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Be aware: Food allergies bring serious problems



The important topic of food allergies enters the spotlight this week. The Food Allergy Network, a national non-profit organization, and the State of Michigan have declared it Food Allergy Awareness Week.

Following the announcement that May is Asthma & Allergy Awareness Month, The Food Allergy Network, a national non-profit organization, has declared May 11-15 Food Allergy Awareness Week.

According to Anne Russell, R.N., Plymouth resident and director of a local support group called Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Education & Support Group, John Engler likewise made the declaration for the State of Michigan.

"I am very pleased that Gov. Engler has approved May 11-15 as Food Allergy Awareness Week," Russell said. "Living with life-threatening food allergies is a challenging and often frightening burden for children. Hopefully, this awareness week will serve to get accurate medical information to the general

public in order to increase their knowledge and sensitivity about serious food allergies."

Doctors across the country report an increase in the incidence of food allergy. Children are the largest group affected. One group of doctors reported a 55 percent increase in peanut allergy in children in the past 10 years.

"Food allergies affect an estimated four to six million Americans," said Anne Munoz-Furlong, founder of The Food Allergy Network (FAN), "yet most people believe food allergies are rare or affect only a small number of adults."

At the upcoming Friday, May 15, meeting of the Michigan Food Allergy Network, Dr. Marc McMorris, a University of Michigan pediatric allergist, will discuss peanut allergy diagnosis and

management. The meeting will begin at 7 p.m. at the Arbor Health Building in downtown Plymouth.

Food allergy is caused by an abnormal immune system response to a food. Reactions can range from mild to life-threatening. Doctors estimate that hundreds of Americans die each year as a result of a food-allergic reaction. Symptoms can include hives, abdominal cramps, vomiting, diarrhea, swelling of the mouth or throat, difficulty breathing, asthma and respiratory diseases. Severe reactions can sometimes prove fatal.

Eight foods cause 90 percent of the allergic reactions in the U.S. they are milk, eggs, peanuts, tree nuts, shellfish, soy and wheat. There is no cure for food allergies. Strict elimination of the food in question is the only way to avoid an allergic reaction.

Convincing others food allergies are real and getting accurate information about ingredients while eating at restaurants are two of the most difficult

problems of living with food allergies, according to The Food Allergy Network's 18,000 members.

Restaurants offer an opportunity for improvement. Few offer training for employees to teach them how to properly answer queries from food-allergic consumers. From a consumer's perspective, the fear of having a reaction because someone else didn't take them seriously or provide the information they need is well founded.

Allergic reactions have been reported and several people have died because restaurant staff were not properly trained in food allergy awareness.

Doctors reported that most allergic reactions occur when allergic individuals, after being assured that their meal is "safe," eat a food that contains the ingredients to which they are allergic. One peanut-allergic individual reports, "Someone told me the nuts on a danish were almonds and lo and behold, they were peanuts. I ate them, my throat got itchy, I got stomach cramps, diarrhea

and was gasping for breath to the point where I passed out."

Schools across the country are reporting an increased number of children with food allergies. A study in the New England Journal of Medicine of 13 children were fatal and near fatal food-induced allergic reactions, found four of the six cases of fatal food-induced allergic reactions had occurred in school.

Food allergy appears to be increasing and allergic reactions can be severe and have caused fatalities. "Until we educate others that food allergies are real, millions of Americans will continue to experience allergic reactions — for some, the reactions may cost them their life," Munoz-Furlong said.

For free information, call 1-800-929-0400 or visit FAN's Web site at www.foodallergy.org. The monthly meeting of the Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Education & Support group is open to the public. Individuals and children from Wayne County and surrounding communities are welcome. The meetings are free and donations are accepted. For more information, call Anne Russell, (734) 420-2805.

Mother's Day is not the only day to pamper oneself



FLORINE MARK

Today is a very special day for many women — it's Mother's Day.

I love Mother's Day because as a mother and grandmother I get spoiled with lots of attention and warm wishes. It's a day to get pampered and do things that make you feel good. Mother's Day reminds women to pay attention to themselves more than just once a year.

