

Sunday, July 7, 2002

MEDICAL BRIEFS

Asthma study

It's estimated that more than 14 million people in the United States have asthma. Researchers at Beaumont Hospital are currently conducting several studies testing oral and inhaled medications to determine their effectiveness in the treatment of asthma.

Beaumont is seeking volunteers of all ages who have mild to severe asthma to participate in its ongoing asthma studies. Study participants will receive study medication, physical examinations and laboratory tests at no charge. They also will be compensated for their time and travel.

For more information, contact Beaumont's Outpatient Clinical Research Center toll-free at (888) 80 STUDY.

Blood pressure/heart

Treating high blood pressure with medications not only lowers blood pressure but also makes the heart work better, according to one of the largest studies of its kind. The study recently appeared in the June 17 rapid access issue of *Circulation: Journal of the American Heart Association*.

"Our results prove beyond the shadow of a doubt that there are benefits for heart muscle from effective, sustained control of hypertension. This is yet one more reason for doctors to be very persistent in helping patients reduce their blood pressure to normal levels," says author Dr. Richard B. Devereaux, professor of medicine, Weill Medical College of Cornell University, and director of the echocardiography laboratory at New York Presbyterian Hospital.

One in four adults has high blood pressure, according to the AHA. Normal blood pressure is less than 130 mm Hg systolic pressure (top number) and less than 85 mm Hg diastolic pressure (bottom number).

Protect eyes from sun

The same ultraviolet rays that damage the skin can harm your eyes. Prolonged exposure to the sun has a direct link to some eye conditions, including the formation of cataracts, and is suspected on contributing to others. Both adults and children should wear sunglasses with UV protection.

Look for sunglasses with a rating that promises to block 99-100 percent of the UV-A and UV-B rays, says University of Michigan Kellogg Eye Center optician David Karl. "More expensive sunglasses do not necessarily offer more protection. It's the UV rating that counts," he says. Another popular feature is polarization, which increases comfort by cutting the glare from horizontal surfaces, like water.

Because UV rays can penetrate the clouds, it's a good idea to wear sunglasses on overcast days, says Karl. You also need protection when you're in a tanning booth, and when you're near water or snow, because reflected sun means intensified UV rays.

For more information about protecting your eyes against the sun, contact the U-M Kellogg Eye Center at (734) 763-1415.

Making connections

There are several ways you can reach the Observer Health & Fitness staff. The Sunday section provides numerous venues for you to offer newsworthy information including Medical Datebook (upcoming calendar events), Medical Newsmakers (appointments/new hires in the medical field), and Medical Briefs (medical advances, short news items from hospitals, physicians, companies). We also welcome newsworthy ideas for health and fitness related stories. To submit an item to our newspaper you can call, write, fax or e-mail us.

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Rx for the road

Medical checklists are a must before leaving home

By DIANE GALE ANDREASSI
SPECIAL WRITER

Thirty members of Oak Pointe Church in Novi went to the hospital before they left for missionary work in Zambia, Africa, this summer. They received immunizations and learned about food, water and other regional health risks at the International Travel Clinic at Botsford Hospital.

"They give you plenty of personal health and safety tips and an overview of the health situation and risks in Zambia," said Paul Jenkinson, pastor of missions at Oak Pointe Church. "We know what we'll be facing. It's a good place to make you feel you're very prepared health-wise."

Making a medical check-list can be the most important thing you do before a vacation, whether you're going up north to the cabin for a few days or taking an exotic trip to a remote jungle on the other side of the world.

If you're going out of the country, the International Travel Clinic, and similar programs at various local hospitals, can research what you need to know to stay as healthy as possible before you go and during the trip. Ideally, travelers contact the office at least two months before they leave, since immunizations often need at least one month before exposure to be effective.

Your travel itinerary doesn't have to be to a country known for its malaria, yellow fever or typhoid break-outs to carry potential health risks. Every country has different hazards, said Dr. Susan Knoll-Vlachos, infectious disease specialist and director of Botsford's International Travel Clinic.

"You can't just say, 'I'm going to Africa.' There are specific diseases associated with specific areas. We have computer programs that update us weekly as to changes throughout the world," she said. The clinic visit and consultation is \$50. Immunizations are extra. The clinic also provides advice about where to avoid the water, unsanitary foods and other concerns, like identifying specific kinds of clothes to wear to protect

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Dr. Susan Knoll-Vlachos
Botsford International Travel Clinic

against mass mosquito bites that carry deadly diseases. A list of the most reputable hospitals in the area where you'll be staying is also provided, along with a review of the region's political unrest and other potential dangers.

"We also advise to check with medical insurance

carriers, because many of the insurers don't cover you out of this country," said Knoll-Vlachos, adding that more travelers in foreign countries die from traffic accidents than anything else.

