

HEALTH DIGEST

Latest attempt to block HIV: Stronger vaginal gels

BY LAURAN NEERGAARD
AP MEDICAL WRITER

WASHINGTON — Try after try to make vaginal creams that could repel the AIDS virus have failed. Now researchers are testing if a drug used to treat HIV infection finally might give women a tool to prevent it — by infusing the medicine into vaginal gels and contraceptive-style rings.

Even quick-dissolving anti-HIV films are being created, the same style now used for breath-fresheners or allergy medicines but made for fingertip application in the vagina.

Called microbicides, this kind of woman-controlled protection is considered key to battling the HIV epidemic — especially in developing countries where the virus is at its worst and women too often can't get their partners to use a condom.

For two decades, scientists tried less powerful medications in disappointing microbicide attempts. Results from the first study to see if this new strategy works — South African women tested a gel made of the AIDS drug tenofovir — aren't due until July.

But researchers gathering for the biennial International Microbicides Conference in Pittsburgh next weekend express cautious optimism.

"Frankly, blocking transmission of the virus appears to be a lot harder than anyone understood it would be at the beginning," says meeting co-chair Dr. Sharon Hillier of the University of Pittsburgh and a principal investigator of the Microbicide Trials Network.

Antiretroviral drugs have revolutionized AIDS care, helping people live far longer with the virus. They've also successfully lowered the risk that an infected pregnant woman passes HIV to her child. So it was logical for scientists to begin testing whether swallowing an antiretroviral drug every day could protect the still healthy, both men and women, from getting infected.

Even if that eventually proves protective, taking daily pills has drawbacks — systemic side effects, the risk of drug resistance, what happens if people miss a dose or share tablets with an already infected relative — that make the approach controversial.

Hence the need for topical protection, too. Women already make up half of the

more than 33 million people worldwide living with HIV, and most of the new infections in hardest-hit sub-Saharan Africa are among young women.

"I have in fact so little to offer them in terms of HIV prevention that I sort of tear my hair out," says Dr. Salim Abdool Karim of the Centre for the AIDS Program of Research in South Africa at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

He led the pending tenofovir gel study, his ninth microbicide study since 1994. "It must take a certain level of perseverance to want to stay in this field."

Taking a lesson from contraception — that more choices equal more usage — researchers are developing other potential tenofovir methods, too: A quick-dissolve tenofovir vaginal film, with less mess to be completely invisible to the partner. Vaginal rings that could ooze tenofovir into the vagina over a month. And for gay men, a rectal tenofovir.

Health workers should be thinking now about the challenges should any of these attempts work, Dr. Regina Osih of the University of Witwatersrand will tell next week's microbicide meeting. Access is a big question in already over-



Keith Srakocic/Associated Press

Both of these vaginal films have been formulated with drugs to target against HIV infection.

burdened regions — as is how often users would need HIV testing to be sure the protection's working.

Diet, exercise made easy

BY JANICE GIBBS
TELEGRAM STAFF WRITER

BELTON — Calories consumed, balanced by calories burned will keep you fit.

It's a simple concept that most people know, but sometimes it takes a little reminder to get motivated.

"You know when you eat too much, your body tells you," said Anthony Brown, executive director and lead trainer at The Access Athletics Training Facility in Austin.

"If we only eat when we're hungry we will maintain our proper body weight," Brown said.

When it comes to selecting calories, there are three types that you eat — Go food, Slow food and Whoa food, he said.

Go foods include fresh fruit and vegetables.

"I call them one word things, apples, oranges, peaches, green beans, peas, asparagus, broccoli, things that you know where they came from," Brown said. "Eat almost as much as you want."

Go foods are "nutrient dense" and rich in vitamins and minerals important to health. Whole grain breads, fat-free milk, yogurt, baked, broiled, steamed and grilled lean fish, lean meats and skinless poultry are examples of Go foods.

Slow foods can be part of a diet, but just not too often.

Slow foods include white rice, white flour, pasta, pancakes and vegeta-

bles prepared with sauces and reduced-fat milk.

