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NEWS FROM THE YALE HEALTH PLAN

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Spring's the Season for Lunchtime Walks

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Editor



Walking is an excellent way to improve physical fitness. Regular walking increases energy levels, improves sleep, builds stamina and perks up your mental outlook. It requires no special training—although you should adhere to some common-sense precautions as noted below. And the only equipment needed is a good pair of walking shoes.

When you choose the shoes, make sure that your heel is $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ " higher than the ball of your foot for support. Also, don't wear the shoes down too far before getting another pair. Your feet absorb a tremendous amount of impact and they need cushioning and support. Better still, have two or three pair of shoes that you can rotate.

Many people walk on their lunch hours as the weather improves. Just make sure that you don't substitute walking for eating, as frequent skipping of meals can actually inhibit weight loss.

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Many Medication Options for Allergy Sufferers

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Clinical Pharmacist

Allergic rhinitis, the most widespread allergic disorder, affects an estimated 20 to 40 million individuals in the United States annually including 10% to 30% of adults and up to 40% of children. Commonly called hay fever, allergic rhinitis is an inflammation or irritation of the mucous membranes lining the nose. Symptoms include: sneezing; a stuffy or runny nose; itchy eyes, nose and throat; and watery eyes. While there is no complete cure, many treatments are available to provide symptomatic relief and to improve functioning.

The best treatment for any allergy is to avoid the allergen. When this is not possible—as is the case with substances such as pollen—medication can usually control the symptoms. Although a number of effective medications are available by prescription, many allergy sufferers will seek relief with over-the-counter (OTC) medications. Patients should try these first for mild-to-moderate allergic rhinitis symptoms but be aware of potential side effects of these medications, including sleepiness, impaired coordination and slowing of reaction time.

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LUNCH TIME WALKS

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When you don't eat regularly the body thinks it's starving and slows down the metabolism. Instead, eat half your lunch, go for a walk and then eat the other half when you return. And don't stop for snacks on your walk; doing so will interrupt your rhythm.

Of course, a leisurely stroll, while it is better than no exercise at all, will not provide much of a workout. In order to get a workout from your walk, you need to pay attention to distance and pace.

When walking for exercise don't stroll or stop. Identify a middle portion of your route where you can comfortably pick up the speed to the point where you would not be able to talk for one block. Then drop down the speed again to where you could converse comfortably while keeping a steady pace. Your pace should work up in speed gradually as you begin your walk and then slow down for the last 3–5 minutes as a cool-down before arriving at your destination.

If you haven't exercised in a while, start with a shorter route—one that will take you about 15 minutes to accomplish at the pace described above—and then increase speed. When you cannot walk any faster for that distance, slow down your speed slightly while increasing your distance by adding another route. Changing routes also reduces the chance of boredom.

If you want to walk around Yale, you'll find on this page some routes with measured mileage. You can use a pedometer to assist in counting your steps (approximately 2,500 steps equal a mile) or you can follow pre-measured grids or maps to assist you in calculating miles.

Some additional tips:

- Walking with a friend or colleague can help you stay committed.
- Another good motivator is a walking diary where you record your distance, time, and any observations of your surroundings.
- If you are just starting out, commit to walking on three days a week for the first month and five times a week from then on.

Important telephone numbers

Urgent Care	432-0123
<i>Open 24 hrs/day, seven days per week</i>	
Toll Free	1-877-YHP-CARE
Information	432-0246
Pharmacy	432-0033
<i>Hours of operation</i>	
Monday, Friday	8:00 AM–6:30 PM
Tuesday, Wednesday	8:00 AM–6:45 PM
Thursday	8:30 AM–6:30 PM
Saturday	8:30 AM–3:30 PM
Patient Representative	432-0109
Medicare/Retiree Coordinator	432-8134
Outpatient Referrals	432-7397
Claims	432-0250
Inpatient Care Facility	432-0001

in touch

- Never walk alone at night or in areas where you feel uncomfortable.
- Use smooth, long strides but don't exaggerate your steps and strain your hips and back. Walk with head up straight and forward and with your shoulders relaxed. Put your ID and keys in your pocket and carry nothing in your arms. Use a small waist pack if you don't have pockets.
- Make sure to warm up.