Make a list

Taking a list of physician numbers, medications and doses you take make the work of emergency medical doctors easier and could save your life, said Dr. Steve McGraw, an emergency medicine physician at Providence Hospital and Medical Center in Southfield.

Keeping a list of allergies and previous illnesses is helpful information, especially if medical care is needed in the foreign country. McGraw suggests people with health problems carry copies of their medical records, which would help emergency room doctors better understand their needs.

If a child has diabetes, for instance, it's important that the child is given a list of the doses and type of medicine taken. While children know they have a disease, they're often not familiar with their medication, McGraw said.

Before parents leave town without their children, it's a good idea to leave a letter explaining that the caregiver has per-

mission to take the child to the hospital for treatment, said McGraw. However, he stressed that children who don't have a consent form will be treated in the same expeditious manner as those who do. Just keep in mind that the paper work process runs more smoothly for those with consent forms.

Be prepared

Another important travel tip is to store medications in travel bags in case airlines lose your luggage, said McGraw. Also, always take extra doses that are separate from the main supply in case it's lost.

You might as well not be on vacation if you can't see all the wonderful places you're visiting. Take an extra pair of glasses or contacts. "If your original pair gets lost, the entire trip is not ruined," said Knoll-Vlachos.

Keeping a first-aid kit in your travel bag and car is a must, she said. The kit should include band aids, ace wraps, gauze, sterile cleansing fluid to rinse off and dress wounds, topical antibiotics and instant ice packs.

McGraw, who treats patients for sunburns so severe they become infected, considers sunscreen essential. "I treat sunscreen as a medication," he said.

Anyone going up north needs insect repellent with DEET, said McGraw. And remember pain relievers, antihistamines and topical skin treatments for exposure to poison ivy and other irritants.

Common sense

People who have medical problems on vacation often failed to use common sense for their own personal protection, Knoll-Vlachos said. She stressed the importance of avoiding foods that have not been stored or kept properly.

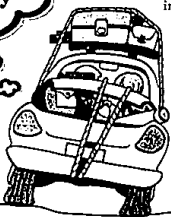
"You don't have to be out of the country to remember how important it is not to eat what's been sitting out in a salad bar or food bars, especially anything prepared with mayonnaise, for hours. That's the number one way of getting food poisoning," she said. "Even fresh salads and fruits can carry bacterial food-borne infection. Always make sure it's something you can wash and peel yourself."

Before a vacation is a good time to update prescription medicines that aren't used daily, she said. It's a perfect time to get bee sting anecdote kits and new inhalers for asthmatics.

Most important, be aware of what's happening around you and make smart decisions about protecting yourself, Knoll-Vlachos said.

"Keep your eyes open to risk factors at hand and make smart decisions on how to have fun safely."

Clara, did you remember my inhaler?



New clinic manages, relieves patient pain

By CAROL MARSHALL
SPECIAL WRITER

Ralph Mandelka only winced one time as the needle went deep into his back. "Wow," was the only word he could muster as a bolt of pain shot down his right leg. "Wow."

Mandelka, a Canton resident, is no stranger to back pain. For 20 years, he has received treatment, including nine back surgeries, following a disking slip and fall accident at work. He is currently a patient of Dr. Timothy Wright at the Tri-County Pain Management Clinic's location in St. Mary Mercy Hospital in Livonia.

At his last appointment with Wright, he underwent for the first time facet joint injections. If they relieved his pain, he would then undergo a procedure that would burn the nerves central to his back pain.

Painful truths

- More than 48 million Americans suffer from chronic pain.
- More than 21 million adults routinely take prescription pain killers.
- Nearly 14 million Americans cannot perform routine activities because of pain.
- Some 4 billion work days are lost each year to pain.
- Each year, \$65 billion is lost in productivity, and \$3 billion is spent on over-the-counter pain medicines.
- More than \$100 billion is spent every year on pain care.

"The pain never goes away," he said. "Sometimes we can manage it OK, but it's never gone."

Once an avid hunter and trapper, and a man who worked with his back, the former heavy repair mechanic said it's hard now to even get a good night's sleep.

"I can't lie down to sleep for more

than five hours, and the pain will just wake me up in the middle of the night," he said. "It's depressing a lot of the time. I try not to think about it but sometimes I ask, 'Why me?'"

Prevalence of pain

Mandelka is one of the 48 million Americans for whom pain has become

a primary illness, rather than a symptom of another disorder.

"Pain management is becoming more of a hot topic because people in pain have not had anywhere to go," said Wright, who joined the Tri-County group in March. "Chronic pain can lead to other problems — psychological problems and physical problems, but it's really been poorly treated up until now. Pain management is finally coming into its own as a specialty within itself."

For more than four decades, pain was treated by physicians in other specialties, particularly anesthesiologists. "But using that method of treating pain, we weren't necessarily treating the whole patient. We were addressing only the pain, and not necessarily the

Please see PAIN, C6