

SENIORConnections

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Heart health: What women need to know

WANT to live a longer, more
healthful life?

Your chances are better if
you take heart disease seriously.

Heart disease is the leading cause of
death among American women. And the
risk rises dramatically with age. One in four
women older than 65 has heart disease.

The average age for a woman to have her
first heart attack is 70. But women don't
need to accept this fate. They can take steps
to protect their hearts at any age.

Common risk factors for heart disease
in women 50 and older are high blood
pressure and high levels of total cholesterol.
It's possible to control these conditions by
eating better, exercising regularly and main-
taining a healthy weight. Women who
smoke should try to quit.

Some women may also need medicines
to control their blood pressure and
cholesterol.



For more information

American Heart Association
[www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org/simplesolutions)
[/simplesolutions](http://www.americanheart.org/simplesolutions)
Or call 1-800-MY-HEART.

Keeping you **WELL-INFORMED**



Mental slowdown after surgery usually doesn't last long

Heart bypass surgery is a serious operation that can cause temporary problems with thinking, remembering and learning. Right after surgery, you may be slower at tasks such as writing and drawing.

But these symptoms generally go away in three months or less, a research team at the Johns Hopkins University reports.

The researchers compared patients who had bypass surgery with another group of heart patients who didn't have the operation. When tested for mental function three months after surgery, bypass patients had greater improvement in some areas than those who had no surgery. After 12 months, mental abilities were the same for both groups.

The patients will be followed three to five years to find out if there are any long-term mental problems.

"Today, people are leading healthier, longer and more productive lives than ever before. Age alone should never be a barrier to receiving appropriate care."

—Gloria Cavanaugh, president, American Society on Aging

NIH sponsors senior-friendly Web site

A Web site with easy-to-understand health information for older people has been developed by the National Institutes of Health. The site can be seen at www.nihseniorhealth.gov.

Information on the site can be read in large print. The site also has a "talking" function that allows users to listen as information is read to them.

Health information is presented in text, quizzes, frequently asked questions (called FAQs), video clips, video transcripts, photos and illustrations.

Topics that are or will be available include Alzheimer's disease, caregiving, arthritis, cancer, hearing loss, alternative medicine, vision changes and many others.

Information is provided by the National Library of Medicine and the National Institute on Aging.



Seniors worry about well-being of their grandchildren

A survey by the National Council on the Aging (NCOA)* found that older Americans are more likely to worry about the well-being of their children and grandchildren than they are about their own well-being or global threats. The survey was conducted in June 2003 by Harris Interactive with a random sample of more than 500 people 60 and older.

CONCERN FOR OTHERS:

Children, grandchildren will be exposed to drugs **63%**

Children, grandchildren will face a lack of employment opportunities **54%**

PERSONAL WELL-BEING:

Inability to physically care for themselves **44%**

Memory loss **42%**

OTHER:

Terrorist attacks **35%**

*A project of the NCOA/MetLife Foundation

Women, children exposed to DES at risk for health problems

Years ago, some women took a drug to increase their chances for a successful pregnancy. Now, these women and their daughters and sons may have special health problems caused by diethylstilbestrol (DES), a synthetic estrogen.

DES was prescribed in the United States from 1938 to 1971 to prevent miscarriages or premature births. Years later, cases of a rare gynecological cancer began to show up in daughters of women who took the medicine. When the cancer was linked to DES, doctors were advised to stop prescribing the drug. By then, 5 million to 10 million women and their children may have been exposed.

There are no medical tests to confirm that someone has been exposed to DES. However, if someone knows or suspects they were exposed, they should be screened

carefully for health problems identified with the drug. Here's what to watch for:

- In women who took it, an increased risk of developing breast cancer.
- In their daughters, a risk of infertility and unsuccessful pregnancies. Daughters also are at risk of developing vaginal or cervical cancer. The daughters would now be in their early 30s to early 60s. The health problems have been found in females as young as 8 and as old as 50.
- In sons of women who took DES, a modestly increased risk of developing cysts on their testicles.

So far, no signs of abnormalities have been found in grandchildren of women who took DES.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention



Dry, irritated eyes can lead to vision loss



Dry eyes are more than an irritation. Excessively dry eyes can cause damage to eye

tissue and threaten your vision, according to the

American Optometric Association (AOA). But the condition is treatable.

