

HEALTH

Beware of holiday dangers

By Raya Tahan
THE ARIZONA DAILY STAR

TUCSON, Ariz. — Mistletoe, holly and Christmas tree ornaments brighten up the holidays but can create health hazards for young children, poison experts warn.

"Each year we have hundreds of poison exposures that are related to the celebration of the holidays," said Jude McNally, the Arizona Poison & Drug Information Center's assistant director.

"The kids that we're most worried about at this time of year are under 5, mostly 2- to 3-year-olds. They're the ones most likely to get into trouble as we bring new holiday things into the home," he said.

The center has already fielded one call from a parent whose child ate toxic mistletoe berries. Holly berries are also tempting, with their red, candy-like appearance. But they, too, are toxic, and consuming just a few berries from either plant can cause eight to 12 hours of nausea, vomiting and diarrhea, McNally said.

Eating 10 or more mistletoe berries can lead to seizures, hyperactivity or hepatitis, he said. Ingesting that many holly berries can cause drowsiness or depression.

A child who eats 10 or more

berries of either type should be taken to the emergency room, McNally said.

Children who consume either plant should be monitored for blood pressure changes and should drink fluids to avoid dehydration, he said.

When these plants are bound in colored ribbon and prominently displayed, they intrigue children. But they can easily fall off doors and ceilings to land in young hands.

Contrary to popular belief, eating poinsettia leaves is not highly dangerous and causes no long-term effects. A child or pet could eat several leaves before feeling nauseated, McNally said.

He said the pyracantha shrub, with its small green leaves and red berries, is a safe alternative. It often grows in yards and is available in plant stores.

Alcohol and chocolate can also cause problems for children and pets. In the season of celebrating and gift-giving, they are more accessible and can easily fall into the wrong hands — or paws.

"People have holiday parties and decide to clean up in the morning," McNally said. "But they might not get up before their kids, and the kids go around drinking fruit punch that has alcohol in it and was left on the

table."

This scenario usually prompts several phone calls each holiday season, he said.

Alcohol can also be discovered as a decorated surprise under the tree. Gift-wrapped cologne and perfume seem particularly attractive to children and pets because they smell nice, but their high alcohol content can cause trouble, he said.

Theobromine, a chemical that occurs naturally in the cocoa plant, can be fatal to dogs. A dog that has eaten chocolate and is vomiting or having a seizure should be seen by a veterinarian immediately, McNally said.

Even ornaments and Christmas lights can seem appetizing, and young children sometimes bite into them, McNally said.

Incidents of accidental drug overdoses increase during the holidays too. Sometimes children find an out-of-town guest's medication, and elderly people often request non-child-resistant caps. A single adult dosage of blood pressure or cardiac medicine can harm a small child.

"Make everyone more aware," McNally said. "When we have guests come into the home, they should store their medication up and out of reach, and be aware of after-shaves and colognes."



The same precautions should prevail when a young family stays in a home that is not childproof, he said.

"We ask that people stop and think," he said. "Take that extra moment to see where the kids are."

The Arizona Poison & Drug Information Center is a free service administered through the University of Arizona's College of Pharmacy. It is available 24 hours a day, every day of the year. It can be reached at (800) 362-0101.

Acupuncture spells relief for ailing patients

By Rick Smith
THE CEDAR RAPIDS GAZETTE

CORALVILLE, Iowa — Verdine Moldenhauer didn't need the National Institutes of Health's recent endorsement of the millennia-old Chinese art of acupuncture to know it can work.

The 82-year-old Moldenhauer, of Iowa City, who suffers chronic neck and back pain, had discovered that on her own at the hands of Dr. Yang Ahn.

Seven times now since June, the retired travel-agency operator has laid face down on a treatment table at Ahn's new acupuncture clinic in Coralville as the doctor systematically stuck thin, stainless steel needles into specific points on her body.

Many of the pricks she compares to little mosquito bites. A few actually hurt. But her discomfort is little on this day, with 36 needles sticking out of her during a 20-minute treatment.

A couple of needles are in her feet and behind her knees and many are along her back and in her neck. To two of the needles Ahn has attached a low-level electrical current.

"I know if you're going to feel like a 20-year-old after the electrical stimulation or not," Ahn jokes.

