

## VITAILS

Wanted:  
depressed teens

**PILOT** • An interdisciplinary group of Calgary health professionals is looking for 50 young Calgarians, ages 13 to 18, to help test an online depression treatment program.

Called The Leap Project, it was developed by the Canadian Institute of Natural and Integrative Medicine in collaboration with mental health specialists from Alberta Health Services, the University of Calgary, Mount Royal University and Spiritual Directions.

The eight-week web-based treatment program (done from home and accessible 24/7)

guides young people through an exploration of life values. Created with input from young people who've experienced depression, the website includes YouTube style videos, music clips, personal stories and more.

Teens wanting to participate must be suffering from mild to moderate major unipolar depression, and have the support of a medical doctor and/or a mental health therapist.

They must also agree to attend four to five study visits over 24 weeks with trained medical professionals. For more information, see leapproject.com.

Building  
better bones

**FORUM** • Learn about using stems calls to regrow bone when the Alberta Chapter of Osteoporosis Canada hosts a free public forum on Saturday from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at the Delta Bow Valley (209 4th Ave. S.W.)

The panellists will include four University of Calgary experts: Dr. David Hanley, who studies osteoporosis; Dr. Steven Boyd, who researches orthopedic mechanics; Dr. Jeff Dunn, a specialist with the Hotchkiss Brain Institute; and Jaymi Talani, a PhD grad who studied biomedical engineering.

Seating is limited. Call 403-237-7022 or e-mail alberta@osteoporosis.ca.

Feeding  
young jocks

**TALK** • Calgary pediatrician and Herald columnist Dr. Peter Nieman is giving two talks this month titled Nutrition for the Childhood Athlete. The first talk is today at the Hillhurst-Sunnyside Community Centre.

Doors open at 7 p.m. The second is June 17 at Fish Creek Library. Doors open at 6:30 p.m.

While Nieman will be speaking mainly about healthy eating related to kids and sports, he'll provide general nutrition information, too. The talks are free, but seating is limited. Call 403-993-4043 to book a seat.

Why young Alberta males are using chewing tobacco at twice the national average — and what one local coach is doing about it

SNUFFING  
OUT CHEW

VÁLÉRIE BERENVI  
CALGARY HERALD

**G**rossed out by the gobs of dirty-brown spittle and worried about his players' health, Jean LaForest quickly moved to snuff out the use of smokeless tobacco when he became head coach of the Cougars men's hockey team at Mount Royal University.

When LaForest arrived in September 2008, about 40 per cent of the players used either chew, a looseleaf tobacco or snuff, a powdered form of tobacco. Both kinds are tucked between the cheek and gums to deliver a nicotine hit. Users spit a lot.

"Guys are spitting on the ice. I've seen it there's brown spots on the ice," he says.

Far worse are the health consequences: mouth sores, tooth and gum disease and an increased oral cancer risk. LaForest gave players a year to quit, directing them to student health services and the Encana Wellness Centre on campus for support.

This season the policy meant players weren't allowed to smoke or use chew or snuff while playing, practising, travelling or representing the team. The policy does not extend to players' private lives.

"It's a hard habit to quit. It's addictive, but it's also a habitual and cultural thing. It's part of our (hockey) culture and I wish it wasn't," says LaForest, adding many of his players, ages 21 to 25, had been introduced to smokeless tobacco in their teens.

A survey by Health Canada in 2007 showed that 17 per cent of Alberta males ages 15 to 19 were using smokeless tobacco — almost double the national average.

"We need to be vigilant, as the tobacco



Colleen De Neve,  
Calgary Herald

**When Jean LaForest became coach of the Mount Royal men's hockey team, he banned the use of chewing tobacco among his players.**

industry's strategy to recruit new users is clearly working," says Ashley Jensen, a spokesperson with the Canadian Cancer Society, Alberta/NWT Division. Jensen says that to make chew palatable to youth, companies mask the strong tobacco taste by candy-coating it with sweet flavours like cherry, peach or vanilla and packaging it to look like mints or gum.

LaForest says chew carries a masculine image, with patterns of use in groups, such as hockey players, baseball players, rodeo athletes and oilpatch workers.

"Having a cigarette in your mouth while you work on an oil derrick isn't an easy thing to do, but having a chew gives you that nicotine fix orally," says LaForest, adding there's "a lot of

use" in leagues such as the provincial Junior A. That's where "Peter" picked up the habit at the age of 18 as a rookie.

"All of the older guys were doing it. It's so cliché, but it was peer pressure," says the 26-year-old MRU grad who declined to publish his name because he's ashamed of his addiction.

Within six months, he went from chewing unfavoured tobacco once a week to every day.

"Once it gets hold of you, it's pretty tough to quit," says Peter, who's relapsed several times but has been off the chew for a month now.

"A lot of athletes who chew are so addicted that if they don't chew the day of a game they play worse because their body goes through withdrawal. It becomes part of your game-day routine that it's psychological: you think 'If I don't chew I won't score a goal.'"

People assume smokeless tobacco isn't as dangerous as cigarettes, says Jensen, also co-chair of Smoke Free Calgary.

"But in some ways, it provides even more nicotine. You get addicted quickly, almost right away. It has the same cardiovascular effects and can increase your risk of heart disease, stroke and high blood pressure over time."

In the short term, it doesn't boost athletic performance, she says, and there's evidence

it slows reaction time, increases heart rate and causes dizziness.

Jensen says anti-tobacco groups want the federal government to ban the flavoured additives used in smokeless tobacco.

Last October, the House of Commons unanimously passed Bill C-32, an amendment to the Tobacco Act that prohibits the tobacco industry from wooing youth with "kiddie smokes" — fruit- and candy-flavoured cigarettes and cigarettos sold in small, inexpensive packages. However, flavoured, smokeless tobacco was excluded, and a Standing Committee has asked Health Canada to provide more information on use among youth. The committee is still due to report.

LaForest wasn't about to wait for government to take action. (Likewise, a Calgary Flames policy prohibits the use of all tobacco products while in the presence of fans, in any arena or at any team function. The Western Hockey League does not permit the use of any tobacco products at practices, games and travel.)

"For us it's about making sure our athletes are as healthy as possible. I don't want them running the risk of oral cancer. It isn't just sports. Part of our mandate is health," says LaForest.

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