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# yale health care

NEWS FROM THE YALE HEALTH PLAN

VOL. X NO. 6

NOVEMBER–DECEMBER 2007

## Breathing easier is goal of asthma management

**A**sthma—the most common chronic illness in children—is an inflammatory disease of the airways. In patients with asthma, these airways respond to triggers and can result in wheezing, coughing, shortness of breath, difficulty talking or inability to exercise. Common triggers are environmental factors like pollen, ragweed, animal dander, and weather changes. Cigarette smoke, perfume, exercise and viral infections are additional possible triggers. Asthma tends to run in families, and exposure to pollution and airborne irritants makes it worse.

The number of people of all ages with asthma has doubled in the past 20 years. In urban areas, hospital emergency rooms are seeing more children with asthma than ever before; asthma leads to 2 million emergency room visits annually, as well as more than 10 million outpatient clinic visits.

The good news is that many effective treatments are available. Asthma medications fall into two primary categories: (1) long term control medications and (2) quick relief medications.



Long-term control medications include inhaled corticosteroids, which decrease airway inflammation and help prevent symptoms from occurring; they should be taken as prescribed, even if no symptoms are present. Quick relief medications are short-acting bronchodilators which relax muscles in the airways to relieve wheezing and make breathing easier at the time of an asthma attack.

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) has established guidelines for asthma treatment, guidelines which the YHP Pediatrics Department uses in working with families to provide the best possible care for children with asthma. Provision of this care has three facets: preventing asthma attacks,

## New CT scanner up and running

**C**omputed tomography, also called CT scan or CAT scan, (computerized axial tomography), is a combination of focused x-ray beams and computerized production of an image. The word “tomography” is derived from the Greek *tomos* (slice) and *graphein* (to write).

A CT scan can be used to study areas of the body, such as the chest, abdomen, and pelvis. It can also take pictures of an arm or leg and of internal organs such as the brain, liver, pancreas, intestines, kidneys, bladder, adrenal glands, lungs, and heart. It also can be used to study blood vessels, bones, and the spinal cord. An iodine contrast material given intravenously is sometimes used to make structures and organs easier to see on the CT pictures.

The scanner consists of a doughnut-shaped structure, or gantry, about two feet thick, through which the patient passes while lying down. The machine sends x-ray pulses through the part(s) of the body being examined. Each pulse lasts less than a second and takes a picture of a thin slice of an organ or area, 64 slices at a time.

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## ASTHMA

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recognizing symptoms when they occur, and initiating timely and appropriate treatment.

Tips for managing children's asthma include:

- Knowing and avoiding triggers. Older children with asthma can do this themselves.
- Being familiar with symptoms. These may include:
  - shortness of breath
  - coughing
  - nighttime coughing (a specific symptom of poorly-controlled asthma)
  - difficulty talking
  - breathing difficulty during exercise
- Keeping a diary of symptoms and informing the clinician of any patterns you notice.
- If the child is old enough to use a peak flow meter, keeping a peak flow diary in order to compare normal air flow with the changes during illness or an asthma attack.
- Knowing what medications your child is on and how best to use them.
- Having medications refilled promptly and always easily accessible at home and work and at school, camp and day care, and when visiting friends and family.

- Having a written asthma action plan, which should include a list of medications to be used daily and when the person is sick, as well as emergency steps to be taken if an attack is not subsiding. Copies of this plan for children should be given to the school and be easily accessible to baby sitters and other caregivers. You should review it periodically to update instructions or medications. Note also that Connecticut law requires that schools have written authorizations forms on file for each child who requires medications at school. You may obtain the forms from the Pediatrics Department.
- Getting regular checkups to review symptoms and medications.
- Getting flu shots since those with asthma are at higher risk for flu complications.
- Keeping the YHP phone numbers for regular and urgent care posted where they can be easily seen.

You can learn other important facts about managing asthma by visiting the Yale Health Plan website at <http://www.yale.edu/yhp/> and clicking Healthwise® for a library of health topics, resources and information.

Information for this article was provided by Jane Milberg, APRN, MSN, Pediatrics Department, and Darlene Ashford, Office of Population Health Management.

