

Health

Lower sodium goals

Advice shift on aspirin use for 'heart health'

NEW YORK, Oct 14, (AP): Older adults without heart disease shouldn't take daily low-dose aspirin to prevent a first heart attack or stroke, an influential health guidelines group said in preliminary updated advice released Tuesday.

Bleeding risks for adults in their 60s and up who haven't had a heart attack or stroke outweigh any potential benefits from aspirin, the US Preventive Services Task Force said in its draft guidance.

For the first time, the panel said there may be a small benefit for adults in their 40s who have no bleeding risks. For those in their 50s, the panel softened advice and said evidence of benefit is less clear.

The recommendations are meant for people with high blood pressure, high cholesterol, obesity or other conditions that increase their chances for a heart attack or stroke.



Wong

Regardless of age, adults should talk with their doctors about stopping or starting aspirin to make sure it's the right choice for them, said task force member **Dr. John Wong**, a primary-care expert at Tufts Medical Center.

"Aspirin use can cause serious harms, and risk increases with age," he said.

If finalized, the advice for older adults would backtrack on recommendations the panel issued in 2016 for helping prevent a first heart attack and stroke, but it would be in line with more recent guidelines from other medical groups.

The task force previously said certain people in their 50s and 60s may want to consider a daily aspirin to prevent a first heart attack and stroke, and that they might get protection against colorectal cancer, too. The updated guidance says more evidence of any benefit for colorectal cancer is needed.

Doctors have long recommended daily low-dose aspirin for many patients who already have had a heart attack or stroke. The task force guidance does not change that advice.

The guidance was posted online to allow for public comments until Nov. 8. The group will evaluate that input and then make a final decision.

The independent panel of disease-prevention experts analyzes medical research and literature and issues periodic advice on measures to help keep Americans healthy. Newer studies and a re-analysis of older research prompted the updated advice, Wong said.

Aspirin is best known as a pain reliever but it is also a blood thinner that can reduce chances for blood clots. But aspirin also has risks, even at low doses - mainly bleeding in the digestive tract or ulcers, both of which can be life-threatening.

Dr. Lauren Block, an internist-researcher at Feinstein Institutes for Medical Research in Manhasset, New York, said the guidance is important because so many adults take aspirin even though they have never had a heart attack or stroke.

Block, who is not on the task force, recently switched one of her patients from aspirin to a cholesterol-lowering statin drug because of the potential harms.

The patient, 70-year-old Richard Schrafel, has high blood pressure and knows about his heart attack risks. Schrafel, president of a paperboard-distribution business, said he never had any ill effects from aspirin, but he is taking the new guidance seriously.

Rita Seefeldt, 63, also has high blood pressure and took a daily aspirin for about a decade until her doctor told her two years ago to stop.

"He said they changed their minds on that," recalled the retired elementary school teacher from Milwaukee. She said she understands that science evolves.

Wong acknowledged that the backtracking might leave some patients frustrated and wondering why scientists can't make up their minds.

"It's a fair question," he said. "What's really important to know is that evidence changes over time."



Food: Food companies are coming under renewed pressure to use less salt after US regulators spelled out long-awaited guidelines aimed at reducing sodium levels in dozens of foods including condiments, cereals, french fries and potato chips.

The voluntary goals finalized Wednesday for 163 food categories are intended to help lower the amount of salt people eat. A majority of the sodium in US diets comes from packaged or restaurant foods - not the salt added to meals at home - making it hard for people to make changes on their own.

To get people used to eating less salt, the Food and Drug Administration said reductions have to be gradual and across the entire food supply so people don't keep reaching for higher sodium options.

"By putting out the targets, that really helps to level the playing field across the industry," said **Susan Mayne**, director of the FDA's food safety and nutrition division.