Inside warm-up exercise: Sit on a chair, bend your knees one at a time and bring the knee to your chest. Hold as you count to ten. This helps to stretch your lower back. Repeat 3–5 times for each knee.

Outdoor warm-up exercise: Stand with your feet at shoulder width. Extend your arms alternately over your head and reach as high as possible, again holding for a count of 10 for each arm. Repeat 3–5 times. This will help stretch your upper back and relax your shoulders.

If you have health concerns or are over the age of 50 and have been sedentary, consult with your clinician before starting a physical activity program. If you experience dizziness, shortness of breath or chest tightness when walking or exerting yourself in any manner, stop immediately and consult your clinician.

Walking routes in the vicinity of Yale and downtown New Haven

Route	Approximate Mileage
Walk around the New Haven Green Start at Phelps Gate on Old Campus, walking around outside perimeter of the New Haven Green	.75 mile
Start at Commons (corner of Grove and Prospect)	
Left (west) on Grove to Broadway	.35 mile
Left (east) down Broadway to York	.5 mile
Straight down Elm to Battell Chapel	.65 mile
Left (north) on College back to Commons	.85 mile
Walking the length of Hillhouse from Grove to Sacher and back	1.0 mile
Starting on the Green at the corner of Elm and Church	
North on Church to intersection with Trumbull	.4 mile
Left (west) onto Trumbull to Hillhouse. Take a right (north) on Hillhouse to right onto Sacher St	.7 mile
Take a right onto Whitney (becomes Church St) back to the Green	1.25 mile



from the desk of

PAUL GENECCIN, MD

DIRECTOR, YALE UNIVERSITY HEALTH SERVICES

In my frequent walks through the clinics and public areas in Yale Health Plan, I have been observing that we are noticeably busier now than we were just a couple of years ago.

I have done some research that supports my observations. Here are just a few examples of increased clinical activity between 2002 and the beginning of 2004:

- In 2002, our Pharmacy filled a daily average of 500 prescriptions and, on a busy day, filled 650. Today the average is 700, and our hardworking Pharmacy staff frequently fill 1000 prescriptions in a day.
- The Allergy Clinic saw an average of 200 patients a month in 2002; today we see 350.
- The Laboratory performed 1000 tests monthly in 2002; the number is now 3000 per month.
- The volume of patient visits in Student Medicine has grown from 1100 per month in 2002 to nearly 2000 now.
- The number of telephone calls on an average Monday in Internal Medicine is now over 600, compared with fewer than 400 in 2002.

Although member enrollment has steadily increased since YHP's founding in 1971, that increase does not account fully for the increase in demand for services. Nor is Yale Health Plan alone; surveys of other health plans reveal the same phenomenon.

I see a direct correlation between how busy we are and how effective we are in disease prevention, early detection and treatment. Compared with the past, we can now offer much more to patients in all these areas.

Several explanations come to mind. The first is that we actively encourage our members to use our services in innovative ways. The breast cancer and cervical cancer screening initiatives in Obstetrics/Gynecology are perfect examples; we have succeeded in reaching unprecedented quality improvement goals through these activities but of course, they require thousands of visits. Our stepped-up implementation of clinical care guidelines in Pediatrics, Internal Medicine and other departments is also bringing in patients—for instance, those with diabetes, cardiovascular problems, hypertension and high cholesterol—who may have visited YHP less often in the past.

A national epidemic of allergic disease, with approximately 20% growth per year, accounts for the increase in activity in the Allergy Clinic; similar situations pertain in other clinics. Increases in the number and variety of laboratory tests and pharmaceutical products available result in more activity in these areas. In addition, this has been a banner year for respiratory ailments, with more flu, colds, bronchitis and asthma than during any year in recent memory.