# in touch

## IMPORTANT TELEPHONE NUMBERS

<b>Urgent Care</b>	203-432-0123
<i>Open 24 hrs/day, seven days per week</i>	
<b>Toll free out of area</b>	1-877-YHP-CARE
<b>General information</b>	203-432-0246
<b>Pharmacy</b>	203-432-0033
Monday & Friday	8:00 AM-6:30 PM
Tuesday & Wednesday	8:00 AM-7:00 PM
Thursday	8:30 AM-6:30 PM
Saturday	8:30 AM-3:30 PM
<b>Patient Representative</b>	203-432-0109
<b>Medicare/Retiree Coordinator</b>	203-432-8134
<b>Outpatient referrals</b>	203-432-7397
<b>Claims</b>	203-432-0250
<b>Inpatient Care Facility</b>	203-432-0001

## ADDITIONAL ASTHMA FACTS

- Asthma affects over 20 million Americans, including nearly 6 million children.
- Asthma is the leading cause of school absenteeism due to a chronic condition, with an estimated 14 million school days missed each year because of asthma.
- Asthma is the third leading cause of hospitalization among children under age 15.
- Secondhand smoke can cause serious harm to children. Between 400,000 and one million asthmatic children have their conditions worsened by exposure to secondhand smoke.
- National data suggest that asthma prevalence rates are higher for younger children, low-income individuals and members of racial and ethnic minority groups.



## Sisters take asthma poster prizes



Yale Health Plan congratulates Cleo Junker and Iris Junker, winners of the first annual Living with Asthma poster contest. Iris who is five, and Cleo who is nine, attend school in New Haven, where they also live. Their parents, Andrew Junker and Cameron Gearen, have both been affiliated with Yale; Andrew is currently a graduate student in the Sociology Department.

The Living with Asthma poster contest was part of the World Asthma Month activities hosted by the Pediatrics Department to improve asthma awareness, education and management. The contest was open to YHP patients between the ages of 5-16 years.

Iris submitted a colorful poster showing asthma triggers and an asthma inhaler, while Cleo submitted an excellent cartoon drawing of a child having an asthma attack at school. Each child won a Yale sweatshirt and a stuffed toy Yale bulldog for her winning artwork. The posters are on display in the Pediatrics Department.



# from the desk of

PAUL GENECIN, MD

DIRECTOR, YALE UNIVERSITY HEALTH SERVICES

*One of YHP's strengths is that our members' primary health care and most of their specialty care needs are addressed under one roof.*

While many of our members have been with us for a number of years and are familiar with the clinical care and health coverage that distinguish YHP, I want to use this space to introduce new members to the many features of our organization that distinguish us from a simple clinic or a health insurance company.

One of YHP's strengths is that our members' primary health care and most of their specialty care needs are addressed under one roof. One-stop care is not only a convenience—it also improves quality-of-care and safety because of the care coordination possible in a multi-specialty practice.

Diverse clinicians, including primary care physicians, nurse practitioners, physician associates, nurse-midwives, consultants and many others work side-by-side and use the same electronic health record listing your medications, allergies and other vital health information. Through our unified medical record you can obtain accurate prescriptions and medication management without having to bounce between offices of independent providers, who often do not have matching information about your health history and current needs.

Another unique feature of YHP is our on-site around-the-clock clinician availability through Urgent Care. This service is a great comfort to a new parent whose infant has a fever at 2:00 am and it is an extraordinary resource for any member with an urgent or worrisome health problem occurring during evenings, weekends and holidays.

Those on other health plans must wait until morning or go to a hospital Emergency Department where waiting times are often many hours and where each visit generates a bill.

Many members are unfamiliar with our Inpatient Care Facility (ICF). With 24-hour physician and nursing presence, individualized care and rehabilitation services, we can deliver in a flexible and personalized setting many treatments that would otherwise require hospitalization. Also, nowadays, hospitalizations are so brief that patients may be discharged before they and/or their families are fully ready. In these situations, we often use our ICF as a transitional setting in which members continue to receive care until they are truly prepared to go home.

