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yale health care

NEWS FROM THE YALE HEALTH PLAN

VOL. IV NO. 2

MARCH – APRIL 2001

Welcome to our *yale health care* prevention issue, the first in an occasional series of issues with a specific focus on a topic of interest to our readers.

Preventing illness and injury – or, to look at it another way, enhancing health – encompasses activities which fall into two broad categories: (1) what we do as individuals in charge of our own choices; and (2) preventive health measures we take in partnership with our clinicians, such as immunizations, screenings, prompt evaluation of problems and disease management. The overlap between the two is also part of what this issue is about.

We welcome your feedback. If you would like to comment or if you have ideas for what you would like to see in future issues, please drop a note to *yale health care* at the address on the back or e-mail member.services@yale.edu with *yale health care* in the subject line.



appointment time

Here are some tips to help you get the most out of the time you spend with your clinician.

Making and getting to your appointment:

- Leave time for parking.
- If you are bringing a child in for an appointment, especially in winter, allow time for removing the child's outerwear.
- Don't overschedule by making appointments at close intervals (one department at 3:00, another at 3:20).
- Please call if you're going to be late or if you have to cancel.

During the appointment:

- Do try to have a clear sense of what you need during the appointment, and communicate it.
- Do remember that your clinician wants to know what's on your mind.
- Do ask the most pressing questions at the beginning of the visit.
- Do ask about follow-up appointments, follow-up phone calls, and getting test results.



- Do come in with a list. Jotting down symptoms, medical history, concerns and questions helps to focus the appointment. The more information you can bring with you, the better.
- Do write down and keep your personal medical history and as much family medical history as you can learn.
- Don't be afraid that the clinician will make judgments about your circumstances. Being up front is the best way to receive the most appropriate care.
- Do speak up if a question seems intrusive, but also do remember that a clinician needs information in order to figure out what course(s) of action will be most helpful to you (medications, lab tests and so on).
- Do remember that YHP has a firm and clear confidentiality policy.
- Do let your clinician know in advance if there is some aspect of an exam or treatment that you are particularly anxious about.
- Do remember that all clinicians are also patients.

Rhea Hirshman, Editor

Important telephone numbers

in touch

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	7:30 AM–6:30 PM
Saturday	8:30 AM–3:30 PM
Patient Representative	432-0109
Medicare/Retiree Coordinator	432-8134
Outpatient Referrals/Claims	432-0250
Inpatient Care Facility	432-0001



“For dry, itchy, winter skin: Towards the end of showering apply a liberal amount of bath oil and rinse off gradually with tepid water. Pat dry with towel – do not rub. This procedure will help your skin absorb needed moisture.”

Brenda Breault, RN
Clinical Manager, Dermatology

adult immunizations

Recently, the federal Centers for Disease Control noted that nationwide adult immunization rates are not at acceptable levels.

While there tends to be emphasis on childhood immunizations, it is also important for adults to receive certain immunizations and to be aware of their immunization status for diseases. All of these immunizations have very few side effects.

Tetanus shots should be renewed every ten years for everyone. If your immunization has lapsed and you receive an injury which may put you at risk for tetanus, immunization within 72 hours after the injury will protect you. If you are not sure whether you had the primary series as a child, contact your clinician.

Influenza vaccinations should be taken by: those 65+; anyone with a chronic disease such as diabetes, chronic heart/lung disease or kidney disease; anyone whose immune system is suppressed; health care workers.

Pneumovax offers protection from pneumonia and should be taken by those 65+ as well as by those with disorders of the spleen and anyone with any of the chronic health problems listed above. It is given at least once, and your clinician may recommend revaccination at five-year intervals.

“I have a tip for migraine sufferers. I find that, in addition to taking my prescribed medication, using an over-the-counter vapor rub on the areas where the pain occurs helps give additional relief.”

Carol Ursini
Finance

Whether or not you have been vaccinated in childhood for the diseases below depends on your age. For instance, if you were born before 1956 you are considered to be immune from measles, mumps and rubella.

Hepatitis B is a preventable viral illness which may go undetected for years and turn into a chronic and even fatal disease. Immunity through vaccination must take place before exposure occurs. It is mandated for health care workers and others who may be exposed to blood or waste products.

Measles, mumps and rubella (“German” measles) shots are required by all schools and colleges. It is particularly important for women of childbearing age to be immune before conceiving. Consult your clinician about your immune status if you are uncertain about whether you received these vaccines.

Ravi Durvasula, MD
Medical Director

Ellen Budris, RN, MSN
Health Promotion & Education

patient/clinician partnering



All good health care requires partnership between the patient and the clinician.

