

A Healthier You

Compliments of Health Coaching

Blue OptionSM

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Letter From the Medical Director

Fall is here! After a hot summer, most of us are happy to see some cooler weather! Fall and winter often mean a lot of time spent indoors. While inside during the cold days, do not forget about your health. Please enjoy this issue of A Healthier You. It is full of great information to help you fall into better health for the New Year. At any age, whether you focus on taking steps to prevent disease and illness, or improve physical or mental health, there is an article for you. We hope this issue will help you in your health journey and that you and yours enjoy a healthy holiday season. Be sure to check out the great Thanksgiving recipe on page 5 – it is a heart-healthy spin on an old favorite!



Medical Director



Gather Around in Good Health

The holiday season is a time for family and togetherness. Knowing you and your family are in good health can ensure lasting years of joy and cheer. Here are some general recommendations for preventive care this season for every member of your family.

Children

A wellness checkup is one of the easiest things you can do for your child for preventive care. Make sure your child gets a yearly physical to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Some common concerns that are easy to overlook are vision health and bacterial infections.

If your child has any conditions that require medication management or special medical or pharmaceutical devices, and you have not done so already, consider meeting with teachers, the school nurse, and after-school caregivers to provide a copy of and review any special medical management plan.

Sometimes, a sore throat is not just a result of the common cold. If your child is sick and does not seem to get better in a few days, get him or her checked for bacterial infections, such as pneumonia, strep and mononucleosis (mono). You can easily treat these conditions with antibiotics if you catch them early. If left untreated, they can cause internal damage and even death.

Adults

As with children, wellness screenings for adults are also the easiest way to maintain good health. Not only should you have a yearly physical, you should also have these specific screenings depending on your sex, age and family history.

Women

- Cervical cancer screening starting at age 21
- Mammogram every year after age 40
- Colorectal screening every 10 years after age 50

Men

- Colorectal screening every 10 years after age 50
- Prostate cancer screening

The Details on Microbes and Antibiotics!

During the fall and winter, sickness is all around. You have most likely heard your physician talk about microbes, but what are they? Microbes are microorganisms that cause sickness and can be spread easily by coughing, sneezing, contaminated surfaces, food and water. There are two types of microbes that can make you sick – viral and bacterial. Here is the difference between the two and what you can do to have fewer sick days!

- When you have a virus, such as a common cold, let it run its course. A virus is not alive and cannot exist on its own. It grows and reproduces after it has entered the body. The body's immune system can fight off some viruses before they cause illness. Antibiotics do not work against viruses. When dealing with a cold, the best solution is to use over-the-counter medications to help you cope with the symptoms, such as runny nose, fever and sore throat.

- A bacterium, on the other hand, is a living organism that you can find everywhere. Some bacteria are harmful and can cause illness. These bacteria enter the body and multiply, which disrupts your normal day-to-day bodily processes. Antibiotics kill bacteria, stopping their growth and reproduction. Overuse of antibiotics for conditions that are not bacterial can actually make them less effective when you need them most – to treat bacterial infections.

Here are a few more ways to help you feel your best this cold and flu season. With both types of microbes, there are ways to avoid being sick. Simply:

- Wash your hands throughout the day. Remember to wet, lather, scrub, rinse and dry to reduce the spread of diarrheal and respiratory illness so you can stay healthy.
- Avoid touching your face. Touching your eyes, putting your finger to your nose, and biting your nails give the flu virus a welcome mat into your system.
- Cover your cough to stop the spread of germs that make you and others sick.
- Eat well. Eating well and staying hydrated can boost your immune system, which helps fight off infections.
- Get a flu shot. If you are over the age of 60, you should talk to your doctor about getting the vaccine for pneumonia.

If you are 65 years of age or older and have not previously received the pneumonia vaccine, talk to your doctor about getting one!

EAT HEALTHIER TO BE Heart-Healthier!

Exercising and eating a heart-healthy diet can reduce your risk of heart disease and make you feel better. During the holidays, it can be hard to stick to a diet. Opting for healthy options when able and making small changes at the table can help during the feasting season. Here are a few ways you can help your heart:



- Control your portion size. How much you eat is just as important as what you eat. By using smaller bowls and plates, you can easily control the amount of food you eat. Eat more slowly so your brain can process how full you're getting.
- Eat five or more servings of vegetables and fruits daily. Fruits and vegetables are not only a great source of vitamins and minerals, but are low in calories and high in fiber. They can also help prevent cardiovascular diseases. Try making more dishes this holiday season that contain vegetables or fruits as the main ingredient. Visit http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/GettingHealthy/NutritionCenter/Recipes/Heart-Healthy-Recipes_UCM_465114_RecipeLanding.jsp for more heart-healthy recipe ideas. The American Heart Association is an independent company that offers health information on behalf of your health plan. (This link leads to a third party site. That company is solely responsible for the contents and privacy policies on its site.)
- Drink six to eight glasses of water daily to keep your body well hydrated and make you feel full longer.
- Limit your unhealthy fat! Not eating a lot of saturated and trans fats is very important in reducing your blood cholesterol and can lower your risk of heart disease. There should be less than 14 g of saturated fat and less than 2 g of trans fats in your daily intake if you follow a 2,000-calorie-a-day diet. Instead of frying the turkey this year, bake it! When you eat a piece of your great-aunt's ham, trim off the fat.
- Reducing the amount of sodium in your food will reduce your risk of high blood pressure, which is a huge risk factor for heart disease and stroke. The Department of Health and Human Services recommends adults have no more than a teaspoon (2300 mg) of salt a day. The Department of Health and Human Services is an independent organization that provides health information on behalf of your health plan. If you are older than 51, African-American or have been diagnosed with high blood pressure, diabetes or kidney disease, your daily intake should be half that (1500mg).

