, the study’s lead author. It is all the more reason that parents should try to monitor how much their kids are sleeping. “Kids should go to bed at a regular time. They should wake up at a regular time. They should have a dark room if possible - that means no TV, no games, no phones,” he adds.

A lot of adolescents just are not getting as much sleep as they should. Recommendations call for teens to sleep nine to 10 hours, but 70 percent of high schoolers do not meet that requirement.

In a second study, researchers in Sweden found that lack of sleep and excessive media use were associated with mental health problems in teens. The researchers from Karolinska Institutet in Stockholm collected data from over 12,000 European adolescents, looking for behaviors that were most associated with depression and suicide in teens.

“It came as no surprise that teens who misused drugs and skipped school were more likely to have depression,” says Danuta Wasserman, one of the study’s authors and director of Karolinska’s National Centre for Suicide Research and Prevention. However, these teens were not the only ones who showed depressive symptoms. Depression and suicidal thoughts were just as common among kids who did not sleep and exercise enough, and who spent a lot of time on the Internet.

More research needs to be done before we can know how Internet use affects depression, and how depressed kids are likely to use the Internet. It could be a way to avoid social interaction, but it could also be a place where kids seek out help, according to Wasserman.

Plenty of evidence exists on the link between sleep problems and depression in teenagers and adults, but teens are especially susceptible to losing sleep. During puberty, circadian rhythms change, and teens want to sleep and wake up later, Roberts says.

At the same time, in high school homework gets harder, kids start to take on part-time jobs, and their social lives amp up. “When you throw in all the video games and iPods and cell phones,” Roberts says, sleep starts to become less of a priority.

“[Sleep deprivation] is a highly prevalent public health problem,” Roberts says. If parents and teachers are able to pick up early on the fact that teenagers are not sleeping enough, they might be able to help before things get worse.

Source: Shots - Health News from NPR
New Pain Pill “Genuinely Frightening”

A potent little painkiller is causing a big stir. The hydrocodone-based drug Zohydro was approved by the FDA last fall to treat chronic pain, and it is set to become available to patients in March. "Shocking, outrageous and genuinely frightening," said Dr. Andrew Kolodny, of Physicians for Responsible Opioid Prescribing.

Bigger, stronger opioids are a concern. Hydrocodone, which is Zohydro's sole ingredient, is one of the most frequently prescribed - and abused - opioids. "It is a whopping dose of hydrocodone packed in an easy-to-crush capsule [making it easier to abuse]," said Kolodny. "It will kill people as soon as it is released."

The concerns echoed by groups opposed to the medication are broadly about the drug's potency and abuse potential. They say they fear that Zohydro - especially at higher doses - will amplify already-rising overdose numbers.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, prescription opioid deaths more than quadrupled since 1999. There were 4,030 deaths involving the drugs in 1999, compared with 16,651 in 2010.

Zohydro's maker, Zogenix, asserts that the drug's benefits outweigh its risks. Zogenix said the company will focus its commercial efforts on a small group of doctors with good experience prescribing opioids, so that only appropriate chronic pain patients would receive the drug.

If Zohydro follows in the footsteps of its opioid-containing predecessors, such a narrow, focused patient group may expand to patients with low back pain, fibromyalgia, arthritis or countless other chronic conditions.

"You are talking about a drug that is... five times more potent than what we are dealing with now," said Dr. Stephen Anderson, emergency room physician. "Put more of this kind of drug out on the street and I will see more overdoses related to this, no question."

Source: CNN

Flavored Little Cigars

More than two out of every five middle and high school students who smoke report using either flavored little cigars or flavored cigarettes, according to a report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This article, using data from the 2011 National Youth Tobacco Survey (NYTS), is the first to measure how many American youth are using flavored little cigars and flavored cigarettes. The study also shows that among youth cigar smokers, almost 60 percent of those who smoke flavored little cigars are not thinking about quitting tobacco use, compared with just over 49 percent among all other cigar smokers.

“Flavored or not, cigars cause cancer, heart disease, lung disease, and many other health problems. Flavored little cigars appeal to youth and the use of these tobacco products may lead to disfigurement, disability, and premature death,” said CDC Director Tom Frieden, MD, MPH. “We need to take comprehensive steps to reduce all tobacco use for all of our youth.”

The study found that 35.4 percent of current youth cigarette smokers reported using flavored cigarettes, which could include menthol cigarettes or flavored little cigars that students mistook for flavored cigarettes. In 2009, the Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act was enacted and prohibited the use of flavors, except menthol, in cigarettes. However, flavored little cigars are still manufactured and sold with candy and fruit flavorings.

“Little cigars contain the same toxic and cancer-causing ingredients found in cigarettes and are not a safe alternative to cigarettes,” said Tim McAfee, MD, MPH, director of the CDC's Office on Smoking and Health. “Many flavored little cigars appear virtually indistinguishable from cigarettes with similar sizes, shapes, filters, and packaging.”

Little cigars have become more popular in recent years; sales increased 240 percent from 1997 to 2007, with flavored brands making up almost 80 percent of the market share.

Smoking remains the leading cause of preventable death and disease in the U.S. The health consequences of tobacco use include heart disease, multiple types of cancer, pulmonary disease, adverse reproductive effects, and the exacerbation of chronic health conditions. Smoking and exposure to secondhand tobacco smoke kills an estimated 443,000 Americans each year. Additionally, for every one death there are 20 people suffering from a smoking-related disease. In addition to the cost in human life, smoking has been estimated to cost $193 billion annually in direct health care expenses and lost productivity.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Investigation’s Nashville crime lab. “Roofies are very rarely - if ever - seen in real life.” How many sexual assaults are associated with date rape drugs is not known, since the vast majority of rapes are unreported. In many cases in which rape is reported, drugs have already left the victim’s system by the time blood or urine samples are collected. “We really do not know for sure what the actual numbers are,” said Dr. Susan R.B. Weiss, Associate Director for Scientific Affairs for the National Institute on Drug Abuse. But, she added, “drugs that are sedating drugs or incapacitating drugs probably are not that common in sexual assault. We really do not know the true prevalence, but we know for sure alcohol is much more common than other drugs.”

Alcohol Most Common “Date Rape” Drug

Women may not recognize alcohol as a potential date rape drug because it is socially acceptable and easily accessible, the article notes. “There are date rape drugs in circulation, and innocent women have been raped due solely to a date rape drug, or a date rape drug and alcohol,” said Dr. Corey Slovis, Chair of Emergency Medicine at Vanderbilt University Medical Center. “However the majority, it appears, of rapes that occur with non-consenting women occur because they have been either intoxicated more than they believe or they have been given higher quantities of alcohol than they thought they had been given.”

Source: The Partnership at Drugfree.org