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Married working mothers have good health reports

United Press International

The caricature of the working married mother as a sickly soul suffering from short circuited nerves, blown fuses and burnout doesn't fit with the facts, ma'am.

Speaking of the jugglers of spouse, children, job, home and maybe a dog or cat, Dr. Lois M. Verbrugge, expert on women, work and health at the University of Michigan, said:

"The best health is found among employed married mothers, though employed married women without children are very close to them.

"The worst health is among women with 'no roles' — unmarried women with no job or children."

Verbrugge, research associate at the U-M Institute for Social Research, Ann Arbor, spoke at a symposium on "Health Prospects for American Women" during the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

The link of multiple roles — job and family responsibilities — with good health comes mainly from the positive effect of each component role, the social scientist said.



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Toothpick related accidents cause serious injuries, deaths

United Press International

CHICAGO — Toothpicks may seem harmless, but toothpick-related injuries send 8,000 people to hospital emergency rooms each year, with some deaths reported from swallowing the wooden slivers, a researcher said Thursday.

At least three toothpick deaths have been reported to the Consumer Products Safety Commission since 1980, Dr. Lawrence Budnick reported in the Journal of Medicine. The Journal reports one case of a

man who swallowed a toothpick which lodged in his liver, causing an abscess. Doctors were mystified and suspected Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS).

When doctors used a surgical procedure to drain the abscess, the toothpick was found. The patient then remembered eating stuffed cabbages held together with toothpicks a week before his symptoms began.

Budnick, of the Philadelphia Department of Public Health, said food preparers should "make certain that

any toothpicks served in foods are clearly visible."

He suggests spearing sandwiches with toothpicks "with the frills on the end. If you just use a plain toothpick, it could just get lost in the sandwich."

He also advocates using brightly colored plastic toothpicks in hors d'oeuvres. "It's no problem as long as people are aware that they're there," he said.

The Consumer Products Safety Commission study estimates that 8,176 people suffer toothpick-related injuries severe enough to send

them to emergency rooms each year, Budnick said. Children under five run the greatest risk of severing, with the highest number of injuries in children five to 14 years old. Budnick stressed that toothpicks should not be considered hazardous items, and pointed out that toothpicks have been used since 3,500 B.C.

"You just want parents to be aware of problems in the home with innocuous, relatively benign materials," Budnick said. "They should know just to keep an extra eye out."

Goats used in research about muscle diseases

United Press International

ATLANTA — Scientists are studying the strange behavior of a breed of goats in central Tennessee in hopes of gaining new information about human muscle disease.

The goats have an hereditary condition known as myotonia. If they are surprised or frightened their muscles contract and freeze. They may fall over or assume a rigid, statueque posture.

"Sometimes they look just like statues," said Dr. James B. Atkinson, a pathologist at the Vanderbilt University Medical Center in Nashville,

who is studying the goats. "You can pick one up and carry it around just like a piece of wood."

Atkinson and another Vanderbilt pathologist, Dr. Larry L. Swift, are searching for clues to human muscle diseases, particularly muscular dystrophy. By studying myotonic goats, investigators have discovered some therapies that help alleviate the symptoms of some human muscular disorders.

Vanderbilt researchers first began their studies of the goats in the 1920s when they discovered the disorder was myotonia and noted simi-

larities between the human and animal muscular conditions.

Among questions scientists are still seeking answers to are how the condition is inherited and what is effective in controlling or preventing the attacks, which last 10 to 40 seconds.

During an attack, the goats continue to breathe, their hearts continue to beat at a steady rate and they remain conscious.

"Most of what we know about human myotonia, from the severity of the condition to the effect of drugs and other therapies, comes from research conducted with goats," he said. "We hope, with continued research, to learn more."

Computer pictures galaxies

United Press International

PASADENA, Calif. — The latest electronic light sensing equipment has made the Palomar Observatory's 37-year-old telescope, a sky-watcher with an illustrious past, the most powerful on Earth.

The new computer-controlled device known as the "4Shooter" enables Palomar astronomers to view objects 200 million times fainter than can be seen with the naked eye.

"It's as if they built another 20-inch telescope," said Don Schmeidler, an astronomer at the California Institute of Technology, who runs the observatory.

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The link of multiple roles — job and family responsibilities — with good health comes mainly from the positive effect of each component role, the social scientist said.

"Employment is associated with good health," she said.

"Marriage also is a healthful status, compared to nonmarriage; and even parenthood is weakly associated with good health. So people with multiple roles reflect the health benefits of each role. The same is true of men.

The health plus to parenthood for the women with multiple roles, however, is influenced somewhat by the ages and number of children, Verbrugge said.

"Having preschoolers or numerous children can pose problems and stresses for working women and ultimately jeopardize their health," she said.

The scientific evidence on this is not consistent, but it points in that direction — more health problems and curative behaviors among women with preschool-age children than older ones, and among women with three or more children rather than one or two.

"The link between busy lives and good health could be true for the majority of women, namely, white middle class women, but not for less advantaged ones."

"The reasoning is that black

women, low income women, and low education women have jobs by necessity, gain few social and financial benefits from their work, and have more domestic responsibilities because of more dependents and less help from spouses.

