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Health and Science in Brief: July 27, 2014

Obesity

We're all in the clean-plate club, researchers say

(MCT) — Seems that most of us take to heart the common admonition to clean our plates, at least when we fill them ourselves.

Adults eat nearly 92 percent of the food they put on their plates, according to research published in the International Journal of Obesity.

There were some variations: If people were distracted, they ate less, almost 89 percent of what they took; they ate 92.8 percent of meals but only 76.1 percent of snacks. At home or in a lab, the amount eaten was about the same, and men and women ate the same percentages.

"If you put it on your plate, it's going into your stomach," said Brian Wansink, director of the Cornell Food and Brand Lab and the study's lead researcher. Wansink, who frequently studies eating habits, conducted the research with Katherine Abowd Johnson, a doctoral student at the John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

Fukushima

Monkeys show low blood cell counts near nuclear plant

(MCT) — Wild Japanese monkeys near the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant have lower blood cell counts than similar monkeys who lived almost 200 miles away, according to biologists.

In a paper published Thursday in Scientific Reports, researchers tested Japanese macaques captured and killed in a forest about 40 miles from the power plant and compared the results to macaques in Shimokita Peninsula, a remote area in the country's north.

According to researchers, monkeys in the vicinity of Fukushima City had detectable levels of radioactive cesium in their muscles, while the northern monkeys did not. Researchers also found that the Fukushima simians had significantly lower white and red blood cell counts compared with macaque troops almost 200 miles away.

Brrr-ribbit

Wood frogs freeze for months, thaw and hop away

(MCT) — Each September, the wood frogs of Alaska do a very strange thing: They freeze.

They do not freeze totally solid, but they do freeze mostly solid. Two-thirds of their body water turns to ice. If you picked

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them up, they would not move. If you bent one of their legs, it would break.

Inside these frozen frogs other weird physiological things are going on. Their hearts stop beating, their blood no longer flows and their glucose levels skyrocket.

"On an organismal level they are essentially dead," said Don Larson, a graduate student at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks who studies frogs. "The individual cells are still functioning, but they have no way to communicate with each other."

The craziest thing of all may be that in this frozen state, they can withstand temperatures as low as zero degrees Fahrenheit for as long as seven months, and then, when spring arrives, thaw out and hop away.

Biologists have known for decades that some frogs freeze in the winter and thaw in the spring, but a paper published in the Journal of Experimental Biology reports that they can freeze longer and tolerate cooler temperatures than previously thought.

"There have been some studies, largely in the lab, that show frogs can stay frozen for a couple of weeks at (temperatures) of about 20 degrees Fahrenheit," said Brian Barnes, director of the Institute of Arctic Biology at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks. "But up here in Alaska, we know these frogs are common all the way into the Arctic Circle where it gets a lot colder than that. That's what kicked off our interest."

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