Dry eyes are most common in later life and in women during and after menopause. As we age, our tear glands naturally produce fewer tears. This leaves eyes feeling dry, irritated and scratchy.

Signs of dry eyes include redness, burning, itching, tearing and mucus in the eyes. Some people are bothered by glaring light.

If you have dry eyes, see your doctor. Another problem, such as rheumatoid arthritis, may be responsible for your symptoms.

Take blood pressure medicine as directed

Medicines can be a vital part of high blood pressure treatment. They should be taken as directed by your doctor. You should never stop taking your medicine without first talking to your doctor, the American Heart Association advises.

If you have side effects report them to

your doctor right away.

The doctor may need to adjust your medicine or your medicine schedule.

It may take a while to find the right schedule that works best with the fewest side effects. But that's a small price to pay to prevent a heart attack or stroke.

Weight-related illness drives up U.S. health care costs

Health problems that come with being overweight or obese make up 9.1 percent of what the United States spends on medical care each year, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports.

That's about the same as the amount spent treating diseases related to smoking, based on research conducted by the CDC and economists from RTI International.

The greatest increase in spending for

treatment of weight-related illness is in the Medicare and Medicaid programs. Costs to Medicare are higher because obesity is associated with chronic diseases that are more common in older people than in younger people. These include cancer, heart disease and diabetes.



LIVING HEALTHY

Living WITH Alzheimer's

One man's experience with the disease



Robert Dreher, 86, of Camden has always considered himself a lucky man.

“Throughout my life, there have always been choices, and somehow, I’ve always found myself on the lucky side of those choices,” he says.

Even now the spirited man counts his blessings. Though his mind sometimes betrays him because of the effects of dementia, he is quick to say, “I’m still lucky, because I’m still alive with Alzheimer’s disease.”

LOSING TIME

Dementia is a group of disorders in which progressive destruction of brain cells leads to a decline in memory, thinking and reasoning. Symptoms typically begin with difficulty remembering new information, and then progress to greater and greater disruption in memory, reasoning, judgment and personality.

Dreher can call to mind many memories of his younger life, such as when he met his Irish wife, Ruby, during World War II and the

passion they shared for reading. Then there was the day he and a buddy walked into a bar in Bangor, Ireland, and taunted a couple of the locals.

“We said we’re glad to see the Irish people willing to come out now that we’re here to protect them,” Dreher recalls. “They graciously ignored our taunts and welcomed us.

Later we discovered two of them were heroic Royal Air Force pilots.”

After the war Dreher worked in a laboratory in Bath for more than 30 years in the histopathology department. He remembers the “best years of his life” as he and Ruby raised their two children, Robert and Robin.

It’s what happened yesterday that Dreher has a tough time remembering. For the last six or seven years, he has noticed that it’s

getting increasingly difficult to remember people’s names or retrieve a word that stays hidden just out of his mind’s reach.

“Sometimes I’m not even sure who I am,” he says. “I can’t connect with myself. I don’t know where I am or what I’m doing here. I’m like a stranger in a strange land. Sometimes I go to bed that way. If I’m lucky, when I wake up, I’m more myself again. The bewilderment comes and it goes.”



INSIDE THE DISEASE

Dreher has had a lifelong thirst for knowledge and has read a lot about his disease. His own self-awareness led him to suspect that he had Alzheimer's disease when he started to recognize patterns of forgetfulness. "Anger is another sign. I don't really get angry at other people, but I'm constantly at war with myself. It drives me nuts not to be able to remember."

He takes Aricept to help enhance his memory and thinking skills. Yet what helps keep him grounded in today are his memories of his younger life, his love of music and books, and his daughter, Robin.

"Robin is a great help because she knows what I want to say," Dreher says. "When I forget a word, she can help me fill in the blank so I can complete the thought. She's very optimistic. That's what I've always admired most about her."

Though he doesn't tend to pick up new novels, he finds comfort in rereading his favorites. He also enjoys the clear and beautiful voice of Vera Lynn. Because she entertained service personnel during World War II, she was known as the "Forces' Sweetheart," Dreher says.

