

Health

FITNESS • MEDICINE

Briefs

Stroke material

The American Stroke Association has several services and materials to assist people who have had a stroke as well as their family members and caregivers:

- **The National Stroke Support Group Registry** has a listing of more than 2,000 stroke support groups nationwide and puts survivors and caregivers in touch with support groups in their area.

- **Stroke Connection Magazine** is a bi-monthly publication for stroke families that explores new treatments and advances, finances, stroke recovery and rehabilitation, reducing stroke risk and stories of inspiration.

- **The Stroke Family "Warmline"** is a toll-free information and referral service with staff members who are stroke survivors and caregivers ready to answer questions about stroke and offer free educational materials.

- **A Family Guide to Stroke** is a comprehensive, 320-page book about the treatment, recovery and prevention for stroke. It discusses the causes of stroke, those at risk, warning signs of stroke and how stroke is diagnosed. It also offers practical guidance on coping with life after stroke, up-to-date medical treatments, and rehabilitation techniques.

For more information, call the American Stroke Association National Center toll-free at 888-4-STROKE and ask for the Stroke Family Support Network or visit the Web site at www.StrokeAssociation.org

Red Cross

Have some time on your hands? If so, become a Red Cross volunteer.

Opportunities exist in all areas. The Southeastern Michigan Chapter of the American Red Cross is the organization that turns caring into action by providing disaster relief and helping people prevent, prepare for and respond to emergencies. For information, log onto www.semdrcross.org or call the Livonia Service Center at (734) 542-0442.

MDA fund-raiser

Local shoe store Payless ShoeSource is hosting a "Letters from Santa" fund-raiser to benefit the Muscular Dystrophy Association. The money raised will help provide medical services, support groups, summer camp experiences and orthopedic equipment for children with neuromuscular disease in the metro Detroit area.

Payless ShoeSource customers can tell a sales associate they would like their child to receive a letter from the North Pole. (The letter is actually written by the Payless ShoeSource elves!) Customers are given a form that asks for the child's name and some detailed questions that Santa needs to know. In a few weeks, the child receives a handwritten letter from Santa Claus. The cost for each letter is \$5, and all money collected is given to the MDA.

Cholesterol

Beaumont Hospital's Division of Preventive and Nutritional Medicine in Royal Oak needs volunteers 18 and older with high cholesterol for a research study on treating the condition with diet or a diet-medication combination. All participants will be compensated for their time and travel. Call toll-free (888) 807-8839.

GYMNASTICS

Helping develop children's physical, mental skills

BY PAM FLEMING
CORRESPONDENT

When people think of gymnastics, most have images of Olympic athletes flying through the air. But gymnastics can be competitive or noncompetitive. The noncompetitive form of the sport has become very popular.

Peggy Stevens of Ms. Peggy's Kids Fitness Center at 34029 Schoolcraft in Livonia, like many gymnastics centers in the area, offers noncompetitive, educational gymnastics for children as soon as they're able to walk.

This type of program is exactly what many parents and children are looking for instead of team programs, she said.

"Noncompetitive educational gymnastics helps improve coordination, increases body awareness, and sharpens intellectual and listening skills. Children learn to use their body for fitness development, and more importantly, it builds self-confidence and self-esteem."

Stevens started her gymnastics program in 1995 at Farmington and Eight Mile roads and just recently moved to her new location in Livonia.

"I have no teams. Our programs are just for fun and fitness. My philosophy is educational. For example, with our preschool children, they learn about colors and numbers. Successful development of motor skills plays a great part in developing a young child's brain."

Her classes start for children who are walking to age three. She has a class for parents with children age one-six who want to bring both children to one class.

The center holds a beginning class for children ages three-six as well as an advanced beginners class. It also offers an advanced class for children ages 6-14 and a class for boys only, age 6 and older. The center's mission statement is to

'Noncompetitive educational gymnastics helps improve coordination, increases body awareness, and sharpens intellectual and listening skills.'

Peggy Stevens
Ms. Peggy's Kids Fitness Center

help make fitness fun and create a lifetime desire to be healthy. Stevens had 400 students at her previous shop and has 500 at the Livonia location.