In addition to inpatient treatment, the ICF also houses our outpatient infusion center for intravenous medications, blood products, port access, and scheduled medication injections—all with flexible scheduling.

Also under the same roof: Our many on-site testing services—clinical laboratory, radiology (now including a state-of-the-art CT scanner), endoscopy—plus other ancillary services including our Pharmacy and our Physical Therapy Department.

One convenience that patients accustomed to other health plans are especially happy about at YHP is their freedom from bills, claims and insurance forms and insurance paperwork. Because your care is pre-paid, you do not see bills and do not need to reconcile the paperwork arising from each clinical visit with an insurance bureaucracy.

YHP is pro-active about helping sustain the health of our community. Besides offering most of your care under one roof, YHP visits work areas across the campus to offer health information, vaccinations and health screening for “silent” conditions such as diabetes mellitus, high blood pressure and elevated cholesterol. We will be doing nearly 100 such events this year alone! We also offer numerous programs in our facility.

I also want to remind you about information resources on the web, including the YHP Healthwise® Knowledgebase at [www.yale.edu/yhp/](http://www.yale.edu/yhp/). I also urge you to sign up to use Yale Health Online ([www.yalehealthonline.yale.edu/](http://www.yalehealthonline.yale.edu/)), which is a useful, convenient and secure way to communicate with your clinicians about test results and health concerns as well as to schedule appointments, arrange for prescription refills and the like. I hope that you will take full advantage of the many services and conveniences offered at YHP. As always, we are eager to hear your suggestions about how we can do an even better job.

By answering your questions, this column will help you get the most out of your YHP membership. Send your questions to: [member.services@yale.edu](mailto:member.services@yale.edu) and write “newsletter question” in the subject line.

# questions, answers

## Using the Pharmacy

Some guidelines for using YHP Pharmacy services. The Pharmacy phone number is 203.432.0033.

### Q. When does my benefit year start?

A. If you are retired your benefit year starts on January 1. If you are an employee your year starts on July 1. If you are a student your year starts on September 1.

### Q. I'm a new YHP member and have an existing prescription from another pharmacy. How do I fill it?

A. You have several options. (1) Your previous clinician can call us directly at 203-432-0033 or send us a fax (203-432-5485) of a written or printed prescription. (2) You can bring in a new written or printed prescription. (3) You can provide your previous clinician's name and phone number and your medication request to a YHP Pharmacy staff member; we will then contact your clinician for you. Please note that we do not accept transfer prescriptions from another pharmacy.

### Q. How do I fill a prescription for the first time?

A. When you come in with a written prescription or if you have just been seen by a YHP clinician who will be submitting a prescription for you, the first stop should be the drop-off window located across from the first-floor elevators.

Here a Pharmacy staff member will take in your prescription, confirm your electronic prescription order and check you in.

### Q. What is the best way to refill a prescription?

A. Use our automated touchtone refill system at 203-432-0033. By using the numbers on your prescription label, you can punch in your request 24 hours a day. A Pharmacy staff member will be glad to show you how to use this automated service.

### Q. How do I know how many refills I have left?

A. The number of remaining refills is printed on the bottom left of your prescription label.

### Q. How soon before a prescription runs out can I call in the refill?

A. Most prescriptions come with instructions about how long the medication is to be used. You should call three or four days before the prescription runs out to get a refill.

### Q. A family member who is on my YHP coverage has a prescription card from another insurance company. Can we use that card here?

A. That is called a third party prescription card and we are not able to process third-party prescription co-payments. These requests must be taken to a retail pharmacy.

### Q. Can a friend or family member pick up a prescription for me?

A. Yes. But you must call us first to give your permission and provide the name of the person picking up the medication. You can also pick up someone else's prescription if they call us first and give us your name.

### Q. How long do I have to pick up a prescription after it is filled?

A. Because of space constraints, we keep filled prescriptions for 10 days before they are returned to stock. After 10 days, the prescription must be reordered.

### Q. The medication I received at the YHP Pharmacy looks different from the brand I used to get. Why?

A. If we provide you with a generic brand, it may differ in color or shape but is the identical substance. Please feel free to contact our pharmacist if you have any questions.

