

Overexposure to lead — which can enter the body by inhalation or ingestion — can cause damage to the brain and to the blood-forming, nervous, urinary and reproductive systems. The court ruled that OSHA justified immediate application of its lead rules to industries such as lead smelting, paint manufacturing and printing, in which exposure to lead is the highest.

On the other hand, the cost-benefit issue — a benzene-case leftover believed by some to be “a bigger question” than the burden of proof issue — remains unresolved. That issue — whether OSHA must be able to justify an exposure limit by comparing the number of workers who will benefit from a limit with the industrial costs of meeting that limit — was not germane to the lead case. So OSHA anxiously awaits the outcome of yet another exposure limit case — one involving coke oven vapors — earmarked by the Supreme Court to resolve the cost-benefit issue. □

You too can live longer

If you've ever felt you won't have time enough before you die to do all the things you want to, maybe you should pay attention to research findings from the University of California at Los Angeles' School of Public Health. Researchers there have documented a strong relationship between longevity and seven health habits:

- never smoking cigarettes
- getting physical activity regularly
- using alcohol moderately or not at all
- getting seven to eight hours sleep per night, regularly
- maintaining correct weight
- eating breakfast
- not eating between meals

In a survey of 6,928 residents of Alameda County, Calif., published in 1972, researchers Lester Breslow and Nedra Belloc reported that the more habits followed, the healthier the person. The following year they reported that 45-year-old men who followed zero to three of the health habits could expect to live only another 21.6 years, while men who followed six or seven could expect to live another 33.1 years, an 11.5 year difference.

In the July issue of *PREVENTIVE MEDICINE* Breslow and James Enstrom report that the increase of life expectancy persists, and was not due to an initial bias caused by persons unhealthy to begin with being able to follow fewer of the habits.

But though most of the factors are more than familiar by now, they're not necessarily being heeded. “The most striking thing about the new study,” says Breslow, “is that it shows a strong tendency for people to persist in health habits. Those who followed six or seven in 1965 tend to still follow six or seven in 1975. Those at the other end are still there. People didn't migrate.” □

Short life for panda cub

The first baby giant panda to be born outside of China lived just eight days. The five-ounce cub was suffocated by its 260-pound mother, who rolled on it accidentally while asleep. Zoo officials in Mexico City are attributing the death to the mother's lack of maternal experience. The baby was the first for the approximately six-year-old female, who had just reached sexual maturity. The mother had appeared to be taking excellent care of the cub, putting it down only when she ate or drank. The technical director of the Chapultepec Zoo says they expect the mother, Ying-Ying, to become pregnant again and to be a more successful parent due to this brief experience in baby care.

Mexico City's panda birth is being attributed to the long-term intimacy between the male and female pandas it received from China in 1975. The pair were kept together, contrary to panda-raising custom, because they seemed to get along well. Other possible factors in the successful mating were the liquid diet that supplemented young bamboo trees and Mexico City's high altitude, which resembles the pandas' natural environment. In Chinese zoos, 18 pandas have been born, but 10 died during infancy and two died as juveniles. Mortality rates are not known for newborn giant pandas in the wild.



Ying-Ying with her tiny infant on day 7.

At the National Zoo in Washington veterinarians are still waiting to find out whether the U.S. female panda is pregnant after artificial insemination last May. If there is a birth, the zoo will set up continuous, unobtrusive video monitoring of the new mother and cub. The director of the Mexico City zoo plans to report to the National Zoo its observations on its panda mother and her short-lived newborn. A spokeswoman for the National Zoo says, “The birth in Mexico was quite an achievement. It appears they did everything right. The outcome was just unfortunate.” □

Headache pills cause kidney problems

The heavy use of headache potions containing phenacetin, a pain reliever, is associated with an increased incidence of kidney damage and urinary tract cancer, say researchers from Bowman Gray School of Medicine in Winston-Salem, N.C. Their findings confirm European studies that suggested the link.

“Out of patients with end-stage kidney disease [those needing dialysis], 13 percent had it because of analgesics,” says Thomas A. Gonwa, now at the University of California at San Francisco. These persons “inflicted their kidney disease on themselves,” he says.

Phenacetin was at one time an ingredient in many aspirin compounds, but most manufacturers have removed it in the past few years. The Food and Drug Administration reportedly is about to ban it.

Gonwa and his co-workers surveyed the tumor registry at North Carolina Baptist Hospital for incidences of transitional cell carcinoma, a urinary tract cancer associated with the kidneys. In a five and a half year period, they found 115 patients with the carcinoma, six of whom they considered to be analgesic abusers. These six had consumed an average of 18.3 kilograms of phenacetin over 20 to 40 years,

which translates to seven or eight phenacetin-containing pills a day, Gonwa says.

The phenacetin-induced cancers may be more often fatal as well. Three of the six kidney patients have died, whereas only 12 of the remaining 109, whose cancers were induced by something other than phenacetin, have died.

The researchers also followed patients who were diagnosed with interstitial nephritis — a degeneration of kidney structure and function that occasionally leads to cancer — and found that roughly one-third of the patients were analgesic abusers. Persons with phenacetin-associated kidney problems should be watched carefully, the researchers warn.

Gonwa says phenacetin abuse may be seen more in the South, where taking headache powders has historically been something of a social function, taking the place of coffee in a coffee break. “It got to be a custom,” says Gonwa.

Phenacetin has been implicated as the guilty agent, rather than aspirin or caffeine, by animal studies that show it to be a carcinogen, as well as by failure to find a similar incidence of kidney problems in persons who take a lot of phenacetin-free aspirin. □