

Tornado tore down in East

LINDEN (AP) — A powerful tornado tore through parts of East Texas Sunday, knocking down power lines and damaging buildings, county offices and homes. There were no reports of injuries, said Gary Stewart, county emergency manager. The tornado reported down several times after hitting the far East Texas town of Hughes Springs in Glassville. The area hit is about 100 miles south of DeKalb, where a major damage occurred a year ago. That May 5 storm damaged 150 houses, injured people and obliterated the town district.

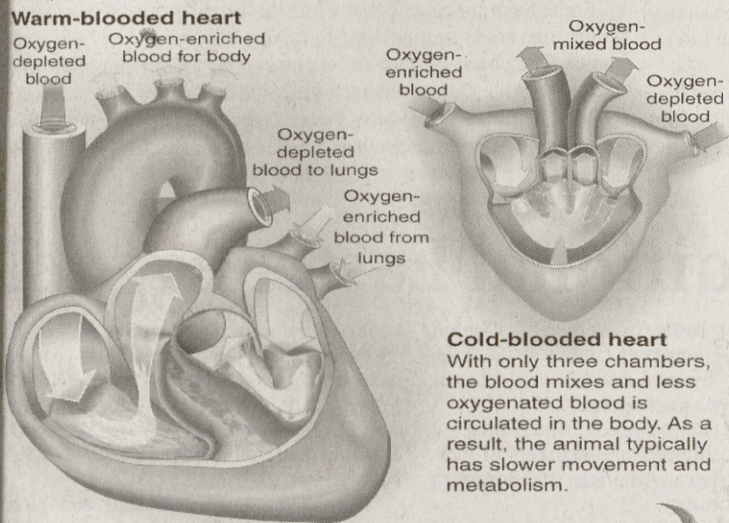
Laredo bridge for inauguration

SAN ANTONIO (AP) — The World Trade Bridge is the international span to connect Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, Texas Gov. and GOP Sen. hopeful George W. Bush and President Ernesto Zedillo at the bridge's inauguration on the border. Political tensions have delayed the scheduled event. Protocol officials had excluded local participants from the mayor of Laredo to be seen at the event. Bush, who was absent from the inauguration ceremony via one of the twin bridges because officials had declined to grant a permit for his cargo-only span. The border's largest span had moved the 10,000 vehicles that cross here in downtown streets and caused traffic. Laredo, to keep opening on schedule with its event on the north side.

Warm Blooded Dinosaurs?

Chambers of the heart

Warm-blooded animals have four chambers that separate oxygen-enriched blood from oxygen-depleted blood. Most cold-blooded animals have three chambers that mix the blood and send less concentrated oxygen to the body. Now, a dinosaur fossil with a four-chambered heart was found — suggesting it was warm-blooded. Warm-blooded animals move faster and more easily resist temperature change. Here is a comparison of a human heart and a typical reptilian heart.



The dinosaur

Scientists believe the animal died 66 million years ago. Here is an illustration of what the plant-eating dinosaur may have looked like.



Size: 13 feet long
Weight: 665 pounds, in the flesh

Source: Science

Emily Holmes/AP

Science in Brief

High winds ground Atlantis

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — Dangerously high wind forced NASA to call off space shuttle Atlantis' launch Monday on a mission to repair the international space station. The space agency tentatively aimed for a Tuesday afternoon liftoff, even though it is supposed to be windier.

NASA flight rules say that the crosswinds can be no higher than 17 mph, in case the spacecraft has to make an emergency return to the launch site. With only nine minutes left in Monday's countdown, the wind was gusting to 23 mph and NASA called off the launch. "We'll get 'em next time," shuttle commander James Halsell Jr. said. Atlantis is loaded with more than a ton of supplies and replacement parts for the space station, which has been orbiting virtually empty for the past 1 1/2 years.

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FDA OKs heartburn remedies

New treatments focus on causes, not just blocking effects

WASHINGTON (AP) — Aline Humphrey was losing a 10-year battle with worsening heartburn: Medications didn't help, and she had resorted to eating only easy-to-digest baby food.

Then doctors snaked a tiny tube down her throat to fix the faulty valve causing the problem. The California nurse celebrated several months later with an eight-course French meal and a bottle of Dom Perignon — no more antacids, no more heartburn.

Now other sufferers can try it, too: The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved the first non-drug treatments for acid reflux — two different medical devices that send a tube down the throat to fix the actual cause of chronic heartburn instead of just suppressing painful stomach acid as medications do.

The hourlong, outpatient procedures could significantly change the way heartburn is treated.

One device is like a tiny sewing machine that puts a few stitches in the faulty valve causing heartburn, creating little pleated gathers to strengthen it. The other device, which Humphrey tried, zaps the faulty valve with radiofrequency energy, beams of heat.