Brown identifies Slow foods as those with less than five ingredients.

It makes reading food labels simple, he said. If the item has more than five ingredients put it back.

"I'm not saying don't eat them, just don't eat them every day, all day," Brown said.

Whoa foods are the highest in fat and sugar — croissants, muffins, fried potatoes, fruit rollups, whole milk, fried meats, butter, cookies and candy. They are "calorie dense" and much of the time low in nutrients.

If a food has ingredients that can't be pronounced, don't eat it, he said.

One exception, Brown did say if you know the person who made the cake, cookie or pie, it can be an occasional slow food.

"If that person is known as a great baker, you know they took care in the ingredients they selected in making that dessert, have a piece," he said.

"Whoa foods should rarely be part of the diet," Brown said.

Exercise is also necessary, but make it fun.



Mitch Green/Telegram

Michael J. Fox of Temple keeps fit by spending time on the treadmill at Summit Fitness Center last week.

Somehow the business of exercise took the fun out of fitness, so Brown suggests figuring out what you like to do and do it faster. If you like to dance, pick the fast song. Instead of doing one song, do two in a row.

"It's real simple things that can make a dramatic difference," he said. "Take some time every day to do something and do it faster, even if it's vacuuming the house."

The body builds muscle when there is resistance, however the body can't distinguish between a bench press and a plow.

Brown said one of his first training jobs was a program called fitness for geriatrics, where cans of peas were used to do biceps curls.

"If you don't have bands and you don't have weights, grab some cans, it's resistance and that's all the body is responding to," he said.

Strength is important and the easiest way to create strength is to create resistance.

"You need strength whether you're pushing a plow or picking up a grandchild," he said.

Brown gave the group three tasks.

- Look at a full day of eating and determine how to work more Go and less Whoa foods into the diet.

- Find a favorite activity to improve cardiovascular health.

- Find someone to do the activity with you.

"It's all about accountability," he said.

Govt. unveils \$1B biomedical tax cred-

WASHINGTON (AP) - The Obama administration said Friday it's offering \$1 billion in seed money to small research firms in the hunt for promising medical breakthroughs.

Companies working on projects that have "significant potential" to produce

new drugs, find a cure for cancer, or address unmet medical needs can apply for up to a \$5-million share of the funds. It's limited to firms with 250 workers or fewer, and applications will have to pass review by experts at the National Institutes for Health.

The idea was championed by three Democratic senators - Max Baucus of Montana, John Kerry of Massachusetts, and Robert Menendez of New Jersey - and incorporated in President Barack Obama's health care overhaul law.

Administration officials

said they expect to receive thousands of applications. Proposals will be accepted from June 21 to July 21, and awards will be announced by Oct. 29. To allow startup companies to participate, applicants can take the money as a grant instead of a tax credit.

Plans for testing student DNA criticized

BY MARCUS WOHLSEN
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

BERKELEY, Calif. — A plan by the University of California, Berkeley to voluntarily test the DNA of incoming freshman has come under fire from critics who said the school was pushing an unproven technology on impressionable students.

The voluntary tests are intended to spur conversation about the growing field of personal genomics, not predict the likelihood of disease, university officials said Thursday.

"We thought that this would be a more engaging vehicle for discussion than having them read a book or an article," said Mark Schlissel, dean of biology at UC Berkeley.

University officials said they were careful to choose genes for testing that were not related to serious health issues.

"We wanted to pick genes in which the variants were very easy to understand, not threatening, and probably reveal information students have about themselves already," said Jasper Rine, a UC Berkeley genetics professor who is spearheading the testing program.

Dr. Muin J. Khoury, director of the National Office of Public Health Genomics at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said the value of the tests to students will depend on how well the results are presented and discussed.

"I just worry about 18-year-old kids saying, oh, I'm a fast metabolizer, I can drink a lot of alcohol, it won't affect me," he said.

Still, said Khoury, "if it's packaged well, it could be a great experience."



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