

Sunday, March 17, 2002

MEDICAL
BRIEFS

SJMH cancer program

The cancer program at St. Joseph Mercy Hospital of Ann Arbor (SJMH) was recently awarded the Five-Star Investor Award from the American Cancer Society. The Five-Star Investor Award is presented annually.

The award is presented to worksites that are active in fighting cancer on multiple fronts through the American Cancer Society "AT WORK" program. Organizations must qualify in five out of nine areas to earn the award and recognition associated with it. SJMH qualified in the following areas: Access to Cancer Information; Making Strides Against Breast Cancer; Relay For Life Smoke-Free Workplace; Volunteerism and Sponsorship.

The hospital is currently planning to begin a program in another qualifying area called Active For Life, a physical activity program to lessen cancer risk.

St. Joseph Mercy Hospital in Ann Arbor has one of Michigan's top cancer programs, providing comprehensive diagnosis and treatment for all types of cancer. The program is a federally designated Community Clinical Oncology Program and one of only 62 hospitals nationwide designated by the National Cancer Institute to participate in the latest cancer treatment and prevention trials.

Epilepsy

The Epilepsy Foundation of Michigan is sponsoring its annual "Winning Kids" Program, which recognizes the accomplishments of more than 30,000 children with epilepsy in Michigan who have overcome tremendous challenges. Children with epilepsy between the ages of five to 10 are eligible.

Our "Winning Kids" will represent the Foundation, participate in fundraising events and other activities throughout the year. The "Winning Kids" Program helps the youth to demonstrate their winning spirit and increase their self-esteem as they tell their stories.

Nominations are being accepted through April 1. Individuals wishing to nominate a child should call the Epilepsy Foundation at 1-800-377-6228 for an application. Parents will be notified in April if their child is chosen as a "Winning Kid." All "Winning Kids" will be officially introduced May 16 at the first Flame of Hope Awards Reception in Birmingham.

Achy joints

People who don't get adequate osteoarthritis (OA) main relief from anti-inflammatory drugs may qualify to test a new, investigational pain killer. Doctors at Beaumont Hospital are prescribing an experimental oral medication in a research clinical trial to determine its effectiveness in relieving OA pain in hips and knees.

Participants will take either a placebo or Diranex (Shire Pharmaceutical Development Inc.) for up to 13 weeks along with their non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) or acetaminophen. They will make periodic doctor visits and keep a pain diary. After the initial 13-week period, participants may continue in the study for an additional year. All participants will take Diranex during this phase.

Participants must have been diagnosed with osteoarthritis; have moderate-to-severe osteoarthritis pain; be 18 years old or older; and female participants must not be pregnant or become pregnant during the study, among other criteria.

Call Beaumont's Anesthesia research office at (248) 551-1907 for more information on this 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 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 newswriter you can call, write, fax or e-mail us.

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Fiber, water, exercise can avert problem

BY RENEE SKOGLUND
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It's not exactly the subject of dinner conversation, but the problem is common: Constipation. Few people go through life without suffering an occasional bout of stubborn bowels. So what can we do about it? Plenty.

First of all, understand that the frequency of bowel movements among healthy people varies greatly, ranging from three movements a day to three a week, according to The American Gastroenterological Association. As a general rule, says the AGA, problems can start after three days. Someone may feel bloated, uncomfortable and "gassy." Stools may harden and be difficult to pass.

"Not to have a bowel movement at least once a week points to a constipation problem," said Dr. Denzge Ward, an internist with the University of Michigan Health System who practices at U-M Canton Health Center.

Barring other pathologies — structural problems such as cancer, tumors and anal outlet obstructions or non-colonic diseases such as diabetes, hypothyroidism, Parkinson's, and even depression — most constipation problems can be easily treated with lifestyle changes.

"Mostly I see constipation in young females and the elderly," said Ward. "I don't see it as much in men. In young females it's mostly because of their lifestyles — low fiber diets high in carbohydrates, not enough exercise and lack of water."

Don't let constipation send you into a panic. "Everybody has bouts of constipation. Nobody is always regular," said Dr. David Margolin, a senior staff colon-rectal surgeon at Henry Ford Hospital. "It's been drilled into the American public that they must move their bowels every day. They don't have to."

Causes of constipation

Remember, constipation is a symptom, not a disease. It is also an age-related condition. According to the AGA, older adults are five times more likely than younger adults to report problems with constipation. This may be due to poor diet, insufficient fluids, lack of exercise, and the use of certain drugs.

Most of the time, constipation in all age groups can be corrected with diet and time. The follow-

ing are some of the most common causes of depression listed by the AGA:

■ **Poor diet** — The culprit may be a diet high in animal fats (meats, dairy products, eggs) and refined sugar (rich desserts and other sweets), but low in fiber (vegetables, fruits, whole grains).

■ **Imaginary constipation** — This is very common and results from misconceptions about what is normal. The antidote from a medical standpoint is simple: Inform the sufferer that the frequency of his or her bowel movements is normal.

■ **Irritable bowel syndrome** — Known as a spastic colon, IBS is one of the most common causes of constipation in the United States. Spasms of the colon delay the speed with which

vulsants for epilepsy, antiparkinsonism drugs, and antihypertensive calcium channel blockers.