Cheerleaders come in to practice at the center, as well as a lot of dancers. Classes are 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and 4:30-8:30 p.m. Wednesdays; 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Fridays; and 9:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. and 2-6 p.m. Saturdays. The center also schedules birthday parties on Fridays and Saturdays. "Kids can run and jump, walk on the balance beam and moon walk mountain. They can tumble, swing on bars and ropes. I thought that there was a need for this, and there are kids who just want to do gymnastics for fun. Kids love being active, even if they are a little overweight."

Mary Jo Keller, director of the Children's Center at Schoolcraft College and an adjunct faculty member, was Stevens' mentor when Stevens was a student at Schoolcraft.

"She brings her own equipment and comes to the center every Monday to help the preschoolers and kindergarten," Keller said. "She's very good with the kids and very positive."

"She helps them create good health practices for the future and learn to listen to their bodies."

PARENTS LIKE PROGRAM

Rita Grima of Livonia said her daughter, Marianne, a fourth grader at St. Michael's Elementary in Livonia, has been participating at Ms. Peggy's for five years. Her other daughters, Stephanie and Jennifer, have been part-time instructors at the center in the past.

"She's become more self-confident. She was very timid when she first started and did not like being in



PHOTOS BY JIM JACOBEL/Observer

Instructor Peggy Stevens helps Jessica Moorman, 3½, navigate the balance beam.

groups. Ms. Peggy's has a gymfest every year in June where the students perform an individual routine on all the apparatuses. You can just see these kids just glow after they've done these events. They're so proud. Peggy asked Marianne to come for the whole week of gymfest because she'd improved so much," she said.

Grima said Marianne tried competitive gymnastics for one summer because Stevens thought she might like a more-structured format. "She really didn't like it. It was too rigid. Instead of encouraging her, they were making her fearful. She lost her confidence. The whole environment was different. She wasn't having fun, so she went back to Ms. Peggy's two years ago. Now she loves going to gymnastics again," Grima said.

Pam Dube of Farmington Hills said her 12-year-old daughter, Sara, a seventh

grader at East Middle School in Farmington Hills, has been going to Ms. Peggy's since she was 5.

Sara was Ms. Peggy's second student. She absolutely loves the place and the person. We won a session at another gym that offered competitive gymnastics during a silent auction at her school a few years ago. But she didn't like it because it was too structured and not very encouraging. Ms. Peggy celebrates every little step that they make. She lets the child set the pace. Peggy encourages and nurtures. She wants them to enjoy what they're doing."

WHAT CHILDREN NEED

Doug Rowe, owner/manager of the Michigan Academy of Gymnastics in Westland since 1978, said his program

PLEASE SEE GYMNASTICS, C7

Oakwood doctor offers a holistic approach to menopause

The first thing women should understand about menopause is that it is not a disease. Medically, it is a

change in female's hormonal status when she stops ovulating and menstruating.

Menopausal symptoms such as irregularities in menstruation, atrophic vaginitis (difficult urinating and painful intercourse) and hot flashes can start for a woman in her 30s. It is important that a woman entering menopause gains a better understanding of her risk of heart disease, osteoporosis and breast cancer,



which increase after menopause.

Taking a holistic approach is more than just treating specific menopausal symptoms. It's about improving a woman's overall physical health. First, I evaluate a patient's risk factors for coronary artery disease, osteoporosis and breast cancer. I then try to decrease any risk factors or modify them using appropriate conventional medical approaches,

such as determining if the patient should take aspirin, or needs cholesterol-lowering medication.

If the patient prefers alternative methods, I explain which options are best for her, their effectiveness and safety. For some patients, I may consider herbal remedies using phytoestrogenic herbs such as black cohosh, anise seeds, fennel or sage for a short period of time to relieve symptoms like hot flashes. However, herbal remedies are not for everyone. No one should try them without consulting a doctor.

At the Oakwood Complementary and Alternative Medicine Center, we also practice ayurvedic medicine, an ancient branch of holistic medicine commonly

used in India and Indonesia. The goal of ayurvedic medicine is to maintain overall good health through knowledge, life-style changes, appropriate dietary intervention (wherein food is used as medicine), exercises (yoga) and herbal remedies if indicated.

DIET AND EXERCISE

The best way to successfully manage menopause requires a combination of knowledge, a healthy diet and appropriate exercise. I strongly recommend a diet rich in fruits and vegetables as a dietary source of vitamins, minerals and antioxidants.

PLEASE SEE MENOPAUSE, C7