

Pot derivative may be alternative to Pill

TEL AVIV — A research team has confirmed that the active ingredient of cannabis — the plant from which marijuana comes — can inhibit ovulation in laboratory rats and a baboon, a finding that may someday lead to nonhormonal contraceptives.

But development of such a contraceptive for human use may be 10 or more years away.

"We proved the active principle of cannabis in its natural form inhibits

ovulation in female rats," said Dr. Daniel Ayalon, head of the Reproductive Endocrinology Unit at Ichilov Hospital.

The ingredient, a metabolite of tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC, was isolated in 1970 by Ayalon's collaborator, Professor Rafael Mechoulam, now rector of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. A metabolite is a chemical produced by the body's metabolism.

"We have also demonstrated on rats that some synthetic non-psychoactive derivatives of THC also inhibit ovulation," Ayalon said. He said these derivatives do not cause any behavioral side effects.

In 1973, Ayalon and a team that included chemists from the Weizman Institute and the Hebrew School of Pharmacy in Jerusalem, published their preliminary finding on THC's ability to control ovulation

in rats. British researchers had earlier found that cannabis suppressed fertility in male rats.

Ayalon said THC research began with curiosity about its toxic effects which were found to be low. They then moved on to fertility.

"We were the first to demonstrate that with one injection of the drug we could suppress the pre-ovulatory hormonal changes (in female rats) and thus delay ovulation," he said.

In the most recent stage of experimentation, the team took one of the synthetic THC derivatives and administered it to a female baboon.

"With the baboon for the first time we tried chronic oral treatment rather than injecting a one-time dosage," Ayalon said. "The 30-day treatment most probably induced a 60-day post-treatment disruption of ovulation in the baboon."

He called the work with female

baboons very encouraging since the anatomical and hormonal structure is so similar to that of the human female.

"We are, of course, planning to work on a possible human contraceptive," Ayalon said. "But it will take years to develop, assuming we get sufficient funds."

Once a THC derivative is proved an effective contraceptive in the laboratory, he said, he and his team

must prove the subject returns to normal menstrual cycle after treatment and the drug is not addictive.

Cannabis has been used for centuries as a drug in many parts of the world. And doctors have used marijuana experimentally as a way to induce nausea in cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy, as a treatment of glaucoma, as a pain reliever, as a treatment for multiple headaches, as an appetite stimulant and in psychiatric treatment.

Cold weather still possible

United Press International
Texas A&M University Tuesday warned Texas gardeners that more subfreezing weather could occur.

Keith Hayes, a National Weather Service agricultural meteorologist, said data compiled for the last 10 years show that freeze dates vary widely across the state.

He provided a table which shows the early freeze date by region, in which there is a 90 percent chance of a freeze occurring after the date; an average date which shows a 50 percent chance of a freeze after that date; and a late date which shows a 10 percent chance of a freeze after that date.

Hayes said chances are good for an early spring and, slim for a later freeze.

The list shows area and then early, average and latest frost average.

Central: March 9, March 25, April 10

East: March 3, March 19, April 4

Southeast: Upper Coast Feb. 1, Feb. 25, March 22

Coastal Bend: Jan. 19, Feb. 17, March 17.

Official says OSHA helps

United Press International
HOUSTON — A Shell Oil Co. executive said Tuesday that, despite his belief the Occupational Safety and Health Administration has "gone overboard" with detailed regulation, he believes OSHA has had a beneficial impact.

"OSHA provides a certain level of regulatory consistency across the country," Howard Kusnetz, Shell safety manager, told a Houston Chamber of Commerce manufacturers committee meeting.

"Employees and employers know that wherever they may be working or wherever they may have plants the same regulations apply."

In addition to setting consistent standards nationwide, Kusnetz said OSHA has eliminated the competitive advantage of unsafe operation, freeing safe operators to maximize the quality of the working environment.

However, Kusnetz said, OSHA has shown a preoccupation with detail that has not contributed significantly to increased worker safety.

"I believe that it (OSHA) has gone almost totally overboard in trying to regulate so completely that room for judgment is almost all gone," Kusnetz said.

Kusnetz cited University of Pennsylvania and General Accounting Office reports that he said indicate the rate of safety improvement has not appreciably accelerated during the operation of OSHA.

Group claims nuke data false

United Press International
WASHINGTON — An environmental group called the Environmental Action Foundation has accused the nuclear industry of using rigged statistics to show nuclear-generated electricity is cheaper than power produced with coal.

The foundation, citing a study by New York energy economist Charles Komanoff, said Monday the Atomic Industrial Forum excluded 12 of the 14 costliest nuclear reactors as well as the two largest, most efficient coalburning utilities from its most recent cost comparison.

"Nuclear power was actually 7 percent more expensive than coal power in 1978, not 34 percent cheaper as asserted by the AIF," said Alden Meyer, foundation spokesman.

The forum, the main nuclear industry trade group, in May released a widely publicized survey of 1978 utility power costs.

The group stands by the validity of its survey, said Carl Goldstein, forum spokesman. "If plants are not represented in our survey, the only reason they are not is we did not get returns from those utility companies."

Komanoff said his study cannot be interpreted to mean coal has already become more economical than nuclear.

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