BE HEART HEALTHY!

Jan. 12, 2015 (HealthDay News) -- Quitting smoking is notoriously tough, and some smokers may try different approaches for years before they succeed, if ever, but new research suggests that someday a simple test might point smokers toward the quitting strategy that's best for them.

It's been long theorized that some smokers are genetically predisposed to process and rid the body of nicotine more quickly than others. Now a new study suggests that slower metabolizers seeking to kick the habit will probably have a better treatment experience with the aid of a nicotine patch than the quit-smoking drug varenicline (Chantix).

The finding is based on the tracking of more than 1,200 smokers undergoing smoking-cessation treatment. Blood tests indicated that more than 660 were relatively slow nicotine metabolizers, while the rest were normal nicotine metabolizers.

Over an 11-week trial, participants were prescribed a nicotine patch, Chantix, or a non-medicinal "placebo."

Specifically, 40 percent of normal metabolizers who were given the drug option were still not smoking at the end of their treatment, the study found. This compared with just 22 percent who had been given a nicotine patch.

Among the slow-metabolizing group, both treatments worked equally well at helping smokers quit, the researchers noted. However, compared with those treated with the nicotine patch, slow metabolizers treated with Chantix experienced more side effects.

This led the team to conclude that slow metabolizers would fare better -- and likely remain cigarette-free -- when using the patch.

The study was led by Caryn Lerman, a professor of psychiatry and director of the Center for Interdisciplinary Research on Nicotine Addiction at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine. She believes that the findings show that not all smokers are alike, and measuring each smokers' "nicotine metabolite ratio" might someday be a useful tool "to guide treatment choices."

This is a much-needed, genetically informed [measurement tool] that could be translated into clinical practice," Lerman said in a university news release. "Matching a treatment choice based on the rate at which smokers metabolize nicotine could be a viable strategy to help guide choices for smokers and ultimately improve quit rates."

"Quitting is challenging for most tobacco users," Folan said. "Guiding them to appropriate treatment more quickly and efficiently will provide a more satisfying experience, with possibly less relapse."

What causes a Cold Sore?

(HealthDay News) -- A cold sore is a painful sore that often forms on the lips or around the mouth. While a cold sore is caused by the herpes virus, many factors can act as triggers. Factors can include injury or stress.

The American Academy of Dermatology says potential triggers include:

♦ Feeling run down, stressed or tired.
♦ Having the flu, a fever or a cold.
♦ Being exposed to the sun.
♦ Having hormonal changes as a result of pregnancy or menstruation.
♦ Having an injury or trauma to the face from a cut, dental work, shaving, or surgery.
People felt less stressed when they checked only three times a day, study finds.

Looking for a way to help reduce your stress? Try checking your emails less often, researchers suggest. The new study featured 124 adults -- including students, financial analysts, medical professionals, and others -- who were divided into two groups. During the first week, one group checked their emails only three times a day, while the other group checked their emails as often as they liked. The groups then switched for the second week of the study. "Our findings showed that people felt less stressed when they checked their email less often," Kostadin Kushlev, a Ph.D. candidate in psychology at the University of British Columbia in Canada, said in a university news release. However, changing email habits proved difficult for many of the study participants, the investigators found. "Most participants in our study found it quite difficult to check their email only a few times a day," Kushlev said. "This is what makes our obvious-in-hindsight findings so striking: People find it difficult to resist the temptation of checking email, and yet resisting this temptation reduces their stress," he explained. Businesses and other organizations may help their workers reduce stress by suggesting they deal with their email in chunks instead of constantly checking and responding to messages, Kushlev said. The study was published online recently in the journal Computers in Human Behavior.

Keep Bedbugs Out of Your Bags

Bedbugs are crafty little critters that can sneak into your luggage while you're traveling, then make themselves comfortable in your home.

- Separating laundry according to color, so you can put dirty laundry directly into the washing machine.
- Laundering all clothing in the hottest setting possible.
- Inspecting your luggage for bedbugs. If you see them, wash luggage with a scrub brush and hot, soapy water.
- Heating infested items to 120 degrees Fahrenheit for at least two hours. Or freezing infested items to 23 degrees Fahrenheit for at least five days.

The University of Minnesota Extension suggests:

- Packing anything that could harbor bedbugs in a sealed plastic bag.
- Turning down the noises at this level:
  - If you're around noises at this level:
    - Turn down the sound.
    - Avoid the noise (walk away).
    - Block the noise (wear earplugs or earmuffs).

