

## MEDICAL BRIEFS

## Toys for Tots

Children throughout Michigan are making their lists and checking them twice, but Santa needs your help! The 54th Toys for Tots Campaign is well under way bringing needy children toys at Christmas.

This year, the Michigan Chiropractic Society and family chiropractor Dr. Barry Hobbs are joining the Marine Corps in asking for your generous help in making children's dreams come true. Please bring a new, unwrapped toy to Michigan Specific Chiropractic, 7276 N. Sheldon, Canton through Thursday, Dec. 13.

For more information, contact Dr. Hobbs at (734) 416-2442.

## Quit smoking

Three million people die worldwide each year as a result of smoking, according to the American Cancer Society.

St. Mary Mercy Hospital in Livonia is helping their community avoid this statistic by holding a series of 2-hour sessions to help smokers break their addiction. The sessions will be held over a 4-week period and cover the effects of smoking, what to expect when quitting, coping techniques and strategies for remaining smoke-free. Sessions will be held 6:30-8:30 p.m. Wednesdays, Jan. 9, 16, 23 and 30, in West Addition B of the hospital. Participants are asked to pre-register by calling (734) 655-8940 or (800) 494-1660 for out-of-area callers.

## U-M diabetes event

The University of Michigan Health System and CVS/pharmacy will offer a free Diabetes Health Care seminar 5-9 p.m. Monday, Dec. 10, at the Holiday Inn North Campus on Plymouth Road in Ann Arbor (just off U.S. 23).

People with diabetes and their family or other caregivers will have the opportunity to talk with UMHS diabetes experts, learn about a special CVS program, and browse displays by makers of different diabetes-related equipment and products. New treatments, diabetes research results and blood sugar monitoring approaches will be discussed. Registered dietitians will give personal diet consultations, and there will be raffles for several prizes.

Among the speakers will be two of the U-M's top diabetes experts, Dr. William Herman and Dr. Robert Lash, both of the Division of Endocrinology and Metabolism.

For more information, contact Rosemary Schmitt at (734) 332-2578.

## Mobility loss study

Forty-nine million Americans have limited ability to do a basic activity of daily life. Mobility loss - difficulty walking - is the leading cause. It affects 16 million people. While the physical aspects of new disabilities get much attention, less is given to the social and long-term experiences.

A new National Institutes of Health study seeks information about the physical and emotional aspects of mobility loss in order to better understand, manage and treat this problem. Volunteers are needed from age 42-69 who use a wheelchair, scooter, cane, walker or brace. Participants receive \$35 for completing interviews. There are no invasive tests, and interviewers travel to participants' locations. All information is kept strictly confidential.

For more information, call (313) 993-7320 and ask for Mobility Study.

## 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 newsworthy information including Medical Database (upcoming calendar events); Medical Newsletters (appointment/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.

■ CALL US:

(734) 953-2128

■ WRITE US:

Observer & Eclectic Newspapers  
(Specify District, Newsletters or Briefs)  
Attn: Renee Skoglund  
36251 Schoolcraft Road  
Livonia, MI 48150

■ FAX US:

(734) 591-7279

■ E-MAIL US:

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## Happy holidays...

MAYBE

## Learn to keep stress out of your holiday season



BY RENÉE SKOGLUND  
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Are you ready to knock that partridge right out of the pear tree? Do you want to turn the lights out, pull the covers over your head and set the alarm for Jan. 2, 2002?

If you're someone who wants to skip the entire holiday season, you're not alone. And guess what? You're not a Scrooge.

"I think there are a lot of people who have an enormous amount of trepidation when it comes to the holidays," said Michael Ware, senior staff psychologist, McAuley Mental Health Services in Ann Arbor.

Deciding at which in-laws you'll spend Christmas, how to deal with over-spending and who gets the kids for the holidays all contribute to holiday stress.

Throw in last-minute shopping, overeating and drinking, a bit of loneliness and you have the ingredients for an emotional meltdown.

"Nobody every stops therapy over the holidays," said Mary Bleyaert, a psychotherapist with Evergreen Counseling Center in Westland. "It's the only time of the year that people are forced to confront those family relationships that they don't deal with on a regular basis."

## Expectations

For some people, the holidays can be a set-up for disappointment, said Ware.

"If you grew up with happy memories, these can be embellished over time. Your present situation may not live up to your past memories."

Conversely, if your childhood memories are unpleasant, the holidays can confirm that nothing has changed for the better, he added. "Your present experience can be a reminder of previous, painful times. You say, 'I dread Christmas. Here it comes again.'"

Be realistic about family problems, say mental health experts.

"We all have visions of Hallmark families in mind," said Jeanne Mathieu-Dendrin, clinical supervisor, Eastwood Clinic, Livonia. "We don't live in Hallmark families. We live in ordinary families."

Most people already in therapy do not look forward to the holidays, she said. "People tend to get back into the dynamics of how they used to respond to certain family members."

Mathieu-Dendrin frequently has her clients rehearse how they'll deal with difficult family members.

"You are in charge of how you act," she said. "You can behave appropriately even when someone is inappropriate. You can always excuse yourself when the interaction becomes inappropriate. We rehearse exiting an uncomfortable situation so they feel more confident going into it. They learn to realize 'I am a capable person.'"

