

New lifestyle brings good and bad to health

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For the Tundra Times

The Circumpolar Health Conference brought together many scientists from all over the world that shared ideas and common concerns. One of the topics discussed was the physical fitness of Native peoples. Tests were done to measure the physical fitness of Natives in 1971 and again ten years later in 1981. Guess what?

As a whole, weight went up, fat went up and leg strength went down. The general trend of height going up also was affected. In fact, studies have shown that since the introduction of high speed snow machines, the general height levels went DOWN by about 2 cm.

There is a dramatic increase in smoking rates. Also life is much easier today with the introduction of snow machines (which means you do not have to walk as much) as well as a generalized easier life style.

All this comes with progress. We have now longer life expectancies, better earlier years of life especially more controlled childbirth and monitoring of health throughout life. But all of that has its price and comes along with adopting the non-Natives way of life.

One of those "Costs" includes a relatively effortless life where you have more time to do nothing at all. Time to sit around and watch TV or video movies. Time to go away for a vacation. Time to do things that do not require much physical effort. Extra time to maybe spend eating, smoking

or even drinking things your body really does not need.

And that is fine if you want to. After all, it is your body and you are its owner so you can do to yourself almost anything you want to. But you have to be prepared to pay the price that goes along with. High blood pressure, different kinds of cancer, extra weight for ~~your heart to carry~~, and quite possibly, dying before

you normally would.

What about infections, especially hepatitis? In The United States, Yupik Eskimos have the highest known prevalence of Hepatitis B virus in the whole country. Currently the state and federal public health services are drawing blood samples from all over Alaska to see who is a carrier and who should be vaccinated (people who are not carriers or who

have not been exposed to it).

Did you know that one of the first vaccinations used in Alaska was against smallpox? The Russians here in the 19th century introduced it through the Russian-American Company in Sitka, Kodiak and other major outposts.

Between 1835-40, a major smallpox epidemic spread through Alaska killing from 1/3 to 2/3's of the Native

population. Only those who were immunized were saved. The Russians kept up the vaccination program until the Americans took over, when it was allowed to slip by.

Another disease that was introduced into Alaska by explorers and fur traders in the 18th century was syphilis. This was an especially important problem for the Russian-American. Continued on Page Eleven

Preventative care the best medicine

Continued from Page Four
can Company and the Natives
living near them.

Dr. Robert Fortune, an Alaskan Medical Historian, reports that infected Tlingit women were hunted down in the woods and forced to accept mercury treatments to cure them of the disease. Other primitive measures were also put into effect in Kodiak and for all people traveling between there and Sitka where they had to undergo medical examinations to certify them free from the disease. Their efforts rid Kodiak of syphilis and greatly reduced it from its former rates in Sitka.

But coming back to 1984 Alaska, we are fortunate that a number of problems that largely killed people in the past are well controlled by modern medicine today. In fact, the thrust of medicine today is to prevent a number of problems before they happen.

A simple example of this is with babies and baby bottles. The bacteria that normally lives in your mouth is called "oral Bacterial."

- a) oral bacteria and sugar = acid.
- b) acid dissolves tooth minerals.

This means that if you give a baby a bottle with something that has sugar in it at bedtime, or keep the baby on the bottle for a long time after they can eat regular food, studies show that he or she

has a 50% chance of having dental tooth decay before the age of three:

You see, when the baby falls asleep with the bottle in his mouth, the saliva supply goes down which allows the acid to build up and start eating away at the protective layers of the tooth. Finally the acid eats away a hole in the tooth where the bacteria can get in and start destroying the tooth.

Be sure to take that bottle away when you child is sleeping and many dentists suggest that after twelve months, they should be weaned from the bottle if at all possible.

By a little prevention, you have saved the teeth of your child and in the long run, saved him from a lot of painful dental work. Of course, breast feeding is best but lets save that discussion for another day...