Over the next 2.5 years, the FDA's target sodium levels aim to cut average intake by 12% - from 3,400 to 3,000 milligrams a day. That would still leave average intake above the federally recommended limit of 2,300 milligrams a day for people 14 and older. But the agency says it will monitor industry progress and keep issuing updated targets to bring levels closer to the recommended limit over time.

The FDA said it took into consideration industry feedback after issuing its draft guidance in 2016. Ketchup, mustard and hot sauce, for example, were split up and now have different targets. Another difference: The final guidance does not spell out a time frame for reaching longer-term targets.

"It's a huge disappointment that the 10-year goal didn't come out at the same time," said Dr. Dariush Mozaffarian, dean of the Tufts University's Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy.

Mozaffarian said some food companies resisted reduced sodium targets, but that more scientific support has emerged for the federal guidance on sodium. In 2019, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine tied the recommended limit to a reduced risk of chronic disease. A recent study in China also found lower rates of stroke and major heart-related events among people using a salt substitute compared with those using regular salt.

Whether the targets are effective in pushing the industry to lower sodium levels will hinge on how the FDA monitors progress and publicly communicates about it, Mozaffarian said.

In a statement, the National Restaurant Association said it provided feedback to the FDA's draft guidance and that its member companies continue to provide options that address customer demand.

The American Frozen Food Institute said member companies have already been offering lower sodium options to meet consumer demand.

Even though the guidance is voluntary, companies might feel pressure to make changes to avoid stricter regulatory action, said Dr. Peter Lurie, president of the Center for Science in the Public Interest, which has called for mandatory sodium standards.

"If it turns out that the impact is not what we would hope, I think it's back to the drawing board, and mandatory cuts are on the table," he said.



Blue Origin's New Shepard rocket latest space passengers (from left), Audrey Powers, William Shatner, Chris Boshuizen, and Glen de Vries raise their hands during a media availability at the spaceport near Van Horn, Texas, Wednesday, Oct. 13. (AP)

Space

Shatner becomes the oldest person in space

TV's Capt. Kirk blasts into space

VAN HORN, Texas, Oct 14, (AP): Hollywood's Captain Kirk, 90-year-old William Shatner, blasted into space Wednesday in a convergence of science fiction and science reality, reaching the final frontier aboard a ship built by Jeff Bezos' Blue Origin company.

The "Star Trek" actor and three fellow passengers hurtled to an altitude of 66.5 miles (107 kilometers) over the West Texas desert in the fully automated capsule, then safely parachuted back to Earth in a flight that lasted just over 10 minutes.

"What you have given me is the most profound experience," an exhilarated Shatner told Bezos after climbing out of the hatch, the words spilling from him in a soliloquy almost as long as the flight. "I hope I never recover from this. I hope that I can maintain what I feel now. I don't want to lose it."

He said that going from the blue sky to the utter blackness of space was a moving experience: "In an instant you go, 'Whoa, that's death.' That's what I saw."

Shatner became the oldest person in space, eclipsing the previous record - set by a passenger on a similar jaunt on a Bezos spaceship in July - by eight years. The flight included about three minutes of weightlessness and a view of the curvature of the Earth.

Sci-fi fans reveled in the opportunity to see the man best known as the brave and principled commander of the starship Enterprise boldly go where no star of American TV has gone before. The internet went wild, with Trekkies quoting favorite lines from Kirk, including, "Risk: Risk is our business. That's what this starship is all about."

Moment

"This is a pinch-me moment for all of us to see Capt. James Tiberius Kirk go to space," Blue Origin launch commentator Jacki Cortese said before liftoff. She said she, like so many others, was drawn to space by shows like "Star Trek."

NASA sent best wishes ahead of the flight, tweeting: "You are, and always shall be, our friend."

The flight brought priceless star power to Bezos' space-tourism business, given its built-in appeal to baby boomers, celebrity watchers and space enthusiasts. Shatner starred in TV's original "Star Trek" from 1966 to 1969, back when the US was racing for the moon, and went on to appear in a string of "Star Trek" movies.

