

Rx Briefs

Healing hands

Did you know your hands have the power to heal pain, stress, and anxiety? The Oakwood Complementary & Alternative Medicine Center in Westland will offer a class, "Introduction to Healing Touch," 6:30-8:30 p.m. Wednesday, April 9. Learn how to perform healing touch therapy on yourself and others. It can help soothe everything from pain to stress and even help people recovering from surgery. Please call (800) 543-WELL to reserve your spot. The cost is \$25.

Bone density

Twenty-five million Americans have osteoporosis, causing their bones to become brittle and prone to fractures. Twenty percent of those affected are men. It is estimated that, by age 50, a woman has nearly a 40 percent chance of developing an osteoporotic fracture during her remaining lifetime. The Costco Pharmacy, 13700 Middlebelt Road, Livonia, will offer bone density screenings 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, April 12. The cost is \$15. To make an appointment, call (734) 427-2866.

Anti-obesity

In a recent supplement to the *Journal of Nutrition*, studies identified calcium and dairy products as potentially powerful players in the fight against obesity.

In one study highlighted in the review, mice on a reduced calorie, high calcium diet lost more weight than mice on a reduced calorie, low calcium diet. The author says data from human studies suggest that consuming the recommended amount of calcium daily, specifically from dairy products, may play an important role in the prevention of adult and childhood obesity.

Managing weight

In a hurry? Exercise can be short...and still effective.

If you are one of the millions of Americans that say they are "too busy" to exercise regularly, you should take note. Experts at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the American College of Sports Medicine say that virtually any activity, even in short bursts scattered through the day, can help people reach the recommended goals for physical activity.

Beaumont

Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak offers the Health Information Center to help older adults and their families have easy access to information on the concerns of older adults.

A variety of topics contained in the center's collection of brochures and books include health maintenance, caregiving, housing, legal and financial information (including Medicare coverage) and local community resources available to assist older adults. To complement the services provided by the center, staff members and volunteers from Beaumont's Department of Older Adult Services are available for consultation of such issues as caring for an aging relative, making decisions about living arrangements and choosing an insurance to supplement Medicare.

The Health Information Center is on the first floor of the Beaumont Medical Office Building, 3535 W. Thirteen Mile Road (West of Woodward Avenue), Royal Oak. The center is open from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday. For more information, call Beaumont's Senior Resource Line toll free at (800) 328-2241.



The virtual colonoscopy uses a CT scan to detect polyps in the colon.

Virtual colonoscopy offers noninvasive scan of the colon

BY RENEE SKOGLUND
STAFF WRITER

Fewer than 40 percent of people who should be screened for colon cancer do so on a regular basis, according to the American Cancer Society. The most prominent reason for this appalling fact is that many people are uncomfortable—if not downright fearful—of a conventional colonoscopy, which involves inserting a flexible tube, an endoscope, through the rectum into the colon.

Along comes the virtual colonoscopy, a relatively new, noninvasive diagnostic procedure that uses a CT scan and specialized software to detect colon cancer. The test involves pumping carbon dioxide into the colon, scanning structures in the abdomen—which usually can be completed in a single breath—hold—then putting the scans together in a computer for a three-dimensional image.

Doctors are hoping more people will be screened now that the "fear factor" has been removed. "It takes eight minutes and the comfort level is without question," said Dr. James G. Henderson, a practicing internist and director of Troy Internal Medicine.

Troy Internal Medicine is the 15th site in the United States to take part in a National Institutes of Health study that measures the outcomes of colonoscopy, barium enema and virtual colonoscopy. The study has been ongoing for the past couple of years and results may be published in another year.

Studies have shown that polyps (small growths in the colon that may become cancerous) six to nine millimeters—the size of an eraser head—can be picked up 92 or 93 percent of the time, said Henderson. He added that just 1 percent of polyps this size are precancerous. "If you find a 6 millimeter polyp, what do you do with it? The likelihood of cancer is not there. With a virtual colonoscopy you can say let's watch this and repeat the test in three years," he said.

Henderson also claimed that a virtual colonoscopy picks up polyps greater than 1 centimeter (slightly less than 1/2 an inch) 96-100 percent of the time.

ADVANTAGES

Because virtual colonoscopy is noninvasive and of shorter duration than conventional colonoscopy, it could benefit patients with certain medical conditions: blood disorders, intolerance to the required sedative for conventional colonoscopy, or heart and lung disease. And, unlike conventional colonoscopy, patients having a virtual colonoscopy do not need to discontinue aspirin, nonsteroid anti-inflammatory medications or the blood thinner Coumadin prior to the test.

"Approximately 40 percent of the senior population is on one or more of these drugs. When seniors learn they do not need to interrupt their medication for two days in order to take a diagnostic test, they are more likely to schedule it," said Henderson.