■ **Loss of body salts** — The loss of body salts through the kidneys or through vomiting or diarrhea is another cause of constipation.

Fiber, water and exercise

"The biggest offense is diet. We as Americans eat terribly. We don't have enough fiber in our diet," said Margolin, who also indicts caffeine. "Caffeine is a terrible thing. It dehydrates the stool and makes it harder and more difficult to pass."

A healthy diet should include 20 to 30 grams of fiber a day, said Ward. "The public is not taking fiber as seriously as they should for constipation and for cancer prevention."

According to a handout from Beaumont Hospital, *Breaking the Constipation Habit*, cut down on refined, starchy foods. Instead, choose whole grain cereals, pasta and bread; add nuts, fruits and vegetables. Cut down on fatty foods, such as butter, cooking oils, cream and bacon. Although these foods may soften stools, they can cause diarrhea.

Water is essential in preventing constipation. Drink at least eight to 10 glasses a day to keep your stools soft. Prune juice or hot beverages may stimulate the urge to have a bowel movement.

Also, start exercising. Began with a simple walking program and do it daily. "Exercise increases the body's metabolism, which contributes to coordinated bowel movements," said Ward. Make sure you drink sufficient amounts of water while you exercise.

Lastly, while you're setting your diet and exercise regimen back on track, set aside a time each day after breakfast or dinner for an undisturbed visit to the toilet. Relax. And remember, reading or listening to music while you're in the bathroom isn't something just sitcom characters do.

While "stimulant" laxatives should be avoided, bulk-forming laxatives — such as Metamucil, FiberCon and Citrucel — can be used every day. They work by adding bulk and water to the stool so it can pass more easily through the intestine. Bulk laxatives can be taken about twice a day in the beginning, said Ward.

"It takes about a week, and then when bowel movements become more productive you can cut back."

Please see CONSTIPATION, C9



Dr. David Margolin

■ **'The biggest offense is diet. We as Americans eat terribly. We don't have enough fiber in our diet. Caffeine is a terrible thing. It dehydrates the stool and makes it harder and more difficult to pass.'**

Dr. David Margolin

Senior staff colon-rectal surgeon, Henry Ford Hospital

the contents in the intestine move through the digestive tract, leading to constipation. Poor bowel habits — Do not ignore the urge to go! Some people refuse to use public restrooms, or claim their daily schedules are just too busy. Remember, if you don't use it, you lose it. The urge to have a bowel movement may stop, leading to progressive constipation.

■ **Laxative abuse** — Laxatives that act as stimulants, such as Ex-lax, can be habit-forming. A person may require increasing dosages until the intestinal muscles become lazy and fail to work properly.

■ **Hormonal disturbances** — These include an underactive thyroid gland, hormonal changes during pregnancy, and the normal hormonal changes associated with puberty.

■ **Medications** — "Medications are a huge problem...even antacids because they have calcium in them," said Margolin. Other medications that can cause constipation include pain medications (especially narcotics), antacids that contain aluminum, antispasmodic drugs, antidepressant drugs, tranquilizers, iron supplements, anticon-

Artist adds color to lives touched by cancer



Artistic direction: Susan Johnson of Rochester Hills gets a little guidance from artist Marilyn Gorman during colored pencil class at Gilda's Club.

BY KEELY KALESKI WYCONIK
STAFF WRITER

Gilda's Club is a homey, healing place where broken people put themselves back together. Anyone touched by cancer is welcome, and they won't be a stranger for long.

I climbed the steps with some trepidation, fearful that I'd start crying. My husband, David, was diagnosed with Acute Myelogenous Leukemia on Sept. 8, 2000. He died four months later on Dec. 17. His nurses told us about Gilda's Club, but we never went. David was in the hospital most of the time. His remission was short, Oct. 2-24.

Birmingham artist Marilyn Gorman was my reason for visiting. She runs a colored pencil class on Wednesdays from 1-3 p.m. I found her in the dining room helping Rita Kamp, a cancer survivor, with a colored pencil portrait. Nancy Duke Epstein of Franklin was busy working on a landscape.

"I love this place," said Epstein, a cancer survivor who co-facilitates the class. "It's a great place, like your own home. I've made a lot of friends."

Epstein never did artwork before, but found a creative outlet with colored pencils. They're user friendly, nontoxic, lightweight and portable, she says.

Being able to draw is not a prerequisite for the class. Gorman shows class participants how to trace a favorite photograph and bring it to life with color.

"It builds your self-esteem, and you can erase what you don't like," said Phyllis Pranski, who joined Gilda's Club after losing her husband to cancer. "You come out with a decent picture. It's given me a lot of confidence, all of a sudden I'm an artist."

Gorman is a patient teacher. She brings 30 years of art training to the table, has been a member of the Colored Pencil Society for eight years and served on its national board for three years.



She knows the emotional toll cancer often demands. Her father died of bone cancer, and the disease isolated him.

"I said I didn't want anyone to die of cancer alone again. He needed a group of guys to play pinocle with. I came here and said, 'I don't know what I can do, but I'd like to help you.' They said, 'We

Please see TOUCH, C9

Artist at work: Susan Johnson puts finishing touches on a colored pencil drawing at Gilda's Club.