Managing diabetes provides a clear example of how such a partnership works in improving health and treating the whole person. The “epidemic of diabetes” has received much press recently and diabetes is one of the most common chronic medical problems treated in YHP’s Department of Internal Medicine.

Diabetes, a disease in which the body cannot properly regulate the level of sugar in the blood, puts an individual at risk for serious complications including heart attacks, strokes, blindness, kidney failure and poor circulation. While its complications can be serious and diabetes cannot be “cured,” very effective treatments are now available and the disease can be successfully managed with a combination of lifestyle changes and clinical care.

A diagnosis of diabetes may mean significant lifestyle changes and requires consciousness about how daily activities affect health. Below are some examples of combining self care with clinical care in monitoring and treating the disease.

- Lose weight or maintain ideal weight through exercise and dietary changes. Control carbohydrate intake. Your clinician can help with information geared to your specific needs.
- Learn to check your blood sugar with a glucometer, and record the results, which your clinician will interpret and discuss with you. Make appointments for urinalysis, blood pressure checks and regular blood tests which your clinician must obtain.

- Keep aware of general health, and have regular visits for diabetic eye exams and for foot exams to check for nerve injury, circulation problems and infection.
- Medications are prescribed based on the underlying problem and should be taken as directed. There are different oral medications which increase pancreatic insulin secretion, which decrease glucose production by the liver, and which increase sensitivity of the tissues to the effects of insulin. If these are not effective, insulin injections may be needed.
- If you are a smoker, your clinician can suggest ways to help you quit.

YHP members with diabetes also have a variety of resources to help with diabetes management, including nutritional counseling and diabetes education services and materials. YHP is also currently investigating strategies to better educate our members, and using our information resources to help in tracking key measures of diabetes control. We are also working with the Yale University School of Medicine on cutting-edge research programs. All of these activities mean optimum care for those with diabetes, and provide a paradigm for health care partnerships.

David Smith, MD
Chief, Internal Medicine
Rhea Hirshman, Editor

“With a family history of diabetes I have to pay attention to my weight. So now I say “diabetes” whenever I look at food that I shouldn’t eat. Also I walk at least 20 minutes a day. Sometimes I have to force myself out the door, but I’m always glad I went.”

Marian Katz
Transcription



prevention 1,2,3

Staying as healthy as possible involves a variety of prevention strategies.

While “health” and “wellness” are subjective and relative terms, many people view wellness on a continuum from severe or terminal illness, to no discernible illness, to feeling great all the time. Prevention, in the narrowest of terms, means averting disease and its development. There are actually three levels of prevention.

Primary prevention includes generalized health promotion activities and specific efforts aimed at preventing disease and creating optimum health. Examples: eating well, obtaining clean water and air, receiving appropriate pediatric and adult immunizations.

Secondary prevention emphasizes early diagnosis and treatment to detect the disease process in order to shorten the duration, severity and complications of illness. Examples of secondary prevention would be blood tests for cholesterol and triglyceride blood levels, yearly mammography, Pap smears, at-home testing for colo-rectal cancer, testicular and breast self-exams, regular eye exams, and blood pressure checks.

Tertiary prevention involves restoration and rehabilitation to reach and maintain optimum functioning within the constraints of specific illness or in response to the effects of treatment. An example of tertiary prevention is receiving physical therapy after an injury and then maintaining progress with specific exercises.

Ellen Budris, RN, MSN
Health Promotion & Education





“Find a balance in life and honor your own creativity. Make something new every day, even if it is as simple as folding a paper airplane, making a sketch of something around you or singing in the shower.”

Ellen Budris, RN, MSN
Health Promotion & Education

understanding stress

We hear a lot about “reducing stress.” What constitutes a stressful event varies from person to person, but stress is always based on the body’s built-in “flight or fight” response and produces a range of physiological changes.

Any problem or obstacle, imagined or real, causes the cerebral cortex (thinking part of the brain) to send an alarm to the hypothalamus (main switch for the stress response). The hypothalamus stimulates the sympathetic nervous system; your heart rate, breathing rate, muscle tension, metabolism, and blood pressure all increase. Your hands and feet get cold as blood is directed away from the extremities and digestive organs into the larger muscles that can help you fight or run. Your diaphragm and anus lock. Your pupils dilate to sharpen vision and your hearing becomes more acute. Your adrenal glands secrete chemicals which inhibit vital functions such as digestion, reproduction, growth, and tissue repair as well as the response of your immune and inflammatory systems.