Dreher was admitted to Rome Memorial Hospital's acute inpatient

rehabilitation unit for physical and occupational therapy after a fall at home. He says it was very difficult for him to figure out how he was going to get back on his feet after he fell. He had to keep pushing his mind to come up with a solution. Then he remembered a place in the house where he could use two steps to help him get into a sitting position and then get up.

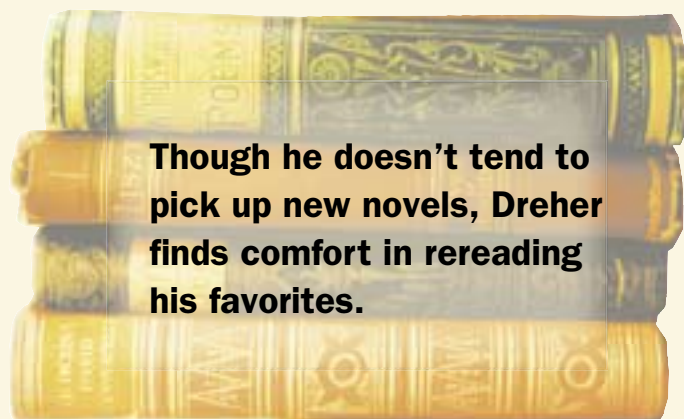
"Sometimes the simplest problems, even counting, can be difficult," he says. "I used to be a whiz bang at math. It's frustrating when I can't remember what comes after 16."

ONE DAY AT A TIME

Dreher was pleased to share his experiences of living with Alzheimer's disease because he found that most of the literature focuses on caregivers. "I've never read anything from the perspective of the person with the disease," he says.

In his search for information, Dreher found studies that suggest that keeping your mind active can help slow down the effects of Alzheimer's disease. And he's doing just that by continuing to read and listen to music.

"I don't try to plan ahead anymore," he says. "I just make the best of what comes my way."



Though he doesn't tend to pick up new novels, Dreher finds comfort in rereading his favorites.

Boost your brain power! 10 tips for coping with dementia

By JACKIE KOLB, M.A., C.C.C.-S.L.P.

Director of Speech Therapy at Rome Memorial Hospital

As we age, it is common for us to have more episodes of being forgetful, not remembering a name or a word, or feeling overwhelmed by plans and schedules. If you are developing signs of dementia, there are many things you can do to maximize your cognitive functions for as long as possible.

- 1. Keep your physician aware of changes that you or others notice.** Ignoring changes or problems will not make them go away. Your physician may prescribe medications that can slow deterioration or enhance your current skills.
- 2. Get mental exercise.** People who routinely use their brains keep their brain function sharper and longer. Play bridge, work crossword puzzles, take classes or learn a new hobby.
- 3. Keep a journal.** Writing is mental exercise, and it helps your brain store information. So if you have dinner plans with friends, jot their names down on your calendar along with the event. Establishing a habit will make it easier to recall information in the future.
- 4. Be organized.** Get in the habit of keeping appointment books and being organized with bills. The more routine these habits are, the easier they'll be to maintain when you need to rely on them.
- 5. Allow for downtime during your day.** Rest breaks are important to help you recharge. Meditating, walking or listening to music will release tension and help the brain function more easily.
- 6. Reduce the sources of stress.** Consider what can be eliminated from your routine to decrease stress and frustration. It's important to take care of yourself and perhaps give up some things that aren't necessary.
- 7. Build in routines as much as possible.** Your memory will function best with things that were learned long ago. But balance this with new stimulation, doing things differently at times. If you end up feeling upset, anxious or afraid, be careful with these changes.
- 8. Create photo albums with pictures from throughout your life.** You might want to include pictures of where you've lived, along with dates you've lived in certain places and jobs you've had.
- 9. Have serious conversations during the time of day that is best for you.** Having conversations when you are tired, hungry, frustrated or distracted will not produce the best results.
- 10. Most of all, have fun.** Lighten the atmosphere. Watch funny movies. Tell jokes. Do the things you enjoy. Your brain will function better with the endorphins released by laughter and happy thoughts!

Overcoming roadblocks to exercise

EXERCISE can seem like a daily chore, and it's easy to make excuses to avoid it.