### Q. What do I do if I am out of the area and need my prescription filled?

A. If you are out of town and without your medication, go to the nearest pharmacy and have them call us at 203-432-0033 to transfer your prescription. Note that you will have to pay the full price and submit a claim form with your receipt to the claims office for reimbursement. If you are out of refills the pharmacy might have to call your clinician for a new order and laws vary by state.

### Q. How do I get enough medication to take with me if I will be away?

A. Discuss your situation with your clinician, who can authorize a change in the amount of medication the Pharmacy will dispense. Make sure that you know exactly how to take the medication (i.e. with food or between meals, what time of day, etc.)

### Q. Does the Pharmacy stock non-prescription items?

A. Unfortunately, our space is very limited. We carry a small selection of over-the-counter items such as acetaminophen, ibuprofen, low dose aspirin and hydrocortisone cream.

Avoid waiting in line by picking up your prescriptions during our less busy times—early morning and mid-afternoon. The busiest times are lunch hour and after work.

## Fall? Asleep?

Allergy sufferers are much more likely to have sleep problems compared with other people, so fall's increased indoor and outdoor doses of dust, mold and pollen may be interfering with your sleep—a full 44 percent of allergy sufferers wake up feeling tired despite getting a full night's sleep, according to a study published last year in the Archives of Internal Medicine. Severe allergy sufferers are also much more likely to experience headaches, anxiety, and depression. If you suspect you have allergies, consult your clinician. In the meantime, here are some self-care tips that may help keep symptoms under control:



- Shower before bedtime to avoid bringing pollen to bed.
- Get a good-quality indoor air cleaner, and change or wash the filter at least once a month.
- Close your doors and windows and use forced air heat to keep pollen outside.
- Avoid hanging clothes to dry outside, where they can collect pollen.

# healthy ideas

## Safe driving in the grocery aisles

Nearly 24,000 kids wound up in emergency rooms in 2005 as a result of shopping-cart accidents. If possible, don't put your child in the front seat of the regular wire carts. They are designed with a high center of gravity and can easily tip over, even when a child is properly seated. Instead, look for carts with molded plastic seats attached (they may look like race cars). These carts are a bit bulky, but the seating is low to the ground, which makes them safer.



## Nuts to you!

Nuts are enjoying a resurgence in popularity since an impressive number of studies have substantiated their healthful properties. People who regularly eat nuts have half the risk of heart disease compared to those who rarely or never eat them. Regular consumption of many kinds of nuts has also been linked to a lower risk of Type 2 diabetes.

Nuts are rich in monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats, which can lower blood cholesterol, especially if substituted for foods high in saturated fat, such as meat or cheese. Some nuts, especially walnuts, are good sources of omega-3 fatty acids—the same type found in some fish—which help prevent platelets from sticking and smooth out abnormal heart rhythms.

Other nutrients found in nuts and peanuts that promote heart health include folate and other B-vitamins, copper, potassium, magnesium, vitamin E, and arginine (an amino acid that helps relax blood vessels). Nuts are also a good source of fiber. As nuts are high in fat, they do provide significant calories. To keep calorie intake in check, substitute nuts for other foods in your diet and buy them raw or dry-roasted. Also make sure to use unsalted nuts in order to avoid ingesting extra sodium.

# YHP staff

## Care Coordination Department adds case manager

**Elisabeth Reilly, MSN, APRN, CPNP,**



a pediatric nurse practitioner with over twenty years' experience, has joined YHP's Care Coordination Department as a case manager. Reilly received her MSN at

Yale School of Nursing and has worked as a pediatric nurse practitioner at Yale New Haven Hospital, the Timothy Dwight School-Based Health Center at the Hospital of St. Raphael, and St. Mary's Hospital in Waterbury. Reilly founded and directed the Cove Center for Grieving Children in New Haven and has done numerous presentations to both lay and professional audiences on issues including childhood grief, asthma and diabetes management in school settings, adolescent parenting, and developmental issues facing hospitalized children and adolescents.

