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## Health shorts

01:00 AM EDT on Sunday, August 6, 2006

***With these bandages, the scrape practically disappears*** Tired of bandages festooned with cartoon characters that draw attention to cuts and scratches? The folks at Band-Aid have set out to remedy this with the new Perfect Blend clear bandages.

Available in three shades, the translucent strips are designed for invisible protection by blending seamlessly with different skin tones. \$2.49. Available in most drug, grocery and chair stores.

***Debate heats up over screening teens for suicide risk*** A growing number of U.S. schools are screening teenagers for suicidal tendencies or signs of mental illness, triggering a debate between those who seek to reduce the toll of youthful suicides and others who say the tests are unreliable and intrude on family privacy.

The trend is being aggressively promoted by those who say screening can reduce the tragedy of the more than 1,700 suicides committed by children and adolescents each year in the United States. Many of the most passionate supporters have lost children to suicide -- among them Sen. Gordon Smith, R-Ore., whose son Garrett died in 2003.

One screening program, TeenScreen, has been administered to more than 150,000 children in 42 states. New York plans to start screening 400,000 children a year, and the federal government is directing tens of millions of dollars to expand screening nationwide.

Use of the psychological evaluations is growing even though there is little hard evidence that they prevent suicides. A panel of government experts concluded two years ago that the evidence to justify suicide screening was weak.

The growing use of screening has coincided with a rapid

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increase in the number of youngsters being prescribed powerful anti-psychotic medications such as Risperdal and Zyprexa that have not been specifically approved for use by children.

Proponents say screening is no different from having health checkups or visiting a dentist, and that the potential benefits are incalculable. After Smith's son killed himself, the Republican bucked the objections of conservative groups to push into a law an \$82 million effort to expand programs such as TeenScreen.

Because suicide victims often turn out to have had mental disorders such as depression and bipolar disorder, David Shaffer of Columbia University, who developed the TeenScreen questionnaire, and other specialists say identifying and treating youngsters with such disorders may reduce the number of suicides.

**A spoonful of sugar . . . . .** helps the medicine go down. That's the idea behind Life Fitness' new omega-3 daily supplement.

Omega-3 has been linked in studies to reducing the risk of coronary heart disease, but supplements usually come in the form of fish oil capsules, leaving an unpleasant aftertaste. Life Fitness' omega-3 soft chews are orange-flavored; unfortunately the chews seem to have exchanged the fishy aftertaste for a chalky one. Still, for the anti-fish set, the orange chews may be the way to go for omega-3.

Another supplementary treat, their Rapid Energy line of chewing gum, fares better. The gum comes in spearmint and cinnamon flavors, and includes a dose of vitamin B-12 for that extra kick start in the morning. Informal office tests showed no boost in stamina, but taste was comparable to regular gum, so why not?

A bag of 30 omega-3 chews retails for \$9.99, and a 12-pack of Rapid Energy gum retails for \$2.49. Available at CVS/pharmacy locations and [www.cvs.com](http://www.cvs.com).

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