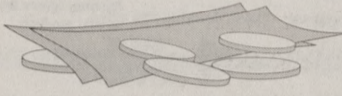


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Science Briefs

**Study questions estrogen effects**

CHICAGO (AP) — A new study has found that estrogen supplements can reduce cholesterol in certain cases, but it only adds to the confusion over whether hormones after menopause help or hurt women's hearts.

The study, involving women who already had heart disease, found that estrogen-progestin supplements reduced elevated levels of a type of cholesterol that has been linked to heart disease. But in women with low levels of the cholesterol to begin with, the hormones seemed to raise the risk of a heart attack.

The researchers said they cannot explain the findings.

Coupled with last week's report from a government-funded study of women and estrogen, the findings add to recent evidence that hormone supplements might not be as good for the heart as some earlier research suggested.

Millions of women take estrogen supplements to ease hot flashes and other symptoms of menopause and to protect themselves against osteoporosis. For the past two decades, doctors have also believed that estrogen wards off heart attacks.

**Apnea linked to blood pressure**

CHICAGO (AP) — Sleep apnea, the breathing disorder that affects some 12 million Americans, may raise the risk of high blood pressure, researchers reported today in the Journal of the American Medical Association.

Sleep apnea is characterized by brief pauses in breathing during sleep and is usually accompanied by loud snoring. The disorder is more common in people who are obese.

In the study, researchers measured breathing pauses and blood pressure in 6,132 men and women 40 and older.

Those with moderate to severe apnea — more than 30 breathing pauses per hour — were more than twice as likely to have high blood pressure as those without apnea. The risk increased with the severity of the apnea, regardless of weight, age or sex.

**Pesticide runoff funding delayed**

TOLEDO, Ohio (AP) — A delay in federal funding is keeping farmers from participating in a program designed to block pesticides from seeping into waterways and prevent soil erosion.

The state is waiting for the U.S. Agriculture Department's share of money so it can begin reimbursing farmers who plant trees or strips of grass near streams.

The "buffer strips" would help keep chemicals from reaching northern Ohio's lakes and rivers.

"We're all ready to get this going," Larry Vance, chief of the state's division of soil and water conservation, said Tuesday. "It's disappointing."

The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program is slated to commit \$201 million over the next 15 years in Ohio.

The federal government's share would be about \$11.1 million each year. The state's share would be \$33.5 million over 10 years.

State officials say it's crucial that this year's money be available within the next few weeks so that farmers can plant the trees and grass before summer.

**Frogs vanishing**  
**Scientists fear species loss**

(AP) — The world's frogs, toads and other amphibians are vanishing, and the decline began decades before scientists first sounded the alarm in the 1980s, according to the biggest statistical study of the topic.

Researchers reported that overall numbers of amphibians dropped 15 percent a year from 1960 to 1966, and continued to decline about 2 percent a year through 1997.

"This should put the last nail in the coffin for anyone who doesn't think there are some population declines for amphibians," said Andrew Blaustein, a professor of zoology at Oregon State University.

The findings, published in Thursday's issue of the journal Nature, were compiled by a University of Ottawa researcher, using Internet contacts with some 200 scientists around the world.

Since the late 1980s, scientists have been concerned about catastrophic declines in populations of frogs, toads, salamanders and other amphibian species, particularly in Australia, South America, Central America and high-altitude regions of the American West.

Because they are more vulnerable than many other creatures, amphibians are considered a "canary in the coal mine" for environmental damage.

Scientists have yet to zero in on the causes but suspect a combination of factors: loss of wetlands to development; use of fertilizers and pesticides; increased ultraviolet light from an ozone layer thinned by industrial pollutants; and the introduction of exotic predators.

"It's just society doing its thing," said Michael Lannoo, a professor of anatomy at the Indiana University School of Medicine.

said Michael Lannoo, a professor of anatomy at the Indiana University School of Medicine.

The study was initiated by Houlihan, a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Ottawa.

"By and large the evidence has been anecdotal. No one has systematically tried to say is the global decline," Houlihan thought the best way to do simply to pile the data up as can get it and see what it tells.

Houlihan gleaned data from obscure scientific journals and university for the past few years.

He mailed the data to the Internet, where it was shared by other scientists.

Amphibian Population Task Force of the World Conservation Species Survival Commission.

Data on 936 populations of amphibians and 157 species came from 37 countries and eight regions of the world. "We could not have done this without the Internet," Houlihan said.

Trends varied by time and place. In Western Europe, a sharp decline in the early 1960s leveled off later in the century. In North America, the decline was steady. There was not enough data to fully analyze trends in South America, Africa and Australia.

Houlihan acknowledged that amphibians traditionally have been through periodic booms to regular population declines. But the analyses found overall booms are not overcoming the declines.

**"It's just society doing its thing"**

— Michael Lannoo  
 Indiana University  
 professor of anatomy

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