*If you're around noises at this level:
Noises Can Damage Your Hearing

Sounds surround us. We enjoy many of them—like music, birdsong, and conversations with friends. But loud or long-lasting noises—from motors, power tools, and even headphones—can permanently damage your hearing. Take steps to protect your ears from harmful noises.

Loud noise is one of the most common causes of hearing loss. An estimated 26 million Americans between the ages of 20 and 69 already have irreversible hearing loss caused by loud sounds and up to 16% of teens have hearing loss that may have been caused by loud noise.

“Noise damage can begin at any age, and it tends to accumulate over time. That’s why avoiding excess noise is so critical,” says Dr. Gordon Hughes, a clinical trials director and ear, nose, and throat specialist at NIH. “Hearing loss caused by noise is completely preventable.”

For adolescents, music players with headphones are a common source of noise exposure. “With adults it may be power tools, lawn mowers, snow blowers, and other sources of that type,” Hughes says. “Workplace noise—like farm machinery, construction, and noises associated with military service—may also cause problems.”

Noise-related hearing loss can arise from extremely loud bursts of sound, such as gunshots or explosions, which can rupture the eardrum or damage the bones in the middle ear. This kind of hearing loss can be immediate and permanent. Most noise-related hearing problems develop slowly over time, with ongoing exposure to loud sounds. Loud noises can injure the delicate sensory cells—known as hair cells—in the inner ear. “These cells have little hair-like tufts on one side,” Hughes says. Hair cells help to convert sound vibrations into electrical signals that travel along nerves from the ear to the brain. These cells allow us to detect sounds, but when hair cells are damaged and then destroyed by too much noise, they don’t grow back so hearing is permanently harmed.

Sometimes loud noises can cause tinnitus—ringing in the ears that lasts anywhere from a brief period to a lifetime. Loud noises can also cause temporary hearing loss that goes away within hours or a couple of days. “Some research suggests that even though the symptoms disappear, there may be molecular or chemical abnormalities that build up and cause potential for long-term damage to hearing,” Hughes says.

It’s best to avoid loud noises when possible, but how loud is too loud? Sound is measured in units called decibels (dB). Sounds less than 75 dB are unlikely to harm hearing. Normal conversation, for instance, measures about 60 dB. A typical hair dryer has an intensity of about 85 dB, but if they’re used for just brief periods, they’re unlikely to damage hearing. However, long or repeated exposure to sounds at or above 85 dB can cause problems.

The louder the sound, the quicker the damage. “At maximum volume, an audio player with ear buds might produce 105 dB. There’s potential for noise damage to occur at barely 30 minutes of exposure,” Hughes says. A siren may be 120 dB, a rock concert 110 dB, a motorcycle 95 dB, and a lawn mower 90 dB. All these have the potential to harm hearing over time.

“Wear ear protection such as ear plugs if the sound can’t be avoided or just get away from the sound, or reduce it, like turning down the volume on an audio player,” Hughes says. Foam insert earplugs can keep some sound intensity from reaching the eardrum, as can protective earmuffs, available at hardware and sport stores. For better ear protection, talk with a hearing specialist about getting a custom-fitted ear mold.

Finally, don’t forget to protect the ears of children who are too young to protect their own. Get a hearing test if you think you or a loved one might have hearing loss.
more than 330,000 people in 14 countries. They examined the association between long working hours and alcohol use. The results showed that people who worked longer hours were more likely to engage in risky alcohol consumption than those who worked standard weeks, 11% more likely.

Risky alcohol consumption was defined as more than 14 drinks per week for women and more than 21 drinks per week for men.

The researchers wrote that their findings suggest that alcohol consumption is more likely to rise to risky levels among employees who work more than 48 hours a week compared with those with standard working hours.

They also wrote that the workplace is an important setting for the prevention of alcohol misuse and that these findings support the regulation of working hours.

Optimism and your Health

Always look on the bright side of life. It’s not only the title of a song, it’s a habit that may actually keep your heart healthier, according to a new study. Researchers examined links between optimism and cardiovascular health in more than 5,100 people who were 52 to 84 years of age. Seven metrics were used to rate their cardiovascular status at the start, including blood pressure, body mass index, blood glucose, cholesterol levels, dietary intake, physical activity, and tobacco use. The study participants were given total health scores that ranged from 0 to 14 with a higher score representing better health. The participants were also asked to complete surveys that assessed their mental health and outlook on life.

The results showed that people who were the most optimistic were twice as likely to have ideal cardiovascular health. They had better total cholesterol and blood sugar levels, healthier body mass index readings, were more likely to exercise and less likely to smoke.

The researchers call these findings significant and say that discovering the mechanisms behind the association of heart health and optimism could help lead to a significant reduction in death rates.