When you decide, consciously or unconsciously, that the situation is no longer stressful (generally within three minutes) the brain is programmed to begin the relaxation process. Stress is not all bad; we need a certain degree of it to keep us alert and engaged and at times it can make life exciting. But remaining in a continuous high-stress state shuts down the relaxation response and your system

remains flooded with chemicals that put you at risk for long-term negative effects.

The good news is that there are a variety of ways to reduce stress. Whole books have been written on this topic, but here are a few simple tips:

- Get enough sleep – at least 7 or 8 hours a night for most people. At least 50% of Americans are chronically sleep-deprived. Sleep deprivation causes impaired functioning similar to that caused by alcohol intoxication – poor judgment, slowed reflexes, blurred vision, impaired reasoning.

- Focus on the moment. If you are worrying, try making a “worry date” for later, telling yourself that you will not worry until a certain time but will allow yourself to worry later if you really have to. Often, the need to worry will diminish.
- Move. “Move it or lose it” isn’t just a catchy slogan. Our bodies were built to move, and any exercise is better than no exercise. Build exercise into your routine. For instance: walk up and down your stairs five or ten times before you shower; pace when on the phone; stretch while watching television; take the stairs when you have to go to the second or third floor, then up the limit.
- Treat yourself to a massage. It doesn’t cost much more than a couple of dinners out.
- Laugh. Laughter increases oxygen intake, releases endorphins that create a natural high, and softens your face, which makes others respond positively to you.

Carole T. Goldberg, PsyD
Mental Hygiene

Rhea Hirshman, Editor



dietary guidelines

To help consumers sort nutrition fact from fiction, the federal government has been publishing “Dietary Guidelines for Americans” since 1980, with updates every five years. The 2000 edition provides a more upbeat approach.

The new guidelines include recommendations for physical activity: 30 minutes of exercise for adults and 60 minutes for children, on most days, but preferably daily – either all at once or spread out in briefer periods throughout the day. Also, for the first time, the guidelines draw a distinction between good fats (unsaturated fats such as olive oil) and bad fats (saturated fat and trans fatty acids). It was felt that oversimplification of the message about fat (previous versions simply recommended “choose a diet low in fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol”) has contributed to the rise of obesity by appearing to give license to consume large quantities of low-fat or fat free junk food.

For the first time, there is information on keeping food safe, particularly during home storage and preparation. The guidelines also mention recent research on possible beneficial effects of moderate alcohol consumption for some individuals.

The new guidelines continue to emphasize balance, moderation, and variety in food choices, with a particular emphasis on grain products, vegetables and fruits. The recommendations are in three groups:

Aim for fitness

- Aim for a healthy weight.
- Be physically active each day.

Build a healthy base

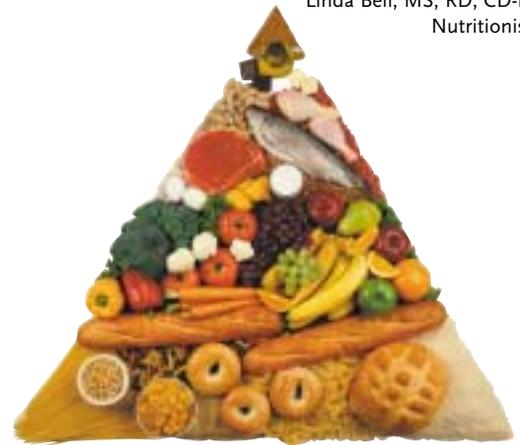
- Let the food pyramid guide your food choices.
- Choose a variety of grains daily, especially whole grains.
- Choose a variety of fruits and vegetables daily.
- Keep food safe to eat.

Choose sensibly

- Choose a diet low in saturated fat and cholesterol and moderate in total fat.
- Moderate your intake of sugars.
- Choose and prepare foods with less salt.
- If you drink alcoholic beverages, do so in moderation.

The dietary guidelines and related information may be downloaded from the Internet at <http://www.usda.gov/cnpp> or <http://www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines>.

Linda Bell, MS, RD, CD-N
Nutritionist



simply exercise

Most of us know that a sedentary life-style can increase the risk of heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, obesity, back pain and a host of other problems.

Workout videos, gyms and home exercise equipment have soared in popularity, as have personal trainers, sports drinks and fashionable workout apparel. Unfortunately, for many, videos go into closets, gym memberships lapse and exercise equipment becomes expensive clothing racks, leading to facetious predictions that treadmills will soon be manufactured with attached hangers.

There is nothing mysterious about exercise. “Exercise” simply means placing on the body a demand that requires an adap-

tation. With this definition, you can see that integrating exercise into your life can be an ongoing and natural process. While jogging, participating in sports, biking, swimming and hiking will all stress the cardiovascular system and expand its capacity, so will climbing stairs regularly and so will brisk walking if done regularly for 20-40 minutes most days of the week. Lifting weights in a progressive program will stimulate muscles to increase strength and will improve bone density. Stretching, if done consistently and frequently, will improve body flexibility. Pace yourself. It is better to start slowly and improve gradually rather than taking on too much at once and becoming discouraged.

