

Health benefit of drug 'ecstasy' debated

Some researchers believe the psychedelic drug MDMA can treat such disorders as depression and marital discord. Psychotherapists at a recent conference in Oakland contended that MDMA breaks down personal defenses and makes people more honest and intimate, according to a report in the journal of the Addiction Research Foundation. MDMA, known as "ecstasy," has been around since 1914, but didn't hit the streets until the 1970s. The federal government banned it last year. Health experts debunked claims that MDMA improves sex and warned that it can cause nausea, raised blood pressure, crying, insomnia, blurred vision, headaches, back pain and even death. The purported benefits of MDMA are reminiscent of therapeutic claims once made for LSD. A skeptical Journal reporter wrote: "Many members of the audience looked as though they had taken 20 years to drift across the Bay Bridge from San Francisco. They were still dressed for the 1960s."

A rare night. Pray for clear skies Thursday night. Venus and Saturn will be shining brightly; the moon will make a rare pass in front of the star Antares, and Mars will be closer to earth than any time since 1971. "It will be a really great night for observing," said Adler. Planetarium associate astronomer James SeEVERS. Venus will be the rightest planet, shining in the western sky for about two hours after sunset. Saturn also will be bright, and several of its 17 moons will be visible with telescopes. The moon will pass in front of the bright star Antares at 11:05 p.m. And

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Mars will be only 37.5 million miles from earth. Due to its elongated orbit, Mars usually is much farther away. The planetarium will open its Doane Observatory and 16-inch telescope to the public from 8:30 to 11:30 p.m. For information, call 322-0304.

Pet cancer. A California veterinarian has opened what he calls the nation's first practice devoted exclusively to treating cancer in dogs and cats. Dr. Justin Quecke has treated about 50 pets at the California Veterinary Oncology Group in Fountain Valley. One couple paid \$1,400 to save a 13-year-old Chihuahua that had breast cancer. And Quecke donated \$2,000 in services to treat Anaheim's drug-sniffing police dog, which had leukemia. More pets are living long enough these days to get cancer. Most common in pets are skin cancer and leukemia. Dogs typically get skin cancer on their noses and ear tips. Quecke recommends applying sun screen to pets that spend a lot of time outside.

Energy machine. It sounds too good to be true: a machine that produces more electricity than it consumes. Mississippi inventor Joseph Newman contends his "energy output" machine is revolutionary. But he can't obtain a patent because the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office

concluded in 1984 that it didn't work. Now, a \$75,000 study by the National Bureau of Standards has found that the machine consumes more electricity than it produces. "Our results are clear and unequivocal," the bureau said. But in an interview with Science magazine, Newman said, "I have no respect for the National Bureau of Standards. This is a conspiracy against me."

Hold the pepper. People prone to bellyaches should be wary of pepper. Researchers at the Baylor College of Medicine in Houston found that red and black pepper cause increased acid secretions in the stomach, and red pepper causes minor bleeding of the stomach lining. The stomach reacts to pepper much the way it reacts to aspirin. Long-term use of aspirin can damage the stomach lining, but researchers aren't certain whether pepper has a similar effect, said Dr. David Graham.

Transplant blues. Between 15 percent and 20 percent of patients who receive bone marrow transplants suffer emotional distress and low self-esteem, according to a study at the University of California at Los Angeles. Dr. Deane Wolcott also found that 10 percent to 20 percent of donors, usually siblings, feel bad about the transplant, especially when it doesn't work. "The donor often feels that 'my body failed my sibling,'" Wolcott said. About 800 bone marrow transplants a year are performed in the United States on patients with leukemia and other diseases.

—Jim Ritter