Foods Your Heart Will Love

Oatmeal	Full of omega-3 fatty acids, folate and potassium, which can lower bad cholesterol.
Salmon	Rich in omega-3 fatty acids and can reduce blood pressure and clotting. To reduce your heart attack risk by one-third, try to have two servings a week.
Olive Oil	The monounsaturated fats lower bad cholesterol and can reduce your risk of developing heart disease. Try cooking your favorite holiday dishes with olive oil!
Nuts	Walnuts contain omega-3 fatty acids and almonds are loaded with mono and polyunsaturated fats. These are good fats and high in fiber. For healthier turkey dressings and piecrusts, incorporate these nuts instead of flour.
Berries	Blackberries, blueberries, strawberries and raspberries contain anti-inflammatories that reduce heart disease and cancer. All berries are great for vascular health.
Legumes	Lentils, chickpeas, black and kidney beans are packed with fiber, omega-3 fatty acids and calcium.
Spinach	Spinach contains lutein, folate, potassium and fiber. Try mixing it with your other favorite greens for a refreshing salad or add it to your favorite casserole.



WINTER BLUES?

The holidays are not always jolly for some of us. There is the stress of getting everything done in time, family issues, traveling and even a time of sadness. You might feel alone when everyone is in holiday cheer and happy spirits, but you are not alone. Depression is even more common among those with a chronic health condition. Luckily, there are ways to avoid holiday triggers that can make you sad.

- **Alcohol:** Alcohol is a depressant. When you are depressed, alcohol can actually make it worse. If you are prone to depression during the holiday season, try to limit your alcohol intake. Opt for non-alcoholic eggnog and sparkling grape juice instead of wine. Have a favorite wintery cocktail? Instead of adding alcohol, use sparkling water. If you happen to need help, seek your doctor. Your physician can refer you to many helpful resources.
- **Volunteer:** There is something about the holiday season that makes us want to give and help others less fortunate. Setting time aside during your hectic holiday schedule to volunteer around the community can bring comfort. Knowing that you are helping others may seem small, but can have a huge impact on the lives of others. Get involved with a soup kitchen or toy drive in your community.
- **Don't sweat the small stuff:** Make a list of the important things that need to be done first, and do not sweat the small stuff. So what if you don't get the lights on the roof by Dec. 20 or you couldn't find a certain ornament? We often let tradition rule our lives this time of year. Don't let the small stuff send you over the edge. Prioritize your checklist. If you feel overwhelmed or depressed, talk to your health care provider about getting help.

Breathe Easier



There are triggers in the fall that can make your asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) worse. Here are some tips to help you breathe easier:

- Visit your doctor regularly and ask him or her to perform a spirometry test. This simple breathing test can tell you and your doctor how well your treatment plan is working.

The Global Initiative for COPD recommends you get a spirometry test at least once a year to detect and treat declining lung function. The Global Initiative for COPD is an independent organization that provides health information on behalf of your health plan.

- Create a written action plan with your physician. This plan should include triggers, symptoms and recommended actions for you to take based on your symptoms.
- Take controller medications every day, as directed. These medicines prevent symptoms before they even begin.
- Quit smoking, or don't start.

Medical Center

Rx

Name _____

Address _____

Date _____

CHECK YOUR MEDICATIONS!

Your doctor may have prescribed Angiotensin-converting enzyme (ACE) inhibitor medication, angiotensin receptor blocker (ARB) medication, digoxin or diuretics to help keep your heart working its best. ACEs, ARBs, digoxin and diuretics require extra follow-up with your doctor to make sure these medicines are working the right way for your body.

If you take or have been on an ACE, ARB, digoxin or diuretic medication for six months or longer, it is recommended that you see your doctor to have a serum potassium and serum creatinine test performed. If you are on a digoxin, you may also need to have a digoxin test to monitor the concentration of the drug in your blood to make sure you are receiving the right dose for your condition.

The Doctor Is In:

Last week, after raking leaves all day, I noticed lower back pain. It has yet to feel any better. What should I do? How long should I wait before I see a doctor, and is an MRI always necessary for low back pain?

Lower back pain is a problem that affects two-thirds of adults. There are many different ways to help you manage it. For most individuals, back pain quickly improves with physical activity, heat therapy, over-the-counter medicines, changing sleep positions, massage, physical therapy and many other alternate treatments. The majority of people are back to their usual activities in 30 days.

For most people with lower back pain, diagnostic imaging (X-ray, CT scan or MRI) is usually unnecessary. It is important to remember that radiation has harmful effects that can add up over time, so avoid such unnecessary testing when you can. The National Physicians Alliance recommends against imaging for lower back pain within the first six weeks of pain onset unless certain symptoms are present. The National Physicians Alliance is an independent company that provides health information on behalf of your health plan. Talk with your doctor first to make sure that diagnostic imaging is right for you.





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