I see a direct correlation between how busy we are and how effective we are in disease prevention, early detection and treatment. Compared with the past, we can now offer much more to patients in all these areas. Using the flu as an example: as busy as we were with 12,000 flu shots last fall, this year's severe epidemic should prompt even more people to seek the vaccine next year. Likewise, I hope that more of our members will avail themselves of our screening programs in order to help avoid preventable illnesses.

Finally, I urge you to take advantage of programs and systems that make YHP more convenient. Try our new early morning and evening clinic hours. Use the Pharmacy's automated phone system for refills (203-432-0033) and come in to pick up your prescriptions at less busy times such as early mornings. I recommend that you register for Yale Health Online. As an enthusiastic user, I rarely need to use the telephone to contact my internist, schedule an appointment or obtain test results. Those of us who use this system communicate confidentially and conveniently on-line, bypassing the busy telephone system. It helps us serve you better.

MEDICATION OPTIONS FOR ALLERGY SUFFERERS

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Antihistamines are the most commonly prescribed medications for the treatment of allergic rhinitis, with dozens of options available. Antihistamines counter the effects of histamine, the irritating chemical released within your body when an allergic reaction takes place.



Antihistamines are generally categorized as sedating—including diphenhydramine (Benadryl), chlorpheniramine (Chlor-Trimeton)—and non-sedating; these include fexofenadine (Allegra), loratadine (Claritin, Alavert). Recently, loratadine (Claritin, Alavert) became available in the United States without a prescription. A starter supply of Alavert 10mg tablets is provided in the allergy care kit available to YHP members from their YHP clinicians and additional supplies can be purchased without a prescription at the YHP Pharmacy or any retail pharmacy.

Oral and nasal decongestants are also available without a prescription to help relieve the stuffiness and pressure caused by swollen nasal tissue. However, decongestants do not relieve the other symptoms of allergic rhinitis, such as runny nose, post-nasal drip and sneezing. Decongestants such as pseudoephedrine (Sudafed) and oxymetazoline (Afrin) are often used in combination with antihistamines or other medications to treat allergic rhinitis. A starter supply of pseudoephedrine is also provided in the allergy care kit. Decongestant nasal sprays such as oxymetazoline (Afrin) work within minutes and last for hours, but should not be used for more than 3–5 days.

Saline nasal spray is also available without a prescription and can help counteract symptoms of dry nasal passages or thick nasal mucus. Unlike decongestant sprays, a saline spray can be used as often as needed. A bottle of saline nasal spray is supplied in the allergy care kit.

Treatment of allergic rhinitis must be individualized based on the frequency, severity and duration of symptoms, on the degree of allergic sensitivity, and on how an individual reacts to specific medications. For instance oral decongestants may cause reactions such as difficulty falling asleep, appetite loss and irritability. Decongestants may also cause significant cardiac stimulation, and should be avoided in patients with unstable hypertension, and used only with caution in patients with cardiac arrhythmias or ischemic heart disease. They may also cause urinary retention in patients with any form of bladder outlet obstruction.

For mild-to-moderate intermittent allergic reactions, OTC medications are available to control most if not all symptoms. Patients with moderate to severe symptoms that last more than one or two weeks despite treatments with OTC medications may require multiple medications, including prescription drug therapy.

Yale Health Online We make mouse calls

www.yalehealthonline.yale.edu



Rather not play telephone tag?

Then sign up for **Yale Health Online**—an electronic medical communication service tailored to the needs of Yale Health Plan members.

Through this interactive web site you can communicate about a range of non-urgent matters, such as:

- requesting, canceling or rescheduling appointments;
- requesting demographic changes (i.e. changing a phone number);
- requesting medication information;
- leaving non-emergency messages (such as requests for test results);
- sending non-emergency messages to clinicians caring for you who participate in this service with:
 - › requests for test results

- › questions about clinical issues
- › communicating about a new medication or a concern you have discussed.

When a request has been processed, you will receive notification at your regular email address, alerting you to log onto **Yale Health Online** where you can see the outcome of your request. The process is simple and confidential, and this web-based system is totally secure. Best of all you can ask questions and receive responses totally at your convenience, wherever you can log onto a computer.

