

ARRESTING LATEX ALLERGY

Awareness is key to reducing the rate of latex allergy development, conclude researchers at an international conference on latex allergy.

The conference, held last February in Amsterdam, brought medical professionals from around the world together to discuss the latest findings on this potentially life-threatening sensitivity.

"The severity of this illness grows with additional exposure," explained Don Groce, an

analytical chemist for Best Manufacturing, a company that produces non-latex gloves. "Without proper education in the health care industry and among the general public, millions of people could develop the allergy in the near term."

Researchers estimate that as many as 17 percent of health care workers suffer allergic reactions to latex, and evidence indicates that the problem is increasing. One Canadian researcher reported that the prevalence of latex allergy among nurses in his study jumped from 2.9 percent in 1986 to 17 percent in 1994.

The conference closed with recommendations that guidelines be developed for working with products that contain latex, that manufacturers explore ways to reduce the latex in their products and that work continue to be done in establishing tests to detect latex allergy. Until more can be accomplished in these areas, researchers recommend that patients and health care providers with sensitivity to latex avoid contact with any latex-containing product.

DON'T FORGET TO FLOSS

Johnson & Johnson's sales figures are a testament to the acceptance of floss by Americans. In 1994 alone, the company sold enough floss to circle the globe more than 62 times. According to a recent Nielsen report, Americans bought 4,761,905 yards of dental floss in 1995. A Johnson & Johnson survey found that floss sits in the medicine cabinets in nine out of 10 American homes. Seventy percent of those surveyed agreed that flossing is as important as brushing for good oral care.

So why is it that more than 60 percent of U.S. consumers, by

their own admission, don't floss regularly?

And what are they doing with all that dental floss?

Johnson & Johnson found that, because of the filament's durability, people use dental floss for a variety of tasks:

- tying flies for fishing;
- as a replacement for shoelaces;
- restringing baseball gloves;
- cutting cheesecake (endorsed by some cookbooks as the best way to slice cheesecake);
- in place of string when flying a kite.

In addition to being a helpful household item, dental floss also can come in handy when you're away from home. In West Virginia, one inmate wove two 20-foot strands of floss into a cord, which he used to scale an 18-ft. wall. Although he enjoyed a brief vacation, the fugitive was returned to his cell within a matter of weeks, and prison authorities learned a valuable lesson: never underestimate the value of dental floss.

NIDR AWARDS GRANTS

The National Institute of Dental Research has awarded four grants to support the study of oral diseases and conditions prevalent among minorities.

Thanks to funding from NIDR, eight universities will join forces to form four research centers. The University of New Jersey and the University of Connecticut dental schools will ally to form the Northeastern Minority Oral Health Research Center. New York University dental school and the Forsyth Dental Center will join forces in the Northeast Regional Center for Minority Oral Health. Other alliances involve dental schools at the University of California,

NIDR TO HOST CLINICAL PRACTITIONERS

The National Institute of Dental Research will host a continuing education symposium for practicing dentists, June 13 and 14, in Bethesda, Md. The symposium, called Scientific Frontiers in Clinical Dentistry, is designed to bridge the gap between the lab bench and the dental chair.

Leading researchers will update participants on the latest advances in dentistry and will discuss clinical applications of these findings. Presentations include advances in periodontology, new approaches for repairing and regenerating oral tissues, restorative-treatment decision making and prescribing analgesics to control acute and chronic pain. Participants can earn up to 13 continuing education credit hours by attending the symposium.

Registration fee is \$100 for health professionals, \$50 for students. For additional information, contact Dina Battle at 1-800-720-3921.