Do what you like to do. Although there are optimal levels of exercise for increasing strength and endurance, don't fall into the trap of thinking “If I can't exer-

cise for an hour, I might as well not bother.” Any exercise is better than no exercise. Play an amateur sport. Use part of your lunch hour to walk outside or walk the steps inside. Get out of your seat and move around quickly. Walk your steps at home twice instead of once. Mow the lawn, walk the dog, or walk with your child or neighbor. Move at a rate above your normal pace, doing various activities that you like. Throw out the garbage, pack the car with groceries, dig a hole for a plant, lift weights — exercise can be a part of your daily life-style. Those who enjoy jogging or going to a gym should exercise that way. Others who dislike these activities should find means of exercise that are enjoyable and accessible. If you've been sedentary for a while, ask your clinician what exercise(s) would suit you best.

Barry Goldberg, MD
Chief, Sports Medicine



information

“If you have severely dry skin, plain water in the bath can cause stinging and burning. Adding one to two cups of table salt for a tub of water will reduce the stinging because the salt will make the water closer to your normal body make up (which is 0.9% sodium chloride).”

Suguru Imaeda, MD
Chief, Dermatology

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Catching up on colds

Although you can't "cure" the common cold, (antibiotics do not work as colds are caused by viruses, which are not killed by antibiotics) a new health promotion program at Yale Health Plan can help relieve the distress. The Yale Cold Care Center saw members through January and February. It offered drop-in group medical appointments, including individual medical assessment, a presentation on the common cold and a cold care kit including everything from over the counter pain relievers to chicken soup. This innovative approach to surviving the common cold will be expanded for next winter's cold season.

Camp exams

Many camps require a physical exam within the previous 12 months for a child to enroll. Please schedule these exams 3 to 4 months in advance of camp attendance so we may update all necessary information and immunizations on the required camp forms. Many sports programs have similar requirements.

Walk on by

The YUHS Health Promotion and Education Department and the Department of Athletics are co-sponsoring a progressive walking program on the Yale campus this spring, led by Larry Matthews, Associate Director of Sports and Recreation. Sessions are free to the Yale community. The five week series which meets on Tuesday and Thursday, will begin March 20, 2001. Walks start at the University Health Services Center, 17 Hillhouse Avenue at 12:10 pm and return at 12:50 pm. Participants are encouraged to walk at their own pace. Wear comfortable walking shoes. Bring a friend. For more information, call 203-432-1892.



Stay healthy abroad

The Travel Clinic at Yale University Health Services offers immunizations, medications and travel advice for those working at or affiliated with Yale. Those planning an overseas trip, particularly to South America, Eastern Europe, Asia or Africa should set up an appointment as soon as they know their plans. There are some naturally busy times of the year for traveling and appointments may not be available on short notice. Some immunizations are also given in a series that requires several injections separated by several weeks, so two or three visits may be required to receive all of the vaccinations. The clinic operates on Tuesday afternoons and is on a fee-for service basis. No referral is needed. Please call 203-432-0093 eight to ten weeks before departure to make an appointment.

More hours in Student Medicine

For the convenience of our student population, the Student Medicine Department has extended its hours. The department is now open for appointments or walk-ins from 8:30 am to 6:30 pm Monday through Thursday and 8:30 am to 5:00 pm on Friday.

“I have a family history of osteoporosis and heart disease. I go to Jazzercise classes two or three times per week and get a great workout: cardio, stretching, strengthening of abdominal and leg muscles, upper body workout. It's all dancing and the constantly changing music means it never gets boring.”

Barbara Dobay, CNM
Obstetrics/Gynecology

self-exams

Many medical problems can be treated more easily if detected early. Here are guidelines for doing some common self-exams.



Breast self-exam for women

Monthly, beginning in late adolescence. The best time is just at the end of the menstrual period, or a specific day for women who are not menstruating. Lie on your back and use each hand to check the opposite breast. Press down with your finger tips and examine the whole breast systematically, circling around the breast from the outside until you reach the nipple. Feel for a lump like a pea or bean. Look in a mirror for any changes in the skin of the breasts, such as an area that looks dimpled.

Testicular self-exam for men

Monthly, beginning at age 15. Do the exam in the shower because heat relaxes the scrotum, making it easier to feel an abnormality. Gently roll each testicle between the thumb and fingers, pressing slightly, feeling for a painless lump along the front or side of the testicle. Also check the epididymis (above and behind each testicle); it is a firmer structure, so don't confuse its normal texture with a lump.

