

HEARTBURN TABLET COULD TREAT COVID-19



COULD a heartburn tablet help in the fight against COVID-19?

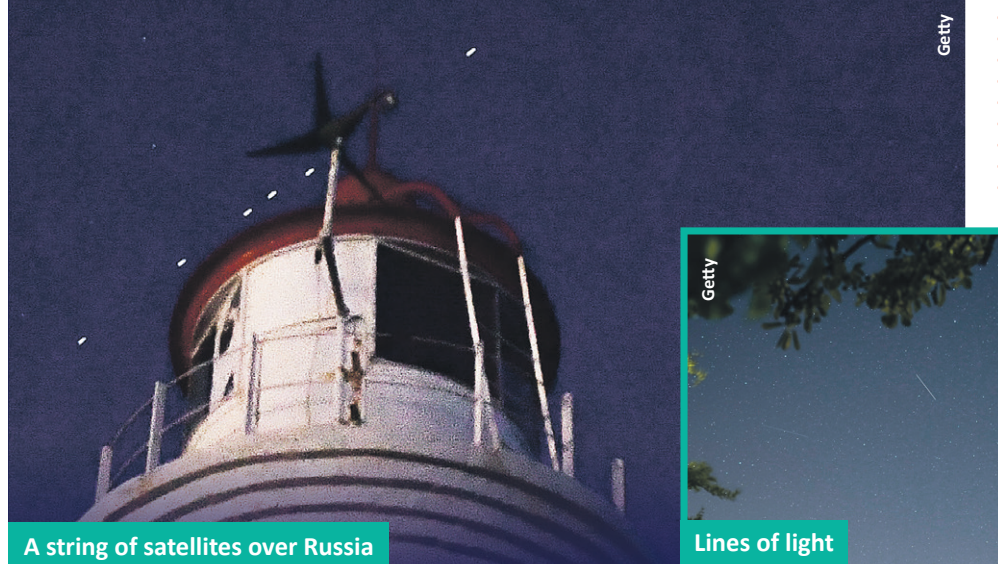
A small group of people who were already taking the heartburn drug famotidine were found to recover more quickly from the new coronavirus. The breathing problems that can occur with the virus improved within a couple of days rather than weeks.

Famotidine is usually given to people whose tummies produce too much acid. This squeezes up into the oesophagus, the food pipe into the stomach, causing a burning feeling in the chest. It is a common problem among older people who have also suffered most from the virus.

A trial of the drug in New York is testing how well it works, with results expected in a few weeks.

Since the study was published, there have been shortages of famotidine in the US as people are buying up the drug.

SATELLITES OUTSHINE STARS



A string of satellites over Russia

Lines of light

THE southern night skies are filling up with satellites and it is getting even harder to see the stars, astronomers are warning.

In the northern hemisphere, where there are more people, the pollution from streetlights has already reduced our chances of seeing the stars and planets above us. In the south over Australia and New Zealand, the skies are known as dark-sky sanctuaries because they are so clear and are a huge draw for tourists. But that may not be the case much longer, as more and more satellites are launched into the atmosphere. Elon Musk's SpaceX company alone plans to launch 12,000 satellites.

Dr Michele Bannister of the University of Canterbury in New Zealand says: "When you look into the night sky, do you want to see nature or do you want to see artificial constructions? This is what it comes down to."

SpaceX is heavily criticised because of the high number of its Starlink satellites, and the speed it's launching them. The company says its aim is to provide cheap broadband internet to the remotest parts of the Earth. They have launched more than 400 sats in the last year in batches of 60 at a time. But they are so bright they show up as long white lines streaking across the sky.

Australian astrophysicist Professor Jonti Horner says that there's no control over what happens above the Earth. He says: "We've lost a lot of the night sky already and this is the next step in its destruction – unless we do something about it."

ALLERGIES BREAKTHROUGH



ANAPHYLACTIC SHOCK is an everyday threat to the lives of people who have allergies.

A bee sting or a hidden food could cause a life-threatening reaction or even, in rare cases, death. At the moment, medication is the only way to treat it and treating the reaction quickly is crucial. This is why most people who know they have severe allergies carry an EpiPen, which can inject medicine quickly into the body.

But, now, a study has shown that it's possible to take a pill to prevent anaphylactic shock before it even occurs, no matter what the cause. People could, for example, take it to stop any accidental reactions when they are trying new foods.

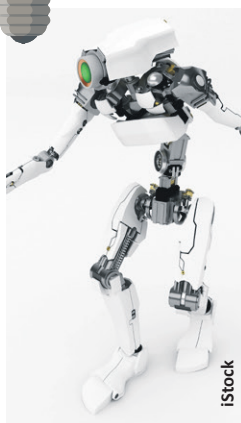
Studies so far have been small but the good results mean further testing on humans will take place. Dr Bruce Bochner, who is involved in the study, said: "This pill could quite literally be life-changing and life-saving."



INNOVATIONS

ROBOTS with flexible feet made from coffee waste are being developed in the US so they can walk on uneven surfaces, just like humans.

It's easy to spot even the most life-like robots by the way they walk: it's usually slow and stiff (like the one pictured). But scientists at the University of California San Diego have created feet that can adapt to different types of surface. The feet, which are made of latex filled with ground coffee, behave like a liquid when they are raised and firm up when they hit the ground. The robots can walk faster and have a better grip, which means they will be more useful in rugged environments.



WARNINGS IGNORED

AN online survey of 500 people shows that an alarming number of people in the US have been using bleach to wash their food.

In April, President Trump falsely suggested drinking bleach could be a way of killing COVID-19. Doctors immediately warned people not to consume it. But more than a third of people surveyed in America have admitted using dangerous products – including a fifth who use highly toxic disinfectant on their skin.



Cleaning products are highly toxic to humans