Science & Technology

Gen Z Discovers LSD, and Other Science News

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The use of LSD has risen among Americans of all age groups over the past two decades, but especially among those aged seventeen to twenty-five, according to research led by Columbia public-health expert Deborah Hasin ’80SW, ’86PH. Her team found that about 4 percent of young adults say they have recently taken acid, up from 1 percent in 2002.

Hasin and her colleagues discovered that LSD’s resurgence in popularity corresponds to a downward trend in perceptions of its health risks, which they

speculate has been influenced by ubiquitous news reports describing the potential therapeutic benefits of hallucinogenic drugs in recent years. While previous studies have shown that small doses of LSD and similar hallucinogens administered by clinicians can help treat post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and other mental conditions, the Columbia researchers say that recreational use of such drugs remains risky. For example, unsupervised use of LSD, PCP, and ecstasy has been linked to a wide range of adverse cardiovascular and neurological effects.

“According to our results, hallucinogen use is a growing public health concern warranting prevention strategies,” says Ofir Livne, a postdoctoral fellow in epidemiology at Columbia’s Mailman School of Public Health and the lead author of the new paper. “Before hallucinogen use becomes normalized, there needs to be a larger body of literature that can help discern safe use from hazardous use.”

Shuteye boosts heart health

Getting a good night’s sleep may be as important for cardiovascular health as maintaining a balanced diet and exercising, finds a study led by Nour Makarem, an epidemiologist at the Mailman School of Public Health.

AI reveals new physics

A team of Columbia engineers led by Hod Lipson has created an artificial-intelligence program that can observe complex phenomena — like the movements of a flame or the liquid in a lava lamp — and detect fundamental principles of motion that no researchers have ever before recognized. They say their program could be adapted to study systems beyond physics, such as the spread of diseases or climate change.

In defense of the office sycophant

A study by Wei Cai of Columbia Business School finds that “upward influencers” in the workplace — basically, those who put more effort into impressing the boss than actually working — can be good for a company’s overall productivity because they

help to maintain strong lines of communication between managers and subordinates.

New hope for treating brain cancer

Medical researchers led by Jeffrey Bruce and Peter Canoll have devised a way to deliver chemotherapy drugs directly into the brain, which they say could improve the treatment of tumors. Their method, which appears to be safe but needs further evaluation, delivers the drugs via a catheter, thereby bypassing the blood-brain barrier that stops foreign substances in the bloodstream, including medications, from reaching the brain.

Otter like no other

An international team of scientists that includes Columbia geochemist Kevin Uno has identified a previously unknown (and long extinct) species of otter that lived in Ethiopia some three million years ago and was the size of a lion.

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