But you can eliminate some of those "roadblocks" to exercise with this advice from aging experts at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the

Being active more regularly can actually increase your vigor, and you should feel less tired.

National Institute on Aging.

Roadblock No. 1: I'm too old to gain any benefits from exercise.

"Even if you are older and have health problems, you can still obtain benefits from physical activity," says David R. Brown, Ph.D., senior behavioral scientist with the CDC.

Regardless of your age, regular exercise can help you feel better and give you more energy.

Exercise also can help manage problems such as high blood pressure or elevated cholesterol. It may even help prevent conditions such as heart disease, diabetes and stroke.

Even if you have a health condition such as arthritis or heart failure, you may benefit from exercise.

Just be sure to check with your doctor first.

Roadblock No. 2: There isn't a gym close by.

"A physically active lifestyle need not mean going to the gym or health club to exercise," says Dr. Brown. To incorporate exercise into your daily routine:

- Work in the garden or do yard work.

- Go for a brisk walk.

Walk in the mall when the weather is bad or if you don't feel safe walking in your neighborhood.

- Take the stairs instead of the elevator or park farther away from your destination.

Roadblock No. 3: I don't have the time or the energy to exercise.

People with frail health, disability can still exercise

If you're in frail health or have a disability, exercise can still be part of your life.

"In terms of physical activity, doing something is better than doing nothing. You can still reap benefits," says David R. Brown, Ph.D., senior behavioral scientist with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

For example: You can try to get 30 minutes of physical activity a day. But it may be easier to exercise for just 10 minutes at a time.



"Being active can actually help increase your vigor, and you [should] feel less tired," says Dr. Brown.

Roadblock No. 4: I'm afraid of falling or injuring myself.

To avoid injury, start out slowly and increase your activities gradually. Always warm up before exercise with some low-intensity activity and light stretching.

If you have a chronic health condition, check with your doctor before you begin to exercise.

Roadblock No. 5: I just can't stick with it.

When you need extra motivation:

- Ask someone to be your exercise buddy. You can encourage each other, especially on days when

you'd rather not be doing anything physical.

- Set a goal and decide on a reward for yourself when you reach it.
- Set up a support system. Ask someone to call and check to see if you've done a little activity during the day.

Most health experts recommend 30 minutes of moderate activity most days. If you can't be active for 30 minutes all at once, try to exercise for 10 minutes at a time.

Short bouts of daily physical activity can be easier than a single long bout if you don't have much energy.

You may need to begin exercising while seated. A physical therapist or certified exercise instructor can provide information on exercise of all kinds, including exercises using a chair.

If you have been inactive, you'll need to start at a fairly low level of activity.

If you have a disability, talk to your doctor. You could also consult with a fitness professional who is trained and certified to work with people who have special needs.

Flat feet

Foot pain could be a sign your arches have fallen



FLAT feet used to disqualify you from military service.

Now they might send you into the operating room.

Flat feet aren't always a problem. Both children and adults can have flat feet that don't cause them any pain. And flat feet are A-OK with the military now.

But sometimes flat feet become a problem later in life. They can cause pain in your feet and even in your back.

WHY FEET GO FLAT

Most of us are born with feet that look flat, according to the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons (AAOS). Curved arches usually form by the time we turn 2.

Sometimes arches don't develop correctly. When that happens, a person is said to have flat feet.

Sometimes the arch on one foot "falls" later in adult life. This condition is called adult-acquired flat foot.

The exact cause for this adult-acquired flat foot isn't known, says Sharon Dreeben, M.D., chair of the American Orthopaedic Foot and

Ankle Society's public education committee. One theory is that a ligament in the foot gives out after decades of use.

"Over time, the rest of the tendons have to work extra hard to keep the foot supported and in shape," Dr. Dreeben says. "Even-

A painless flat foot that doesn't hinder your ability to walk requires no special treatment.

tually, the whole foot drops and turns outward."

This type of flat foot becomes progressively more painful and deformed. If treated early, support can help prevent deformity. Left untreated, surgery may be the only remedy.

You may be at higher risk of adult-acquired flat foot if you:

- Have certain medical conditions, such as diabetes or arthritis.
- Are overweight.