However, those who have made changes have done so in ways that may impact their long-term health.

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Michael Ware, psychologist  
— McAuley Mental Health Services

Psychologist Dorothy Cantor, former president of the American Psychological Association and a private practitioner in Westfield, N.J., suggests another strategy: avoidance.

"If you have bad feelings about someone, try and avoid him or her and not make an issue of it but don't pretend that all is well. This will enable you to feel true to yourself and less stressed out," she said.

## Money

Establish a realistic family budget and explore ways to give without spending money. Try exchanging favors, such as offering to paint a friend or relative's bathroom, install a ceiling fan or baby-sit the children for a weekend, said Mathieu-Dendrin. "It's giving, but it's not materialistic."

Children's expectations for certain gifts also figure in money-related stress, she warned. "If they don't get just the right item, you deal with post-holiday blues."

The antidote is for parents to focus on a different kind of giving, such as spending time doing family activities - skiing, sledding, making ornaments - or volunteering within the community.

"The holidays can focus on being together, with parents and grandparents talking about when they were young. That's the real holiday," said Mathieu-Dendrin.

## When it's more than holiday blues ...

For most people, the holiday blues are seasonal, but, for some, true symptoms of depression arise that cannot be ignored. Seek professional help if you experience any of the following symptoms:

- Loss of interest in activities you typically enjoy.
- Not taking care of yourself: not eating or bathing, reluctance to leave the house or even get out of bed.
- Overleeping or not sleeping enough.
- Overeating beyond the typical holiday excess.
- Overdrinking.
- Rapid mood swings; unusual irritability.
- Thoughts of self-harm or harming others.

Cantor suggests parents tell the child that they, along with Santa Claus, will try to choose the most suitable present. "Children have to learn that their wish is not someone's command and to curb their desires for instant gratification."

Many families include giving to charity in their holiday budget. However, because tragedy is especially poignant during this time, certain associations asking for money take advantage of our vulnerability, said Ware.

"You feel both touched and manipulated by the numerous requests. Some people feel very pressured to respond. You must realize there are limitations to your ability to respond to humanitarian causes."

## Other issues

"For people who are in recovery for alcohol-related problems, it's very difficult to stay focused on recovery, especially when family and co-workers can drink responsibly," said Mathieu-Dendrin.

Mental health experts offer the following suggestions if alcohol is an escalating problem during the holidays:

- Arrive late for parties and leave early.
- Attend a party with a friend who will help monitor your alcohol intake.
- Drink only non-alcoholic drinks.
- Nurse one drink all evening and keep it in hand to ward off suggestions to "have another drink."

Another factor of holiday stress is loneliness, especially for those who have lost a loved one either through death or divorce. The holidays are the time for tapping into a network of family and friends, said Ware.

"Sometimes it means accepting as many invitations as possible."

Conversely, it's OK to avoid some festivities if they're so out of sync with how you're feeling, said Cantor. "If you are in this situation, try and articulate what you need from those around you - since they may not know how to help you - and ask for their understanding if you decline to engage in an activity."

## Validation

It's an old adage, but there's no such thing as perfection - especially when it comes to the holidays. If you're prone to go into a cleaning frenzy, tackle one kitchen counter at a time, said Bleyaert. "Then watch some television and clean the other counter tomorrow."

Above all, validate yourself, do some internal nurturing.

"Give yourself permission to think and feel, said Bleyaert. "Decide what you want to deal with this holiday season, what kind of Christmas you want. And be assertive about that."

Eastwood Clinic, 17250 Farmington Road, Livonia, (734) 426-4070; McAuley Mental Health Services, 2006 Hogback Road, Ann Arbor, (734) 207-2400; Evergreen Counseling Center, Westland, (734) 261-2172.

## Unhealthy eating proves by-product of Sept. 11 for a few

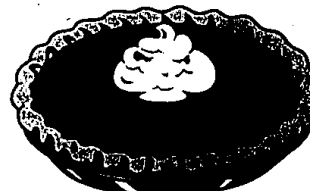
About 20 percent of Americans have made unhealthy changes in the way they eat in wake of the events of Sept. 11, according to a new survey commissioned by the American Institute of Cancer Research.

"We've been hearing a lot about how the stress, grief and anxiety that accompanied the attacks inspired 'sweeping shifts' in the way Americans eat, but these numbers don't quite bear that out," said Melanie Polk, director of nutrition education at AICR. "Instead, most Americans told us they have not made any changes in how much they eat or which foods they choose."

However, those who have made changes have done so in ways that may impact their long-term health.

Almost 20 percent of those surveyed said they were eating more "comfort foods" like mashed potatoes and gravy, fried chicken and macaroni and cheese. About 13 percent were eating richer, heartier foods like steak, stew and lasagna. Sugar cravings are also on the rise, with 19 percent saying they're eating more desserts and ice cream.

Such foods tend to be high in fat and calories and low in nutrients. These meals also lack the protective potential of phytochemicals, natural substances found in plant foods that have been shown to fight cancer and other diseases.



Please see EATING, D5