

Obesity ties to cancer

CHICAGO (AP) — Obesity and inactivity may significantly increase the risk of cancer of the pancreas, a hard-to-treat disease that kills nearly 9,000 Americans each year, a study found.

The findings bolster evidence that the disease is linked to abnormal insulin production and diabetes, and suggest that lifestyle changes not immediately help decrease the risk, researchers said.

The study by researchers at Harvard's School of Public Health and affiliated hospitals based on data from two general health studies involving more than 150,000 female nurses and male health workers nationwide followed for up to 20 years.

The findings appear in Wednesday's Journal of the American Medical Association. Obesity and inactivity have been linked to numerous health problems, including other types of cancer.

Until now, cigarette smoking was the only convincing "modifiable" risk factor linked to pancreatic cancer. Drs. Susan Gapstur and Peter Gann of Northwestern University said in an accompanying commentary. If additional research confirms the findings, there could be "a profound impact" on public health.

"These factors could account for as much as 15 percent of all pancreatic cancer cases beyond those attributable to smoking," said Gapstur and Gann.

In the study, researcher Dominique Michaud and colleagues said 350 cases of pancreatic cancer occurred during the follow-up. An increased risk was found in participants with a body-mass index of at least 25, which is considered slightly overweight.

The biggest risk was in these participants, with a body-mass index of at least 30, who were 72 percent more likely to develop pancreatic cancer than normal-weight people.

Black boxes to be put in race cars

ATLANTA (AP) — After a month-long investigation of Dale Earnhardt's death, NASCAR has decided not to require drivers to wear head and neck restraints, but it will improve safety by installing "black boxes" similar to those used in airplanes.

"We have committed to the installation of crash data recorders," said NASCAR President Mike Helton on Tuesday. "Such devices will help drivers, owners, manufacturers and NASCAR study how impacts affect drivers' cars."

Earnhardt was not wearing a head and neck device when he was killed in a crash on the final turn of the Daytona 500 Feb. 18. Use of the devices dramatically increased after then.

Among other findings released at a news conference, researcher said Earnhardt's seat belt broke during the crash, but did not immediately determine whether it played a role in the seven-time Winston Cup champion's death.

Signing day



Four-year-old Paris Babers of College Station has her jersey signed by freshman wide receiver Terrence Murphy at Aggie Autograph Day at

Kyle Field Saturday. Aggie fans came from all parts of the state to meet the 2001 Texas A&M football team.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Judge orders casino ship to become more accessible to disabled

MIAMI (AP) — A casino ship must make restrooms more accessible for passengers in wheelchairs, but will not have to make more extensive changes to accommodate the disabled, a judge ruled.

Monday's ruling by U.S. District Judge Shelby Highsmith came in what is believed to be the first trial targeting disabled access to passenger ships.

An advocacy group for the disabled had asked for widespread changes ranging from lower craps tables to installation of an elevator on the Casino Princessa ship, which sails daily from Miami.

But the judge said those suggestions were too expensive or would fundamentally alter the casino games. He limited alterations to restroom fixtures on one of four decks on the \$7 million, 600-passenger ship, built in 1998.

Highsmith noted the U.S. Transportation Department still has not written rules for access to cruise and gambling ships under the 11-year-old Americans With Disabilities Act. But he said the task of applying the law "can no longer be delayed."

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