Bezos is a huge "Star Trek" fan - the Amazon founder had a cameo as an alien in one of the later movies - and Shatner rode free as his invited guest.

As a favor to Bezos, Shatner took up into space some "Star Trek" tricorders and communicators - sort of the iPhones of the future - that Bezos made when he was a 9-year-old Trekkie. Bezos said his mother had saved them for 48 years.

Bezos himself drove the four crew members to the launch pad, accompanied them to the platform high above the ground and cranked the hatch shut after they climbed aboard the 60-foot

BEIJING, Oct 14, (AP): China is preparing to send three astronauts to live on its space station for six months - a new milestone for a program that has advanced rapidly in recent years.

It will be China's longest crewed space mission and set a record for the most time spent in space by Chinese astronauts. The Shenzhou-13 spaceship is expected to be launched into space on a Long March-2F rocket early Saturday morning from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center on the edge of the Gobi Desert in northwestern China.

The first crew who served a 90-day mission aboard the main Tianhe core module of the space station returned in mid-September.

The new crew has two veterans of space travel. Pilot Zhai Zhigang, 55, performed China's first spacewalk. Wang Yaping, 41, and the only woman on the mission, carried out experiments and led a science class in real-time while traveling on one of China's earlier experimental space stations. Ye Guangfu, 41, will be traveling into space for the first time.

rocket. He was there to greet them when the capsule floated back to Earth under its brilliant blue-and-red parachutes.

"Hello, astronauts. Welcome to Earth!" a jubilant Bezos said as he opened the hatch of the New Shepard capsule, named for first American in space, Alan Shepard.

Shatner and his crewmates wore close-fitting, flame-retardant, royal-blue flight suits, not exactly the tight, futuristic-for-the-'60s V-necks that the crew of the Enterprise had on TV.

The actor said he was struck by the vulnerability of Earth and the relative sliver of its atmosphere.

"Everybody in the world needs to do this. Everybody in the world needs to see," he said. "To see the blue color whip by, and now you're staring into blackness, that's the thing. The covering of blue, this sheath, this blanket, this comforter of blue that we have around, we say, 'Oh, that's blue sky.' And then suddenly you shoot through it all, and you're looking into blackness, into black ugliness."

Shatner said the return to Earth was more jolting than his training led him to expect and made him wonder whether he was going to make it back alive.

"Everything is much more powerful," he said. "Bang, this thing hits. That wasn't anything like the simulator. ... Am I going to be able to survive the G-forces?"

Passengers are subjected to nearly 6 G's, or six times the force of Earth's gravity, as the capsule descends. Blue Origin said Shatner and the rest of the

The mission is expected to continue the work of the initial crew, who conducted two spacewalks, deployed a 10-meter (33-foot) mechanical arm, and held a video call with Chinese leader Xi Jinping.

China Manned Space Agency Deputy Director Lin Xiqiang said the rocket was fueled and ready to fly. "All systems conducting the Shenzhou-13 mission have undergone a comprehensive rehearsal. The flight crew is in good condition and our pre-launch preparations are in order," Lin said at a Thursday briefing.

The crew's scheduled activities include up to three spacewalks to install equipment in preparation for expanding the station, verifying living conditions in the module and conducting experiments in space medicine and other areas, Lin said.

China's military, which runs the space program, has released few details but says it will send multiple crews to the station over the next two years to make it fully functional. Shenzhou-13 will be the fifth mission, including trips without crews to deliver supplies.

crew met all the medical and physical requirements, including the ability to hustle up and down several flights of stairs at the launch tower.

Shatner going into space is "the most badass thing I think I've ever seen," said Joseph Barra, a bartender who helped cater the launch week festivities. "William Shatner is setting the bar for what a 90-year-old man can do."

The flight comes as the space tourism industry finally takes off, with passengers joyriding aboard ships built and operated by some of the richest men in the world.