Our clinicians are enthusiastic about the capacity of **Yale Health Online** to enhance routine communication with patients. Sign up, and you will be, too.

To register, or for a guest visit, go to the **Yale Health Online** web site: www.yalehealthonline.yale.edu. Questions? Call Member Services at 203.432.0246.



Dietary Fiber Supports Good Health

Fiber has been recognized for decades as an important dietary component for its role in healthy digestive function. Eating an adequate amount of fiber can help to prevent constipation, hemorrhoids, and diverticulosis. More recently, research has been done on fiber's potential to have a protective role in preventing health problems such as heart disease; it is also currently under study for a preventive effect against type 2 diabetes and certain types of cancers.

Fiber is found only in plant products—fruits, vegetables, legumes and grains. The two main types of dietary fiber are soluble and insoluble.

Soluble fiber forms a gel when mixed with liquid, while insoluble fiber passes through the digestive tract largely intact. Both types of fiber help to maintain regularity. Soluble fiber has some additional health benefits, such as helping to maintain healthy blood cholesterol levels, which may reduce the risk of heart disease. Soluble fiber is found in oats, beans, some fruits and vegetables (including apples, oranges, and carrots), and psyllium. Psyllium, is a grain found in some cereal products, in certain dietary supplements, and in some bulk laxatives. Psyllium seeds may also be found at health food stores, and can be mixed into yogurt or other foods.

Insoluble fiber holds on to water, although it does not dissolve, and adds bulk to stools, decreasing transit time and promoting regularity. Insoluble fiber is found in whole wheat products, wheat and corn bran, and many vegetables such as cauliflower, green beans and potatoes, as well as in the skins of fruits and root vegetables.

The recommended fiber intake for adults is 21–38 grams total fiber per day, while the typical American diet supplies only 10–15 grams per day. For children older than 2, the recommendation is to increase dietary fiber intake to an amount equal to or slightly greater than their age plus 5 grams per day to achieve intakes of 25 to 35 grams per day after the age of 20. For example: a 10 year old should eat about $10 + 5 = 15$ grams of fiber. Maximum intake should be no more than the child's age + 10; in other words, no more than 20 grams of fiber for the 10 year old.

To increase total fiber intake, choose a diet high in fruits and vegetables, legumes, and whole grains including whole grain breads and cereals. Recent studies suggest that an intake of 5–10 grams of soluble fiber per day can reduce LDL cholesterol (bad cholesterol) by about 5%. See the list for foods and serving sizes that provide at least 2 grams of soluble fiber.

CHOLESTEROL: THE GOOD, THE BAD

Two components of blood cholesterol number are HDL (“good” cholesterol) and LDL (“bad” cholesterol). HDL, or high-density lipoprotein, seems to take excess cholesterol from the blood vessels and deposit it in the liver. LDL, or low-density lipoprotein, stays in the blood vessels, contributing to atherosclerotic plaques, the substance that causes blood vessel blockages. These blockages can contribute to heart attacks and strokes. A healthy total cholesterol reading should be 200 or less.

EATING? TAKE YOUR TIME

Despite their love of cheese and other high-calorie foods, the French have markedly lower obesity rates than do Americans. While one factor may be that the French are less sedentary, another may be the time they typically spend eating. Not only do the French eat smaller portions, but they also spend more time eating each meal than Americans do. The relationship to weight gain? Eating more slowly may help trigger feelings of fullness before you overeat; the brain takes several minutes to register the fullness sensation.

Soluble Fiber

- 1 cup of cooked oatmeal
- 1 cup of oat bran
- 1 cup of cooked rye cereal
- 1 cup of barley
- 1/2 avocado
- 1 cup of broccoli
- 1 cup of Brussels sprouts
- 1 cup of carrots
- 1 cup of collard greens
- 1 cup of parsnips
- 1 large sweet potato
- 1 cup cooked beans
- 1 cup split peas
- 1 cup lentils
- 1/2 cup dried apricots or figs
- 6 prunes
- 1/4 cup ground flax seeds
- 1/2 cup of sunflower seeds
- 1/3 cup Bran Buds™ cereal

information

PEDIATRIC PHYSICALS NEEDED FOR SCHOOL, CAMP, DAYCARE

Connecticut schools require a physical exam; most schools will accept a physical exam done any time after January 1 of the year that the child is entering. Daycare and after school programs require these exams, many summer camps require a physical exam within the previous 12 months for a child to enroll, and many sports programs have similar requirements.

