Long-term antibiotic use linked to higher risk of bowel cancer precursor; new app aims to take fear out of flying

PUBLISHED : Wednesday, 05 April, 2017, 6:31pm

UPDATED : Friday, 07 April, 2017, 1:49pm

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MyFlight Forecast tells you what the weather will be during your flight and how likely turbulence and flight delays are. In other health news: the longer you use antibiotics the more likely you are to develop colon polyps

**Long-term antibiotics increase cancer risk**

Long-term use of antibiotics increases the risk later in life of developing colon polyps, often a precursor of bowel cancer, researchers said on Wednesday. The findings, published in the journal *Gut*, add to evidence that the digestive tract’s complex network of bacteria may play a key role in the cancer’s emergence.

Earlier research has linked antibiotic use to developing bowel cancer but the potential association with these abnormal growths had not been explored. To find out more, Andrew Chan of the Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston combed through health records for 16,642 women who were 60 or older in 2004.

The women were enrolled in the Nurses Health Study, which has been following the health of 121,700 nurses in the United States since 1976. The nurses’ medication is included in the monitoring. The women examined in the new study had had at least one colonoscopy between 2004 and 2010. During that period, 1,195 cases of polyps were diagnosed.

The researchers found an increased risk of polyps among women who had taken antibiotics for a total of two months or more over a two-decade span. Women who did so in their 20s and 30s had a 36 per cent greater chance of polyps forming compared to counterparts who did not extensively use antibiotics. The risk jumped by 70 per cent in women who took antibiotics for at least two months while they were in their 40s and 50s.

**Pilot develops app to let fearful passengers check flight weather and more**

Flying can be a nerve-racking experience for some, with unexpected flight delays and the occasional turbulence sometimes leading to a stressful trip. A new, informative app has been designed to reduce a passenger’s fear of air travel. Designed by pilot Timothy Griffin, the MyFlight Forecast app (not available in Hong Kong) allows passengers to access a weather forecast for their particular flight.

Top of Form

Bottom of Form

The app also provides information regarding potential airport or flight delays as well as a turbulence forecast. Users can simply input their origin airport and destination airport to access a live turbulence report. Rather than simply pointing out places where turbulence has been reported on their flight path, the app educates passengers on the phenomenon, reminding them that it’s not unusual or unsafe.

“Many who suffer from fear find relief in understanding,” Griffin said. “By understanding aviation weather, and how it may affect their particular flight, passengers will feel more at ease when they fly.” Travellers can download the MyFlight Forecast app for free on iPhone or Android devices. *AP*

**Pregnant and obese? Your baby is more likely to have epilepsy**

Being overweight or obese in the first trimester of pregnancy has been linked to a higher risk of bearing a child with epilepsy, researchers say. The study was based on data from 1.4 million children in Sweden, and was published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (JAMA) Neurology.

Just how much a child’s risk of epilepsy rose was linked to how obese the mother was early in her pregnancy, said the findings led by Neda Razaz of the Karolinska Institutet in Stockholm.

Risk of epilepsy increased by 11 per cent in children of overweight mothers,” whose body-mass index was between 25 and 30, said the study, which found that, of the 1.4 million children born between 1997 and 2011 in Sweden, 0.5 per cent (7,592 children) had been diagnosed with epilepsy by 2012.

BMI is calculated based on a ratio of height and weight. The average range is generally 18.5-24.9.

Women who were obese, having a BMI of 30 to 34.9, saw a 20 per cent increased risk of bearing a child with epilepsy compared to normal-weight mothers. For women with a BMI of 35 to 39.9, the risk rose 30 per cent. And for those with extreme obesity, the risk was 82 per cent higher than normal-weight mothers. Epilepsy is a brain disorder whose causes remain poorly understood.

The survey-based study did not delve into the causes of the apparently higher risk of epilepsy, which may include genetic and environmental factors. Researchers speculated that being overweight or obese during pregnancy could lead to a higher risk of brain injury in infants, or that obesity-induced inflammation could affect neurodevelopment. *AFP*