



Harris County Hospital District

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MEDIA RELEASE

Summertime Health Myths Exposed

HOUSTON (June 11, 2007) – Although summer isn't officially here until June 21, summer activities are in full swing. The kids are out of school and the pool is calling their names. Wait, the kids just ate lunch. Do they really need to sit by the pool for an hour until they can jump in?

Despite what you may have been told while growing up, there is no reason why a person can't swim after eating.

"There has never been a documented case of drowning caused by swimming on a full stomach," said Dr. Larry Butcher, medical director at the Harris County Hospital District's Acres Home Health Center. "It is true, however, that the body diverts blood toward the gastrointestinal tract and away from the muscles after eating, which could possibly lead to muscle cramps."

Myth # 2 – Tanning is healthy for the body

False

While a person might look good with golden bronze skin and Web sites may tout that tanning actually cuts the risks of cancers, there is no such thing as a healthy tan.

"Many think that a tan protects them from a sunburn," Butcher said. "However, a tan is the result of the body defending itself from further damage from UV radiation. If a person has a tan, there is already damage."

While it is true that a tan may provide some limited protection – about SPF 4 – it certainly does not mean that tanned skin is healthier than skin that is not tanned. Repeated exposure to UV radiation from the sun greatly increases the risk of skin cancer and wrinkles.

Myth # 3 – Dark-skinned people don't need sunscreen

False

Although people with dark skin may not burn as easily as those with fair skin, they are still at risk for skin damage from excessive sun exposure. Dark-skinned people have more melanin in their skin, which does provide some protection against UV radiation.

"Those with darker skin can still have skin damage," Butcher said. "Everyone should use a sunscreen with at least SPF 15."

Myth # 4 – Urinating on a jellyfish sting will relieve the pain

False

Despite what Monica, Chandler and Joey did on an infamous episode of “Friends,” urinating on a jellyfish sting will not relieve the pain.

“Because urine contains salts, electrolytes and ammonia, in theory it could help relieve pain,” Butcher said. “But in fact, it is likely to cause more pain.”

So save the unfortunate person suffering from a jellyfish sting from further embarrassment. The proper treatment for a jellyfish sting involves first inactivating the nemocyte – stinging cells.

Rinse the wound with normal saline or, as a last resort, seawater. Do not use fresh water. Fresh water will stimulate unfired nemocytes, worsening the pain. Then soak the wound in vinegar for 15 to 30 minutes.

You may apply a cold pack to the area, but do not apply ice directly to the wound since melting ice is fresh water. Prompt medical attention should be sought.

**Myth # 5 – A watermelon will grow in a person’s stomach if they swallow a watermelon seed
False**

“Of course a watermelon won’t grow in someone’s stomach,” Butcher said. “There is a very small risk that the seed could cause damage to the intestine, such as a tear, obstruction or inflammation, but this is unlikely. It is also possible that it could lodge in the appendix and cause appendicitis, but again, this is very unlikely.”

The Harris County Hospital District is the public health care system for the nation’s third most-populous county. It provides more than 1.1 million health care visits each year to uninsured and underinsured residents of Harris County. The hospital district operates Ben Taub General Hospital, Lyndon B. Johnson General Hospital, Quentin Mease Community Hospital, 12 community health centers, a dental center, eight school-based clinics, 13 homeless shelter clinics and four mobile health units.

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