"Both rely on the fact that we think fixing the valve is a good long-term option rather than staying on medications for the rest of your life," explained Dr. Neil Stollman of San Francisco General Hospital, who tested the radiofrequency device, Curon Medical Inc.'s Stretta system.

"I still practice medicine, and I know a lot of patients who are going to benefit," said Dr. Brian E. Harvey, the FDA senior medical officer who reviewed Stretta and competitor C.R. Bard Inc.'s Endoscopic Suturing System. The FDA approved both earlier this month.

Some 14 million Americans suffer

chronic heartburn, called "gastroesophageal reflux disease," or GERD. A valve where the esophagus meets the stomach, called the lower esophageal sphincter, relaxes at the wrong times, allowing acidic stomach contents to back up into the delicate esophagus causing a burning sensation.

Spicy foods or overeating could give anyone occasional heartburn. But GERD causes serious, repeated heartburn. The stomach acid can actually corrode the esophagus, causing inflammation or scarring that makes it hard to swallow. One recent study found people with severe reflux are eight times more likely to develop esophageal cancer.

Acid-blocking medicines — such as Prilosec, the world's best-selling drug — are highly effective at relieving symptoms.

Some people don't like taking daily medicine. Others don't have insurance to cover the drugs. Curon cites one estimate that patients and insurers worldwide spend \$14 billion a year on anti-heartburn drugs.

Still other patients get no relief from drugs, or suffer side effects. When acid blockers fail, patients have tried Propulsid, a drug that pushes food through the stomach faster so there's less to reflux — but one drug the manufacturer is about to quit selling because it also can cause lethal irregular heartbeats.

Until now, the only non-drug alternative was surgery to tighten the valve.

The two new systems don't require cutting patients: Curon's Stretta has electrodes on an endoscope threaded down the throat. The electrodes burn spots on the muscle controlling the faulty valve. A flexible scar-like tissue forms. Doctors aren't sure if that tightens the valve, or if the heat zaps overactive nerves that made the valve malfunction. Regardless, in a study of 47 patients followed for six

months after the procedure, 70 percent had quit taking all heartburn medicines.

Bard's suturing device, developed by a physician at the Royal College of London, is like a miniature sewing machine on an endoscope.

Tiny stitches tighten the valve. In a study of 64 patients, 67 percent had either no heartburn or only occasional, brief episodes six months later.

No one knows how long the effects will last — patients may need retreatment every few years, FDA's Harvey cautioned.

Both procedures can cause mild chest

or stomach pain that day, but studies found no serious side effects. However, physicians do need training to perform the procedures, something both companies are beginning. The procedures will cost \$2,000 to \$2,500.

"If it turns out that this works as well as we think, it's going to be very appealing to physicians and our patients," said Emory University's Dr. Patrick Waring, who tested Bard's suturing system.

"I think there's a lot of people ... who don't want to have an operation, who don't want medicine on a daily basis but still want relief from their heartburn."

New treatments for heartburn

Millions of Americans suffer chronic heartburn caused by acid reflux, where a faulty valve lets stomach acid back up into the esophagus. The FDA has approved two competing non-drug treatments illustrated below.

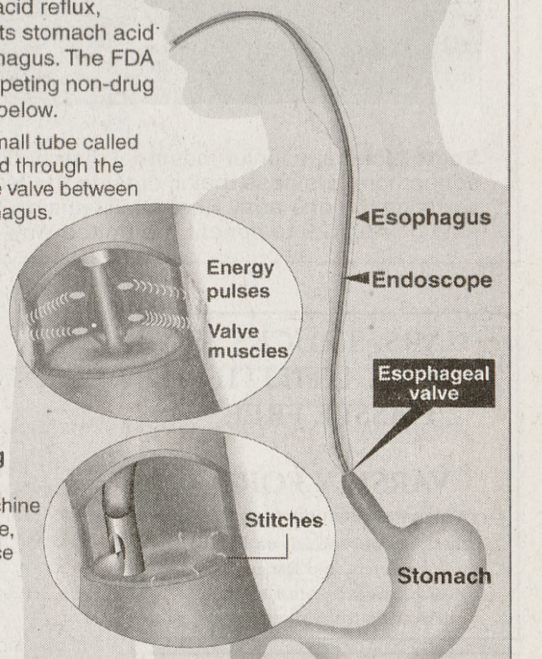
In both treatments, a small tube called an endoscope is passed through the mouth and placed at the valve between the stomach and esophagus.

Stretta system

The tube contains electrodes that use radiofrequency energy to burn spots on muscles controlling the faulty valve, thus tightening it.

Endoscopic suturing system

A miniature sewing machine is on the end of the tube, allowing doctors to place tiny stitches along the valve's edge that are gathered to tighten it.



Sources: Curon Medical Inc., C.R. Bard Inc.

Emily Holmes/AP

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