In my work with women who have weight problems, I have often found that many women are so busy meeting other people's needs that they simply don't have the energy to meet their own. Moms come last on their own priority lists.

The way we eat and whether or not we exercise is often dependent on our families' schedules.

With many women, squeezing in a 20-minute workout is only feasible if time allows in a busy week after our children and our spouses needs are first met. With only a little time leftover, I hear women complain that they are too tired to do what it takes to care for themselves. Mother's Day is the perfect time to give yourself the gift of making you a priority.

Everyone needs to schedule exercise into their routines on a regular basis and make that time a priority. That may mean finding a baby-sitter or ordering in dinner some evenings, but you need to take that time to take care of your body.

It won't take long to realize that you really do have time to exercise and your body and mind will thank you for it.

Now that your spare time is taken up by exercising, there can't possibly be time for eating healthy can there? Absolutely!

Please see MARK, D6

Can you solve a problem with the help of hypnosis?



DR. KEITH LEVICK

Look into my eyes. You're getting sleepy, very sleepy.

What is this nonsense? Does hypnosis really work?

Yes, it does and it can be effective for a variety of problems. Due to Hollywood and stage hypnotists, unfortunately, hypnotherapy is often misunderstood.

Allow me to put to rest some of the common misperceptions regarding hypnosis.

Simply stated, hypnosis is a state of mental and physical relaxation. There is no loss of control or a loss of consciousness. Think about the last time your body was at rest and your mind focused on nothing. Perhaps the time you were sitting and staring out the window. In that situation your mind was blank as you stared into space. This could describe a "hypnotic trance." It's a state of relaxation where you are aware, alert, and totally in control of yourself.

The negative belief we have regarding a particular problem — "I can't quit smoking" — lies in the conscious part of the brain. Hypnosis is an alteration of our consciousness, thereby allowing the unconscious to search for new ways to solve the problem.

In other words, the unconscious part of the brain offers positive beliefs to replace the conscious negative ones.

The hypnotherapist facilitates the actual process

Please see LEVICK, D6

Home sweet home Home childbirth deemed positive option

What Jennifer Westcott remembers most about the birth of her son, Hunter, is what a wonderfully rewarding experience the occasion was.

Although she admits the labor was the "hardest thing" she's ever done, the memory of the pain is bested by the sensation she felt cradling her first child just moments after he was born; the pure emotion her friends and family expressed as attendants of the birth; and just as important — the control she maintained by having a home birth.

"Having my baby at home as opposed to a hospital meant being in control ... total control," said Westcott, a Livonia chiropractor who gave birth to her first child in 1995.

Westcott, 30, said as a chiropractor, her personal philosophy regarding sustaining a natural health regimen led her to begin searching for a midwife even before she became pregnant.

"I knew my midwife would be a guest in my home and that I could do what I wanted whether it meant being in the tub, eating or doing whatever," said Westcott.

"I was so determined to have a home birth because I wanted to be in a comfortable and quiet setting where the natural birthing process wouldn't be interfered. Getting pregnant and having babies is the most natural thing a woman can do. I have great respect for the human body.

Birthdays practices have evolved from ancient women giving birth while standing or squatting, the invention of birth chairs during the Renaissance, the use of forceps in the 1850s to the state-of-the-art hospitals of the 21st century.

The birthing position of having women place their legs in stirrups is said to have come out of "a point in history when Louis XIV commanded that a 'viewing table' be constructed so he could better see the birth of one of his mistress' children ... the birther to do among the elite and eventually made its way into the accepted norm."

At the very origin of childbearing, however, the process remains unchanged.



Mom: Cheryl Resnick Ettinger of Southfield poses with her two sons, Jordan, 3, and Jaime, 1. After an unsatisfactory experience during the hospital delivery of son Jordan, Ettinger spent nearly two-years researching the option of homebirth, where she had Jaime in March of 1997 under the guidance and support of two midwives.