Acupuncture is finding a place in conventional medical treatment in the United States, and Ahn, who is schooled in the

ancient practice of needling, is leading the way in melding the conventional and the alternative in Eastern Iowa.

In Iowa today, a scattering of chiropractors have incorporated acupuncture into their practices and five non-physicians are registered as certified acupuncturists.

Ahn ranks as one of the few medical doctors in Iowa who turns from conventional Western medicine to acupuncture when the patient requires it.

Some doctors, like Moldenhauer's, are referring patients to Ahn and some doctors and their wives are coming for the treatments.

"That's a heck of a lot of change," Ahn said.

Ahn offers a classical Chinese theory and a modern scientific one to explain how acupuncture works.

The classical says that channels of energy run in patterns through and over the body, and the placing of needles at precise points unblock obstructions along these channels.

The modern says that the placing of needles at these points stimulates the nervous system and releases chemicals in the muscles, spinal cord and brain. The chemicals change the experience of pain and trigger the release of other chemicals and hormones to help the body regulate itself.

Whichever it is, the result is the

body's natural healing abilities are stimulated, Ahn said.

Ahn says there are more than 350 acupuncture points organized into 12 groups and then combinations of groups to treat various health problems.

Where to place needles and in what combination has been established through 3,000 years documented practice, Ahn said.

A family practitioner and surgeon for nearly 30 years, Ahn now estimates that 15 patients a day at his Medcenter West clinic in Cedar Rapids receive acupuncture treatment.

For now, most of Ahn's Iowa patients are what he calls "bread-and-butter" people, ones less concerned about living energy and more interested in relief for a specific medical problem, mostly chronic pain.

"They're desperate," Ahn said.

About 50 percent of Ahn's patients receive acupuncture for lower-back pain and about 25 percent for neck and upper-back pain. He also uses it to treat chronic headaches, heel spurs, tennis elbow, shingles, burns, cold sores, smoking cessation, arthritis and other conditions.

But he emphasizes that most of those to whom he recommends acupuncture are those who have not responded well to Western medicine or who have unacceptable side effects from medication.

"Western medicine is good," he

Poor more likely to use Ritalin

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

PITTSBURGH — Pre-teen boys covered by Medicaid are prescribed Ritalin, a drug for treating hyperactivity, nearly three times as often as boys with private insurance, a University of Pittsburgh study shows.

The study, confined to seven counties in western Pennsylvania, compared the rate that Ritalin was prescribed for 165,000 children covered by Medicaid to prescriptions for 84,000 children insured in a private plan.

Findings were released Friday by Pitt and the Jewish Healthcare Foundation, which sponsored the study.

From 1992 to 1995, Ritalin use for boys aged 9 to 11 covered by Medicaid jumped from 6.5 percent to 11.5 percent, indicating one in 10 boys uses the drug.

"That's a huge number," said Dr. Kelly Kelleher, a researcher at Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh who conducted the study.

For boys of the same age with private insurance, Ritalin prescriptions rose to 4.1 percent, the study showed.

Ritalin is a stimulant prescribed



to treat attention deficit disorder as well as hyperactivity.

Kelleher's findings surprised University of Maryland researcher Julie Zito, who said she has found the opposite: that wealthier children are more likely to be prescribed psychiatric drugs.

Nationally, the use of stimulants to treat children ages 5 to 14 for attention deficit disorder or hyperactivity has increased 250 percent from 1990 to 1995, Zito said.

Kelleher said the results may indicate that Ritalin is over-prescribed to low-income children whose family may not have access to more comprehensive services, such as counseling or parenting classes.

But other factors may have affected the study, he said.

Children on Medicaid may have more disabilities than those using private insurance, or their parents may be more willing to accept drug therapies, Kelleher said.

INJURED? IN PAIN? CALL ACUTE CARE CHIROPRACTIC



Gentle, Safe Relief For

HEADACHES SUFFERERS

**LOW BACK & LEG PAIN
SUFFERERS**

**CARPAL TUNNEL
SUFFERERS**

ARTHRITIS SUFFERERS

**NECK & SHOULDER
PAIN SUFFERERS**

- Free Phone Consultation
- Same Day Appointments
- Insurance Claims Accepted & Processed

(704)338-1550
Dr. Michael C. Ebner, D.C.

1028 West Fifth Street
Charlotte, NC 28202

Located 1 Block from I-77, 3 Blocks from Uptown