

MEDICAL
BRIEFS

Swimmer's ear

Your summer swimming may yield an unwanted extra: swimmer's ear, a non-contagious infection of the ear canal. Any time water enters the outer ear canal, bacteria can multiply and cause an infection, resulting in itching, swelling, pain, decreased hearing and fluid draining from the ear.

"Cotton swabs are a leading culprit," says otolaryngologist Dr. Michael Seidman of the Henry Ford Health System. "You may think they're soft, but they're extremely irritating to the thin skin of the ear canal."

For treatment, Dr. Seidman recommends mixing equal parts of isopropyl alcohol with white vinegar and putting a few drops of the mixture into the ear canal. Let the fluid run back out; the alcohol helps dry the water.

The best way to prevent swimmer's ear is to keep the ear canal dry. Earplugs are recommended when participating in water-related activities. If the ears get waterlogged, try over-the-counter ear drops. Another alternative is a blow dryer. Set it on warm temperature and move slowly outside the ear, keeping it at arm's length from the ear. If symptoms persist for two or three days, call a doctor.

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Kidney cars

Here's an easy way to clean out that garage - donate your car to the National Kidney Foundation of Michigan. When you call 800-488-CARS a representative of NKFM and Charity Motors will ask you a few questions about your vehicle. The car will be towed away from almost anywhere - driveway, roadside or parking lot.

Seventy cents of every dollar raised with the Kidney Cars Program benefits the programs and services of the NKFM. So get in gear and donate that old car. Not only will you be helping the thousands of Michigan residents living with kidney disease, but you may be eligible for a tax deduction.

Clean house, smart kids

A University of Michigan study shows that the cleanliness of the home children grow up in predicts their educational attainment and earnings more than 25 years later. The study is based on an analysis of data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics, a longitudinal study of a representative sample of U.S. men, women, and children, conducted since 1968 at the U-M Institute for Social Research, the world's largest academic survey and research organization.

Interviewers visited each respondent's home every year from 1968 to 1972, rating overall home cleanliness on a five-point scale from 1 (dirty) to 5 (very clean). Then, 25 years later, the researchers assessed the educational attainment and earnings of the 3,395 young adults who grew up in these homes. After controlling for parental education, income, and many other factors, they found that young adults who grew up in homes rated clean to very clean had completed 13.5 years of school compared with 12 years for those whose childhood homes were rated as not very clean to dirty.

Their wages reflected the same pattern, with those growing up in the cleanest homes averaging \$14.17 an hour compared with \$12.60 an hour for those raised in the least clean homes.

"Keeping a clean and organized home reflects an overall ability and desire to maintain a sense of order in a wide range of life activities," says U-M researcher Rachel Dunifon. "These are qualities that also seem to be important in predicting intergenerational success."

We want your health news

There are several ways you can reach the Observer Health & Fitness staff. The Sunday section provides numerous venues for you to offer noteworthy information including Medical Databases (upcoming calendar events), Medical Newsletters (appointments/new hires in the medical field), and Medical Briefs (medical advances, short news items from hospitals, physicians, companies). We also welcome noteworthy 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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lifelong
CHALLENGE

Program promotes wellness for people with spinal cord injuries



Learning: Eric Britz (foreground), Marva Ways and Stephen VanKerckhove, participants in the Wellness with SCI Program, discuss issues of nutrition, sexuality and stress reduction during the program's fifth workshop.

'I think the program has helped me to better take control of my own situation when it comes to health problems.'

—Stephen VanKerckhove
Group participant

They have the same desires and fears. There's a difference between disabilities you can hide and those that can't be hidden," said Cole.

Research program

Cole is an instructor in U-M's Wellness with SCI Program, a two-year clinical trial that will assess the effects of a holistic health approach to caring for people with spinal cord injuries. Participants are divided into two groups. Those assigned to the intervention group take part in six, four-hour workshops over three months, addressing issues from exercise and bladder/bowel function to nutrition and sexuality.

Those in the control group will receive the workshop manual, but do not attend workshops.

Both groups went through the same assessment process, and all participants will receive additional examinations during a four-month follow-up period. The hypothesis is that participants in the intervention group will improve their quality of life and experience fewer secondary conditions associated with spinal cord injuries - depression, osteoporosis, chronic pain, urologic problems, weight gain, pneumonia and musculoskeletal problems such as shoulder pain and carpal tunnel syndrome.

Program manager and co-investigator Sunny Roller has a personal stake in the program. She is a polio survivor who uses leg braces, crutches and sometimes a wheelchair.

"I realized about 10 years ago there was no focus on wellness for people with spinal cord injuries. The focus was on survival," she said. "As we grow older we need to realize we are more fragile than others. You just can't send us to the neighborhood gym and tell us to go for it."

The first intervention group met in April and will conclude this month. A second group will run July-September. The current group's 16 members meet in a large room off the hospital's main cafeteria.

"I think the program has helped me to better take control of my own situation when it comes to possible health problems," said Stephen VanKerckhove, 24, of Plymouth, who



Personal approach: Dr. Ted Cole (left) talks about discrimination and sexuality with insight and humor. James Randall of Romulus (foreground) shares his experiences.

he is prepared to take his "lumps" when someone confronts him or when he's in the wrong. Mostly, he's learned to back away.

"I'll just broaden my horizons elsewhere."

Lindberg's experience is not uncommon for people with spinal cord injuries, said Dr. Ted Cole, professor emeritus, Department of Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation, University of Michigan Health System. It's part of the "belt buckle" syndrome. Because people in wheelchairs must look up to view most of the world - or because others must look down to see them - their humanity is often diminished.

"Able-bodied people regard them as inferior, second-class, disadvantaged citizens. Able-bodied people disempower them, neuter them and regard them as inconsequential. They're just people like us, but who happen to have a physical disability."



Taking control: Stephen VanKerckhove said the program has empowered him to deal better with health issues.

was injured in an automobile accident eight years ago.

He recently graduated from the University of Michigan-Dearborn and plans to enter law school at Wayne State University this fall.

Charles Martin, 49, of Northville, a former drummer and vocalist with Bob Seger's band, was returning home from a band practice 24 years ago when he was hit by a car while crossing the street. He is now a part-time facilitator for Livonia's Youth Assistance Program and serves on the board of directors for the Michigan Chapter of VSA Arts.

Articulate and expressive, Martin said he's attended many programs for people with spinal cord injuries over the years. "I'm always curious to get more information. Just because I've been in a wheelchair for 24 years doesn't mean I can't be curious."

Please see CHALLENGE, D5



A meaningful life: Program facilitator Tom Hootlin of the Ann Arbor Center for Independent Living says his injury is just part of his life, not all of it.