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If you know your child will be attending camp or entering school or day care, please schedule these exams three to four months in advance so we may update all necessary information, and try to avoid the busier months of May, June, August and September. Call the Pediatrics Department at 203-432-0206 for an appointment.

TRAFFIC ON HILLHOUSE AVENUE

To facilitate access to the construction site across from the Yale Health Services Building, the City Of New Haven has implemented some changes in traffic and parking patterns on Hillhouse Avenue.

- A small portion of the street is now two-way.
- A barrier has been erected to allow easier truck access.
- Several parking spaces have been eliminated.
- A traffic light has been installed at the corner of Hillhouse and Trumbull.

These changes have meant traffic backups on Hillhouse at certain times of the day—particularly the later mornings—and therefore difficulty in getting to the YUHS parking lot. While the construction is underway, you can avoid the delays by:

- Using parking lot #37 on Trumbull Street, completely avoiding Hillhouse.
- Taking the Yale shuttle if you are traveling from a campus location. Schedules and information are available at <http://www.yale.edu/work/departments.html>
- Walking, if possible.

If you do need to travel by car, please allow yourself extra time to find parking.

BLOOD DONATIONS NEEDED

Partly as a result of the winter weather, many areas of the country are experiencing shortages of donated blood. The American Red Cross notes that blood has a shelf life of only 42 days, so supplies need constant replenishing. Each donor makes a difference. More than 38,000 blood donations are used every day in the United States. Every two seconds, someone in the U.S. needs blood and just one unit of blood can help save as many as three lives.

Donors must be at least 17 and weigh at least 110 pounds. Donors can give blood every 56 days, or about six times a year. Eligible donors should call the Red Cross (800-448-3543) to make an appointment to give blood or to find the location of the nearest blood drive.

WORK TOGETHER, WALK TOGETHER

Time again for the annual spring walking program co-sponsored by the YUHS Office of Health Promotion and Education and the Yale Department of Athletics. The progressive distance walk, now in its 17th year, meets on Tuesdays and Thursdays from March 23 to April 22—rain or shine. The group leaves from the front of YUHS, 17 Hillhouse Avenue at 12:10 pm and is led by Larry Matthews, Associate Director of Sports and Recreation, Payne Whitney Gymnasium. Sessions are free and open to the entire Yale community. Participants are encouraged to walk at their own pace. Comfortable walking shoes are recommended. No registration is required. You are encouraged to join the program with a friend or colleague to increase your motivation. Bring your whole department! For more information call the Office of Health Promotion and Education at 203-432-1892.



SLEEP IS YOUR FRIEND

The old expression “I’ll sleep on it” seems to have scientific validity. Our brains appear to continue working on problems even after we have gone to sleep. In one recent study, one group of people was allowed to sleep for eight hours before tackling a specific problem. Upon returning to the problem, the sleepers were almost three times as likely as the non-sleepers to find a solution.

In another study, people trained to perform a task had a better performance on tests of the new skill after a night’s sleep, compared to testing after several hours awake. Researchers speculate that sleep may help with the process of consolidating and storing memories. A recent article from the journal *Nature* notes that sleep may help restructure memories before they are stored and that this restructuring may enhance creativity.



KEEP YOUR MIND YOUNG

Our minds need exercise as much as our bodies do. Intellectual activities help keep the middle-aged mind sharp. Compared to people who preferred activities such as gardening or household tasks, at least one study has shown that people who regularly engaged in cognitively complex leisure time pursuits stayed sharper as they aged. These pursuits included attending cultural events, taking classes, doing puzzles—anything that engages the brain.