## New PA will serve two departments

**Kenneth Watkins, PA-C,** has joined the YHP Student Medicine and Employee Health Departments. He began his professional life as a medical laboratory



technician, and later graduated from the Yale School of Medicine's Physician Associate program. Prior to coming to YHP, Watkins worked in Employee Medical Services for the Pitney-

Bowes corporation in Shelton and as a family practice PA at community-based clinics in Ansonia and New Haven.

# information



## DIABETES: BE AWARE, TAKE CARE



November is National Diabetes Awareness Month. Diabetes currently affects nearly 21 million Americans—about 7

percent of the population. Following the screening, testing and treatment guidelines of the American Diabetes Association can help people with diabetes live longer, healthier lives and avoid the serious consequences that can result from the disease—including vision loss,

amputation, heart attacks and kidney failure. To help YHP members with diabetes obtain the care they need, we have been sending reminders to those who are due for the following services:

- A dilated retinal eye exam should be performed at least once a year. Diabetic retinopathy is the leading cause of blindness in working-age Americans. However, early detection and treatment can preserve your eyesight.
- A hemoglobin A1c (HbA1c) test should be performed at least two-four times annually. This blood test measures blood sugar control over the past 90 days and is the most important test for monitoring diabetes.
- LDL cholesterol should be checked at least once a year. Cholesterol numbers indicate the amount of fat in the blood and provide information about heart attack risk.
- A urine protein/microalbumin test should be done at least annually to check for diabetic kidney damage.

Additionally, if you have diabetes and have not seen your clinician in the past six months, please schedule an appointment to review your current health status.

## YALE HEALTH ONLINE— AS CLOSE AS YOUR COMPUTER

YHP members can have their health-related questions answered promptly and easily by registering with Yale Health Online, a secure electronic communication portal that connects members directly to their health care providers. The “Front Desk” allows members to request, cancel or reschedule appointments and to update personal information. The “Consultation Room” can be used to post secure non-emergency messages to their health care team, including requests for medication information and test results.

Using Yale Health Online is simple and confidential; unlike regular email, this web-based system is totally secure and is fully HIPAA-compliant. Best of all you can ask questions and receive responses anywhere and any time you can log onto a computer. Many of the members who already use this service have commented on its simplicity and convenience.

To register, or for a guest visit, go to the Yale Health Online web site: [www.yalehealthonline.yale.edu](http://www.yalehealthonline.yale.edu). Questions? Call our Member Services Department at 203-432-0246.

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## Winter holiday recess hours

YHP clinical services will be available as follows during the winter recess:

- Monday, December 24** closed  
**Tuesday, December 25** closed  
**Wednesday, December 26** clinics open 8:30-5:00 with reduced staffing  
**Thursday, December 27** clinics open 8:30-5:00 with reduced staffing  
**Friday, December 28** clinics open 8:30-5:00 with reduced staffing  
**Monday, December 31** closed  
**Tuesday, January 1** closed

Pharmacy hours will be as follows:

- Monday, December 24** 8:30-2:30  
**Tuesday, December 25** closed  
**Wednesday–Friday, December 26–28**  
8:30-5:30  
**Saturday, December 29** 8:30-3:30  
**Monday, December 31** 8:30-2:30  
**Tuesday, January 1** closed

Urgent Care and the ICF will remain on their regular round-the-clock schedules during recess.



# New in town?

## Translation service smoothes access to care

Rhea Hirshman, editor

Imagine yourself in a foreign country, beginning to learn the language. One day you wake up feeling a little under the weather. Uh oh. How do you say “under the weather” in your new host country? For that matter, how do you say, “My ears are stuffed up and my stomach doesn’t feel so great either”?

Such situations are bound to occur at a place like Yale. With its population of students, faculty and staff from six continents, the Yale community is an international one. And even for persons fluent in English as their second (or third or fourth!) language, explaining to a health care provider the details of how and where it hurts can feel daunting.

To provide the best possible care, we have partnered with CyraCom International to provide interpretation services, which

can be delivered over-the-phone in 150 languages, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. When a translation between English and another language is needed, YHP staff can quickly access the service through dual-handset telephones which put the caregiver, patient and interpreter on the line at the same time. Handsets are located in departments throughout YHP and at our business office at 55 Whitney Avenue. To protect privacy, sets are located away from public areas.