Virgin Galactic's Richard Branson went into space in his own rocket ship in July, followed by Bezos nine days later on Blue Origin's first flight with a crew. Elon Musk's SpaceX made its first private voyage in mid-September, though without Musk on board.

Last week, the Russians launched an actor and a film director to the International Space Station for a movie-making project.

Blue Origin said it plans one more passenger flight this year and several more in 2022. Sounding like the humane and idealistic Captain Kirk himself, the company said its goal is to "democratize space."

Shatner strapped in alongside Audrey Powers, a Blue Origin vice president and former space station flight controller for NASA, and two paying customers: Chris Boshuizen, a former NASA engineer, and Glen de Vries of a 3D software company. Blue Origin would not divulge the cost of their tickets.



In this photo released by Xinhua News Agency, the Shenzhou-13 manned spaceship atop a Long March-2F carrier rocket is transferred to the launching area of Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center in northwestern China, Oct. 7. China is preparing to send three astronauts to live on its space station for six months - a new milestone for a program that has advanced rapidly in recent years. (AP)

Discovery

**Quake shakes Spanish island:** A 4.5-magnitude earthquake shook La Palma in Spain's Canary Islands in what was the strongest recorded tremor since volcanic eruptions began 26 days ago, authorities said Thursday.

The quake was one of around 60 recorded overnight, Spain's National Geographic Institute said, as the Cumbre Vieja volcano continued to spew fiery rivers of lava that are destroying everything in their path and dumping molten rock into the Atlantic Ocean.

The flow from three rivers of molten rock broadened to 1.7 kilometers (about a mile), the La Palma government said.

Hard, black lava now covers 640 hectares (1,580 acres) on the western side of the island, authorities said, though most of the lava is unaffected.

The lava has partially or completely destroyed more than 1,500 buildings, though prompt evacuations have so far avoided casualties. More than 6,000 people have had to abandon their homes. (AP)



**Turtle thrives at animal refuge:** A rare two-headed diamondback terrapin turtle is alive and kicking - with all six of its legs - at the Birdseye Cape Wildlife Center in Massachusetts after hatching two weeks ago.

A threatened species in the state, this turtle is feeding well on blood worms and food pellets, staff at the center say. The two heads operate independently, coming up for air at different times, and inside its shell are two gastrointestinal systems to feed both sides of its body.

The turtle originally came from a nest in West Barnstable that researchers determined was in a hazardous location and needed to be moved. After hatching, turtles in these so-called "head start" nests are sent to different care centers to be monitored before their release in the spring. The Cape Cod Times reported.

The turtle was named after infamous twins Mary-Kate and Ashley upon hatching two weeks ago at New England Wildlife Center, The Boston Globe reported.

Center veterinarian **Pria Patel** and other staff will continue to monitor the turtle in the coming weeks. They're hoping to perform a CT scan to learn more about its circulatory system. (AP)



**'End oil and gas explorations':** The European Union Wednesday proposed a new policy for the Arctic region so that the 27-member bloc could play a stronger role for a "peaceful, sustainable and prosperous Arctic".

The new policy presented in a press conference in Brussels today says that the "Arctic region is of key strategic importance for the European Union, in view of climate change, raw materials as well as geostrategic influence".

Ahead of the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) and in support of global climate action, the EU policy proposals called for "oil, coal and gas to remain in the ground" and to end oil and gas explorations in the Arctic region.

Noting that "the EU is also an importer of oil and gas extracted in the Arctic," the proposed policy says that "building on the partial moratoriums on hydrocarbons exploration in the Arctic, the EU is commit-



Sinkevicius



Patel

ted to ensuring that oil, coal and gas stay in the ground, including in Arctic regions".

**Virginijus Sinkevicius**, EU Commissioner for the Environment, Fisheries and Maritime Affairs told the press conference that "the Arctic region is warming three times faster than the rest of the planet. The melting of ice and thawing of permafrost in the Arctic further accelerate climate change and have huge knock-on effects. (AP)