Plan Ahead for Travel Abroad

The YUHS Travel Clinic offers immunizations, medications and travel advice for those working at or affiliated with Yale University. You do not have to be a Yale Health Plan member to use the clinic. Anyone planning an overseas trip, particularly to developing countries, should contact the clinic as soon as they know their plans to set up an appointment for a consultation and an immunization schedule. The clinic operates on a fee-for-service basis, and no referral is needed.

Please plan ahead. There are some naturally busy times of the year for traveling and you may not be able to get an appointment on short notice.

Some immunizations are also given in a series that requires several injections separated by several weeks. Two or three visits may be required to receive all of the vaccinations.

In addition to providing immunizations, clinic staff will advise you on avoiding health hazards specific to the area(s) you will be visiting, as well as on how to access medical facilities in those areas. You will also be able to obtain prescriptions (which can be filled at the YHP Pharmacy) for medications (such as antibiotics and anti-malarial drugs) which you can carry with you for “just-in-case” medical needs.

Call 203-432-0093 eight to ten weeks before departure to make an appointment. If you have to travel suddenly, you should still call the clinic to receive advice and prepare as much as possible.

healthy ideas

TIPS FOR ALLERGY SUFFERERS—INDOORS AND OUT

- The most common allergens to which people are exposed at home are dust mites, cockroaches, cat dander, and dog dander. Outdoors the culprits are pollens and molds.
- Allergic individuals should remove carpeting, which functions as a far too comfortable home for dust mites and can also hold mold. Keep upholstered furniture to a minimum for the same reasons.
- Use dust-proof casings over the mattress, box springs, and pillows and wash bed linens and blankets frequently in hot water with scent-free detergent.
- Maintain indoor relative humidity to below 50%.
- Use a HEPA air filter.
- Keep windows closed at night to prevent pollens or molds from drifting into the home. Close car windows when traveling.
- Reduce activities in early morning, when pollen is usually emitted.
- Avoid lawn mowing and leaf raking.
- Do not hang laundry out to dry as pollens and molds may collect in the fabric.

calendar

WEBSITES

Food safety stories—from mad cow disease to pesticide contamination—have been prominent in the news. Below are some web sites where you can do your own research on food safety issues.

<http://www.foodsafety.gov>

Has links to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA); Environmental Protection Agency (EPA); Centers for Disease Control (CDC), and Food Safety and Inspection Service as well as a search engine which will search through all four sites.

<http://www.cfsan.fda.gov>

Link for the Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition.

<http://www.healthfinder.gov>

Excellent site to search for all types of health-related information.

<http://www.navigator.tufts.edu>

Has good reputation for assisting people with evaluating nutrition websites.

Wellness Programs at YUHS

Blood Pressure Monitoring

The Office of Health Promotion and Education conducts blood pressure screenings on the 4th floor of YUHS on the first Tuesday of each month from 9:00 to 11:00 am and at many campus locations (consult the YHP website for dates and places) for YHP members who are not currently being treated for a blood pressure problem. Members who have been diagnosed and are under treatment for hypertension are monitored in the Internal Medicine Department (203-432-0038) by appointment (Monday through Friday, 8:30 am to 4:00 pm).

Adult CPR Classes

Adult CPR classes are held monthly. For information, call 203-432-1892.

Cancer Support Group

Life Options is a support group for adult YHP members diagnosed with cancer, regardless of type of cancer or stage of disease. The group meets weekly with a facilitator. There are three 15-week programs each year, and members can enroll in consecutive series of meetings. The group is partially funded by the Edith S. Hallo Fund and by a small weekly fee charged to each participant. To enroll or for more information, contact the facilitator, Naomi Panza, MSW, at 203-432-0290.

Obstetrics Programs

The Yale New Haven Hospital Wellness Center (688-WELL) offers early trimester prenatal classes for all new and expectant mothers and post partum reunion classes for those who have recently given birth. There is no charge for YHP members. Patients can register for either class at the YHP Ob/Gyn appointment desk or by calling 203-432-0222. Spouses and significant others are welcome to attend.

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Please remember that free parking for YHP members is available both in the lot right next to 17 Hillhouse Avenue and in parking lot 37, just across Trumbull Street.

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