"All of this would make multiple roles tough for them, entailing more stresses and fewer satisfactions; so the effect on health could be negative or, at best, less positive than for white middle class women."

However, married, single, parent or not, women with a paid job are notably healthier than unemployed women and women outside the labor force, Verbrugge said.

Given the fact that employment seems to be a "healthy status," Verbrugge made a prediction.

"As larger percents of women become employed and are exposed to employment for more years of their lives, the health of American women should improve."

"Although work environments and tasks do pose some risks that nonemployed women avoid, research evidence suggests that these are more than offset by social and psychological benefits of jobs. The same is true of men."

Fathers active in raising children

United Press International

Fathers are no longer just bystanders in child-raising — their new role often starts in the delivery room and sometimes winds up in full-time parenting.

This Father's Day will see a new breed of fathers taking a more active role in their children's lives. Some do so by choice, determined not to be as distant from their offspring as they were from their own fathers. Others have been thrown into a more active role in child-rearing by divorce or because their wives are spending more time at work outside the home.

Men have come a long way in parenting from the days of the country's founding fathers, according to Kyle Pruett, associate professor of psychiatry at Yale University.

"For centuries," Pruett said, "men were not allowed to go near their ba-

bies. In Puritan cultures, women were the only beings charged by God to be near infants. People believed there were noxious and evil things which happened between fathers and children. Fathers couldn't go near their children until they were 6 years old and in breeches."

Dr. Michael Yogman, associate chief of the division of child development at Boston's Children's Hospital, said that today nearly all hospitals allow fathers in the delivery room, compared to only 27 percent as recently as 12 years ago.

For the past decade, Yogman has worked to dispel the notion that fathers are incompetent with infants.

When he started his research, "fathers would not be involved with young babies," Yogman said in a recent interview. "They were bystanders watching their wives until the

baby began to talk or throw a ball."

"People have described dance type behavior — cooing, smiling, vocalizing — between mothers and infants," he said. "When we asked men to play with their (infants), we found the identical sensitivity to the baby's timing and rhythms."

Yale's Pruett has done a pilot study of families in which fathers were the primary care-givers and determined that there are advantages to father being the dominant parent.

He found infants who were primarily taken care of by their fathers were more outgoing and displayed more persistence in problem solving than other babies.

Pruett explained the differences in part by citing the fathers' tendency to pick up their infants in a "football position," slinging them over the crook of their arm looking

outward, rather than "nestled in their mother's breasts."

"(Fathers) tend to hold the babies so they are looking out at the world as they do," Pruett said.

Ron Levant, professor of counseling psychology and director of the fatherhood project at Boston University, encourages fathers to stay involved with their children beyond infancy. His workshops teach fathers how to discipline, talk to and play with their children.

He said the fathers in his program "are generally good at being providers, but they are dissatisfied with their roles as fathers."

"They talk with sadness about the distance they felt from their own fathers. They feel inept and marvel at the ability of their wives to set limits and communicate, and they feel out of it."

Book details ups and downs of Harvard

United Press International

NEW YORK — Fran Worden Henry's first year at Harvard Business School left her so tense her teeth died, so obsessive she could not concentrate on her sister's wedding, and so frazzled she once tried to wash her dirty laundry in the clothes dryer.

Now, two years after graduation, Henry said she's glad she struggled through it.

"What my MBA's given me is that foot in the door," she said. "It's like a stamp of approval. It did give me technical training and I do use that training, but more importantly, it gives me a chance to prove myself."

Henry's recent book about her time at Harvard includes stories of male executives, from a bank loan officer in New Bedford to a British oil executive in Bangkok, who sud-

denly became interested in her opinions when they learned where she was going to school.

If there is a villain in the book, it may be the school's case method of teaching, in which business problems are presented through complex descriptions of a company's product or finances. Once a class was finished, she wrote, the teacher never referred again to the case under consideration.

"How could we learn to see problems in a long-range perspective when we dealt with 800 problems for 3 hours each?" she wrote. "The case method encouraged short-range thinking because it set us up to analyze and solve a problem without having to account for the impact of our decision."

Students waded through three 20- to 40-page cases a night, fearful they

would be asked to "present" the next day and be caught unprepared. Behind much of the terror lay a system of grading that guaranteed some students in each class would fail.

"Toughing it out at Harvard," published by McGraw-Hill, begins on the day Henry mistook a clothes dryer for a washer. "My hot, sticky clothes circled slowly in front of me, reminding me I was losing control," she said.

She suffered from vivid dreams of violence and retribution, and a sudden spate of toothaches. "Stress can kill a tooth," her dentist consoled her.

Preoccupied with business cases, Henry could not focus in on her non-Harvard friends or family. Greeting her parents after a long absence, she absent-mindedly asked: "Did you have a profitable trip?"

About a quarter of the 785 students in Henry's class were women and the book dwells at length on what it was like to be female in the power-oriented, competitive atmosphere of HBS' graduate program.

She worried about "the habit of many women had of raising their hands and starting out their comments with the phrase 'I just wanted to say...'"

But in retrospect, Henry said, she thinks Harvard is no different than any other big university, really. There are no women to speak of at faculty who are tenured. I don't think that's going to change in the near future.

"It's got lot of inertia to overcome. From that perspective I appreciate the strides Harvard made," she said.