- Have a family history of flat foot.
- Have a history of foot injuries, such as ankle sprains.

HELP FOR FLAT FEET

A painless flat foot that doesn't hinder your ability to walk or wear shoes requires no special treatment or orthotic device, according to the AAOS.

If adult-acquired flat foot is diagnosed early, shoe inserts that support both the heel and the arch may be all that's needed, advises Dr. Dreeben.

Should additional treatment be necessary, surgery might be used to reconstruct the foot's soft tissues. This is usually an outpatient procedure. Recovery requires spending about four weeks on crutches, followed by four weeks of physical therapy.

More complicated surgery may be needed if the condition isn't treated when the foot is still flexible, Dr. Dreeben says.

If you suspect a problem with your feet, talk to your doctor about your concerns.

Home tests for flat feet

You might not be able to tell whether you have adult-acquired flat foot simply by looking at your arch. But there are tests that you can perform at home, says Sharon Dreeben, M.D., of the American Orthopaedic Foot and Ankle Society.

Too many toes test: Stand with your feet side by side. Have someone (or a mirror) behind you. How many toes can be seen from behind on the outside of your foot? Normally, only the small pinky toe should be visible. If "too many toes" can be seen, you may be developing a flat foot.

Tiptoes test: Stand barefoot with both feet on the ground. Hold onto something, such as a solid piece of furniture, that won't move and throw you off balance.

Lift one foot off the ground, then try to slowly rise on the tiptoes of the other foot. You should be able to go up and stand on your tiptoes about five times. If not, have your foot checked by a medical doctor, Dr. Dreeben advises.

The tiptoes test is not recommended for people in frail physical condition. They may have difficulty performing the test due to a condition other than their feet, says Dr. Dreeben.

go! For more information
American Orthopaedic
Foot and Ankle Society
www.aofas.org

A jolt in the night

What to do when 'charley horse' comes calling

YOU'RE snuggled in bed, sleeping peacefully, when an intense pain grips your lower leg and jolts you awake. Your calf muscle feels hard and tight, like a knot. And it really hurts!

Chances are, you have a "charley horse." "Charley" can cause your calf or thigh muscle or even your foot to cramp.

Fortunately, this pain is usually short-lived. Most muscle cramps go away within minutes, according to the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons.

What's more, some simple steps can speed relief and keep cramps from coming back. To help ease the pain:

- Straighten the affected leg and flex your foot upward (toes toward the ceiling). If you are able, grasp your toes and pull them

upward, toward your knee. Hold the stretched position until the cramping eases.

- Walk around or shake and massage the cramping area. Then elevate your leg.

- Take a hot shower or a warm bath.

- Apply heat or cold—an ice pack, for example—whichever feels better.

Muscle cramps generally are caused by such things as dehydration, prolonged sitting and over-exertion of the muscles.

Sometimes cramps are caused

by a medical condition such as diabetes, thyroid disease, anemia or circulation problems.

PREVENTING LEG CRAMPS

There are steps you can take to stop leg cramps before they begin:

- Drink six to eight glasses of water daily to help keep your muscles well-hydrated.

- Stretch calf muscles regularly.

- If possible, ride a stationary bike or go swimming on a regular basis. These activities can help stretch and strengthen leg muscles.

- Keep blankets loose at the foot of your bed to help prevent your toes and feet from pointing downward while you sleep.

- Make sure you eat plenty of potassium-rich foods. Among your choices are bananas, tomatoes, potatoes, broccoli, cantaloupe, oranges and grapefruit.

Additional sources: *Geriatrics*; *Postgraduate Medicine* online



▶ *To head off leg cramps, do this exercise in the morning, before dinner and before bed:*

1. Stand 30 inches from the wall.
2. Keeping your heels on the floor, lean forward and put your hands on the wall. Slowly move your hands up the wall as far as you can comfortably reach.
3. Hold the stretched position for 30 seconds. Release.
4. Repeat the exercise two more times.

Source: *Postgraduate Medicine* online

HEALTH TIP

If leg cramps are severe, frequent or respond poorly to simple treatments, see your doctor. Medical tests and/or prescription medicines may be needed.



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