

Weight-Loss Pill

A new version of a weight-loss drug in development may have eliminated some scary side effects. Rimonabant was hailed as a promising anti-obesity treatment until it was linked with severe depression and suicidal thoughts. Now scientists have identified a similar compound that cannot enter the brain. Obese mice that received it orally lost weight with no adverse behavioral changes. The drug blocks cannabinoid receptors (the ones that give marijuana its effects) outside of the brain, making the body more sensitive to the appetite-suppressing hormone leptin, says lead researcher Joseph Tam, a staff scientist at the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. If further testing is successful, the drug could become available in five to seven years, Tam says.

Breakout Foods

Does it or doesn't it? A study brings new light to the question of whether food can cause acne. Forty-four clear-skinned participants and 44 others with chronic breakouts kept records of everything they ate for three days. Their total carbohydrate consumption did not differ, but the acne sufferers consumed significantly more high-glycemic-index carbohydrates, such as white bread, as well as more milk and ice cream. High-glycemic-index foods release sugar into the bloodstream quickly, causing spikes in insulin and IGF-1—hormones involved in oil production in the skin, explains Zahara Manaf, a dietitian at the National University of Malaysia. Milk has similar hormonal effects, but yogurt does not, as certain probiotics in it (and fermented milk, or kefir) may even reduce outbreaks, she says.



Whiter Teeth

What works best: A bleaching gel, toothpaste, or mouthwash?

An easy way to whiten teeth at home is surprisingly effective. Scientists stained cows' teeth with coffee and then treated them with various toothpastes or mouth rinses (twice daily for 12 weeks) or with bleaching gel from a home-whitening kit (once a day for two weeks). Mouthwashes with hydrogen peroxide (such as Listerine Whitening) worked just as well as the bleaching gel. "A very low concentration of hydrogen peroxide solution applied for a long time seems to have the same results as a higher concentration used for less time," says Carlos Rocha Gomes Torres, an assistant professor of restorative dentistry at São Paulo State University in Brazil. But toothpastes containing chemicals that bind to stains or abrasive substances that scrub them off whitened no better than standard formulas, Torres and his colleagues found.

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