COLON CANCER SCREENING

The American Cancer Society acknowledges that new tests for colon cancer, such as virtual colonoscopy and fecal DNA evaluation, hold promise for the future and will continue to be reviewed as data becomes available. Until they are better studied, people over 50 at average risk should follow one of five screening options:

- Fecal occult blood test (FOBT) every year
- Flexible sigmoidoscopy every five years
- Fecal occult blood test every year plus flexible sigmoidoscopy every five years (Of these first three options, this is most preferable)
- Double-contrast barium enema every five years
- Colonoscopy every 10 years

Comments by Dr. Naresh Gunaratnam:

■ Fecal occult blood test. If the test is positive, it's worth looking into the colon since cancer is a bleed and sometimes pre-cancers bleed. However, the test is not sensitive since cancers bleed intermittently and the blood may come from hemorrhoids. "It's the worse test."

■ Sigmoidoscopy. Views just the lower one-third of the colon. "That's where most cancers occur. However, there's no law that says your remaining two-thirds of colon doesn't have cancer. It's a matter of odds."

■ Combined sigmoidoscopy and fecal occult blood test. "Shows greatest evidence."

■ Double-contrast barium enema. Used for 100 years. Not very sensitive and purely diagnostic.

■ Colonoscopy. The most complete test. Detects polyps 1 millimeter. "It's the best tool to pick up a cancer and the best procedure for removing a polyp. It's one-stop shopping and is considered the gold standard. You can be screened and receive therapy."

Virtual colonoscopy also eliminates the risk, although minuscule, of bowel perforation resulting from the insertion of the scope. And because there is no sedation involved, patients can drive themselves home.

Researchers at the University of California performed both virtual and conventional colonoscopies on 300 patients in an effort to compare results. Many of the patients had symptoms suggestive of colon cancer. The results of the study showed virtual

colonoscopy was just as accurate as conventional colonoscopy in detecting colon cancer.

DISADVANTAGES

"The only advantage is it (virtual colonoscopy) is noninvasive," said Dr. Michael Biederman, a gastroenterologist at Botsford General Hospital. "Is it paid for by most insurance companies? No. It will find things that will make us busier... The problem is if they find something, the patient has to undergo another procedure."

The virtual colonoscopy is a diagnostic tool, not a therapeutic one, he said. If a suspicious polyp is found, the patient must undergo a conventional colonoscopy, during which the polyp is removed.

Biederman believes the appeal of virtual colonoscopy is related to Americans' attitude towards pain. "In this country, everybody thinks everything should be painless. In other countries there is more tolerance for discomfort."

In addition, patients must undergo the same bowel preparation prior to the test, which Biederman says brings the most complaints.

Biederman acknowledges that the images produced by the CT scan are "very good," but he retains some skepticism. "They (the proponents of virtual colonoscopy) are providing a program for me, so it is the best of the best."

He stresses that the American Gastroenterology Association considers the procedure experimental. Head-to-head studies are not complete. Dr. Judy Lee, lead researcher for the University of California study found that virtual colonoscopy was less effective than conventional colonoscopy in detecting small polyps.

"For the anxiety ridden, it's better than nothing," said Biederman. "For people with a history of polyps, conventional colonoscopy is the procedure of choice."

THE QUESTION

When it comes to virtual colonoscopy vs. conventional colonoscopy, Dr. Naresh Gunaratnam, gastroenterologist and director of clinical research, Department of Internal Medicine, St. Joseph Mercy Hospital, has a middle-of-the-road opinion. If it increases the number of screenings, it has its place in the battle against colon cancer.

"Colon cancer is the No. 2 cancer killer of all Americans. That's not something people know about. It's also the most preventable," he said. "These cancers typically progress from pre-cancerous adenomas (little bumps in the colon). They start showing up at age 50 in the general population, but with people with a first-degree family member who had colon cancer, they start earlier."

PLEASE SEE COLONOSCOPY, C7

Nursing group offering tetanus shots at home show

Homeowners, landscapers and builders alike are preparing to plant flowers and gardens, or to construct wood decks and new homes, at the first sign of spring.

But before the "do-it-yourselfers"—or even the professionals—start digging and building this spring, they need to make sure that they have had a tetanus-diphtheria (Td) shot within the past 10 years. University of Michigan Health System experts advise.

Most people are at the greatest risk for exposure to tetanus—two serious and potentially fatal infectious diseases caused by bacteria entering through a break in the skin—during home improvement projects, household chores, outdoor leisure activities and even animal bites.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 53 percent of American adults are not adequately immunized against tetanus.

To help adults protect themselves against the risk of tetanus before they begin their spring projects, Michigan Visiting Nurses (MVN) will offer Td shots at the Building Industry Association (BIA) of Southeastern Michigan's home and garden show in Novi. MVN, part of the U-M Health System, provides a broad range of high-quality, reasonably priced home care services and vaccinations to the community.

In cooperation with a national tetanus education campaign conducted by the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases and the National Coalition for Adult Immunization, MVN encourages any adult who cannot remember the last time they were vaccinated for tetanus and diphtheria to get immunized this spring.

On Friday, April 4, through Sunday,

PLEASE SEE TETANUS SHOTS, C7