Home delivery

Despite modern medical advances and interventions, a growing percentage of women around the world have listed having the baby at home to their list of birthing options.

"Historically, home was the place of birth until the 1930s," said Cheryl Resnick Ettinger, a childbirth counselor and educator from Southfield who gave birth to her second child at home in 1997.

As more centralized hospitals were established and the "house-call" doctor of the early 1900s starting making rounds, the birth setting was relocated from the bedroom to the delivery room out of convenience. U.S. births taking place in hospitals rose from 37 percent to 96 percent from 1935 to 1960.

Ettinger argues, however, that the transition has led to an alarming rate of C-sections and higher incidents of infant deaths with an infant mortality rate (in a measure of assessing birth safety) that ranks the United States 28th in the world, according to Dr. Marsden Wagner of the World Health Organization (WHO).

The Centers for Disease Control

and Prevention released statistics from 1990 that showed "direct-entry midwives had the lowest infant mortality rate — half that of medical doctors." The statistics reflected the infant mortality rates of live births in hospitals, birthing centers and at home. The Direct-Entry Midwife and Certified Nurse Midwife had overall lower incidents of infant mortality than medical doctors and doctors of osteopathy.

WHO statistics

The World Health Organization states that "no region in the world is justified in having a Caesarean rate greater than 10 to 15 percent." The Caesarean delivery rate in the United States for 1995 was 20.8 (source: Monthly Vital Statistics Report, Vol. 45, No. 11 Supplement; www.cdc.gov/).

WHO is a worldwide organization that serves as the directing and coordinating authority on international health work. Some of their functions include assisting governments (upon request) in strengthening health services; stimulating and advancing work on the prevention and control of epidemic, endemic and other diseases;

turned out to be the worst."

Ettinger labored for several hours in the birthing center before it was determined that a Caesarean section was necessary. She says she requested to remain awake during the procedure with an epidural so her husband could attend, but was sedated without his presence.

"I was not allowed to see my own baby until he was 21 hours old. Even then I needed written permission," said Ettinger who left the hospital without a baby. "My surgical hospital birth was the most dehumanizing, depersonalizing experience of my life, and the cost for this medical nightmare was almost \$30,000."

Another option

Over the next two years, Ettinger says she joined the International Caesarean Awareness Network and met other women who shared their experiences about hospital births as well as researching extensively the option of home birth.

"I made a choice on my own to have a home birth to avoid the unnecessary interventions and drugs I was exposed to the first time," said Ettinger.

Jaime Aren was born in March 1997 at the Ettinger home. Two midwives spent more than 24 hours with the couple, according to Ettinger, who said she was supported and embraced by the midwives who were guests in her home. She says she went walking, watched her wedding video, ate homemade chicken soup and bagels, and rested in a pool of warm water before she and her husband embraced their son without the separation they experienced the first time.

"All newborn assessments were done with him right there on my chest. We never needed permission to see him, he belonged to us and not an institution."

The cost of Ettinger's birth was \$2,475.

"Having been on both sides of birth, I can honestly say that if we were to do this again we would take the low-tech, low-cost, high care and best results route to birth. Love gets a baby in and love helps get a baby out."

Home birth is an option for low-risk women with adequate prenatal care and a qualified attendant. Women who have chosen home birth as an option say they valued the one-on-one attention and care by the midwife and birth assistant. They sought the control to plan their birth with all the freedom and intimacy possible.

"Home birth is nothing new, it's been done for centuries and is slowly making a comeback as people become more aware they have a choice in their birthing options."

Editor's Note: Home birth may not be a choice for everyone and not all women may be eligible as health conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure and cardiac problems place them in a higher-risk category for complications during delivery. All of the persons interviewed for this article suggested taking advantage of the resources available regarding home birth before making a decision. The Internet offers a wealth of information and sources for you to consult. The best parent is an educated one ...

Cheryl Resnick Ettinger contributed to this article; she can be reached for information on childbirth education at (248) 647-1122.