In addition to being able to use the translation service during an appointment, patients who would like to be able to use it on an ongoing basis can obtain a card from Member Services. This card can be presented at the time of a visit to let staff know that the patient wishes to use the service.

Since its inception in April of 2004, the translation service has helped facilitate clinical encounters for speakers of Chinese (several dialects), French, Hebrew, Hindi, Korean, Russian, Slovak, Spanish and Turkish. Requests for translation have come through Internal Medicine, Urgent Care, Ob/Gyn, Student Medicine, Surgical Specialties and Dermatology.

Also, two important pieces of patient information—one concerning advance directives and the other outlining patient rights and responsibilities—have been translated into Mandarin Chinese, French and Spanish and are available around the building and through Member Services.

# Hello...Ciao...Hola...Bonjour...Olá...你好...Heil

## SCANNING

*continued from page 1*

The information passes to a computer which then produces a picture of the internal body structure. The pictures are displayed on a screen and are read and interpreted by the radiologist, who will send the report to your clinician(s). While many tissues can be better differentiated with a CT scan than on standard xrays, patients should also be aware that CT scanning requires more radiation exposure, so talk with your clinician about the benefits and risks, as you would for any diagnostic test.



*Pictured above is our on-site CT (computed tomography) scanner, installed in August, allowing most of our members who need this diagnostic test to have it done here in the YUHS building. As always, CT scans and other diagnostic procedures are undertaken by clinician referral. If you are to be scheduled for a CT scan, you will receive a call from the Radiology Department with preparation instructions. (Please note that some specific conditions may necessitate CT scanning in a hospital setting; your clinician will advise you.)*



## From the Pharmacy

### Moving meds across the pond

You're new to Yale—just arrived from your hometown far across the sea and have settled into your new home. You've unpacked your belongings and are ready to embark on this phase of your education or career. Everything is going splendidly until you realize that the medication you have been taking from your native country is about to run out.



The clinical pharmacist team at the YHP Pharmacy can help. Clinical pharmacists and clinicians work with our members from overseas to find

equivalent or substitute medications that will provide the same benefits as the medications they were taking in their home countries.

A clinical pharmacist can research your original medication and can often find an equivalent product for your clinician to order for you. This research is usually done on websites that specialize in foreign medications. Many drug companies are global and produce the same medications in all parts of the world under different trade names;

the exact same medication that you were taking at home may be available in the United States but sold under a different name.

However, sometimes a medication that is available overseas is not available in the United States. If that is the case, the pharmacist will research other medications and provide a recommendation to your clinician for something similar.

The clinician will order a small quantity for you to try to determine the medication's effectiveness. If it works well, it would become your replacement medication. Every person is unique, so sometimes several medications may be tried before the right one is found and you can continue taking it.

Pharmacists now have research options previously unavailable. Identifying and comparing medications—a task that once took long hours of research through reference books and telephone calls to different companies—can now be done in a fraction of the time it once took. If you have any questions about your medications, our pharmacists are here to help. Call 203-432-0033.

## Flee the flu

This year, flu shots are available at sites around campus. Remaining dates for flu shots (all locations are in New Haven):

### Tuesday, November 13th

11:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.  
Divinity School Common Room,  
409 Prospect Street

### Wednesday, November 14th

9:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.  
Ingalls Rink, 73 Sachem Street

### Wednesday, November 14th

4:00 p.m.–7:00 p.m.  
YUHS building, room 464

### Thursday, November 15th

9:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.  
Ingalls Rink, 73 Sachem Street

### Tuesday, November 27th

11:00 a.m.–2:00 p.m.  
Human Resources, 155 Whitney Avenue

### Wednesday, December 12th

11:00 a.m.–3:00 p.m.  
Woolsey Hall, 500 College Street

Questions or comments about the newsletter? We'd like to hear from you. Drop a note to [member.services@yale.edu](mailto:member.services@yale.edu) and put "newsletter" in the subject line.

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