Skin self-exam

Examine your skin monthly for abnormal moles. You will need a wall mirror and a hand mirror to examine parts of your body that are hard to see. A suspicious mole is one that has any of the following **A-B-C-D** features.

- **Asymmetry** (one half of the mole looks different from the other half)
- **Border** irregular (the border has a “scalloped” appearance)
- **Color** varied (the mole is not a uniform color, but has various shadings within it)
- **Diameter** (larger than 6 mm, the size of a pencil eraser)

If you notice something unusual you should call your clinician to see if an appointment is advisable. An abnormality found during a self-exam does not always mean a serious problem. But the safest approach is to check yourself regularly and have the clinician repeat the exam if you notice anything.

Deborah Meredith, CNM
Obstetrics/Gynecology

common injuries

Ever wonder what is meant when the clinician says, “You’ve sprained your ankle”? Below you will find definitions of some terms related to common injuries.

Ligament A piece of connective tissue that secures two bones together. The ACL (anterior cruciate ligament) connects the thigh bone (femur) to the shin bone (tibia).

Tendon A piece of connective tissue that connects a muscle to a bone. Your Achilles tendon connects your calf muscle to your heel.

Sprain The injury that occurs when you twist ligaments beyond their normal range of motion.

Strain The injury that occurs when you overuse a muscle. A low back strain, for instance, is a common result of too much snow shoveling.

Spasm A muscle contraction that occurs when the body is trying to protect itself from additional movement. It is often the result of a muscle strain and, while most spasms resolve themselves, you may need help for a particularly stubborn one.

“**itis**” means an inflammation (i.e. tendonitis is an inflamed tendon).

Contusion A bruise to any body part. Bruising involves breaking of the blood vessels, often resulting in the familiar “black and blue” mark. Contusions to limbs are not serious, but a brain contusion can be.

Fracture A break in a bone. There are multiple types of fractures.

Laceration A cut in the skin, or a cut through a muscle or tendon.

Pinched nerve Pressure (not actual squeezing) on a nerve, usually as it exits the vertebrae, producing numbness, tingling and other abnormal sensations along the path of the nerve.

Quadriceps The four muscles that make up the front of the muscle group on each thigh.

Hamstrings The three muscles that make up the back of the muscle group on each thigh.

Rotator cuff The four muscles that make up your shoulder muscle group, responsible for all shoulder movement, such as putting on a jacket, scratching your back and raising your hand.

Meniscus Also known as cartilage, usually associated with the knee. It acts as a shock absorber between bones and is also found at other joints, such as the jaw. The meniscus thins with age.

Most medical terms can be explained in lay language, so before you leave your clinician’s office, ask for explanations of any terms unfamiliar to you.

Michael Goulet, RPT
Clinical Manager, Physical Therapy
Rhea Hirshman, Editor

calendar

ONGOING WELLNESS PROGRAMS

YHP 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. Members can enroll in a consecutive series of meetings. Funded partially 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, Mona Felts, MSW, at 203-432-0290.

Adult CPR Classes

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

Early Pregnancy Classes

Held on the 2nd Wednesday of each month from 10:30–11:30 in room 405 for YHP members. To register, call the Ob/Gyn Department at 203-432-0222 or stop by the appointment desk. We encourage you to bring a supportive person.

Weight Watchers at Work

Mondays, 12:15–1:00 in room 405. You can join any time. For information, call 203-432-1892.

HIV+ Peer Support Group

Meets one evening a month at YUHS. For more information, contact Debra Boltas, Ph.D. at 203-432-0290.

Blood Pressure Checks

Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9:00–11:00 in room 406. Open to the Yale community free of charge, by referral or on a walk-in basis. For info, call 203-432-0093.

Post-partum Reunions

Held on the 3rd Friday of each month from 10:00–11:30 in room 405. Bring your new babies to this great support network for all new moms! Conducted by Wendy Madore, RNC. Call the Ob/Gyn Dept. (203-432-0222) to register.

Wondering whether you should get the pneumovax, which protects against pneumonia? While you should check with your clinician, the general guidelines are that the vaccine should be taken by those in the following categories:

- anyone over 62
- adults with chronic heart, lung, liver or kidney disease
- adults with diabetes
- adults with compromised immune systems due to long term steroid or chemotherapy treatments.

You may obtain the vaccine at the walk-in clinics held in YHP's Immunization Department on the 4th floor. Hours are 8:30-4:30 every weekday except Tuesday.

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Yale Health Plan
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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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