

Patient Choice Connection

Patient Choice News for Members

Spring 2005

Judging Health Reports

Barely a week goes by without news of a medical “breakthrough” or health warning. In recent years, mainstream reporting of such events has dramatically increased in response to greater public demand for health information.

Some medical reports can be helpful. Unfortunately though, many are misleading or contradict prior reports. People can become confused and frustrated trying to decipher the truth. *Is my medicine safe? Will eating certain foods reduce my risk of getting cancer? What are the true risks with hormone replacement therapy?*

To get the real story behind the headlines, ask yourself some key questions.

1. How large is the study and how long did it last?

Studies involving large groups of people over several years are more reliable than small, short-term studies.

2. What is the source of the study?

Studies published in clinical journals are usually reliable because the research has been peer reviewed by other scientists.

3. Who funded the study?

To learn this you may need to locate original research in the library or online. Keep in mind that sponsoring groups may have a vested financial interest in study results. If they control the way studies are performed or reported, the objectivity of the findings can be compromised.



4. What is the type of study?

In general, randomized trials, cohort (long-term, ongoing) studies and human subjects provide the most relevant information about how the results might affect you.

5. Is the study supported by previous research?

The more research available with similar findings, the more reliable the study. If the study's results are new, you may want to consider it a preliminary step with more research needed.

6. Is the media reporting adequate detail?

A single news bite in a magazine or a television broadcast can't do justice to any significant study. Useful, reliable reports should include most of the details noted in questions 1-5 above, and compare new results with other evidence on the topic. ●

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Are You Getting The Care You Need?

In health care, quality means getting appropriate, timely, personalized care that produces the best possible results. Knowing what high-quality care is and what services you should be receiving can help you make better choices and get better health care overall. Fortunately, Patient Choice makes it easier for you to help improve your care with an online quality initiative called *CompareYourCare™*.

The *CompareYourCare* web site includes a set of tools that can help you understand what quality health care is and how to work with your doctor to get it. The site is managed by HealthGrades, a national health care quality ratings and services company.

You can use the site to:

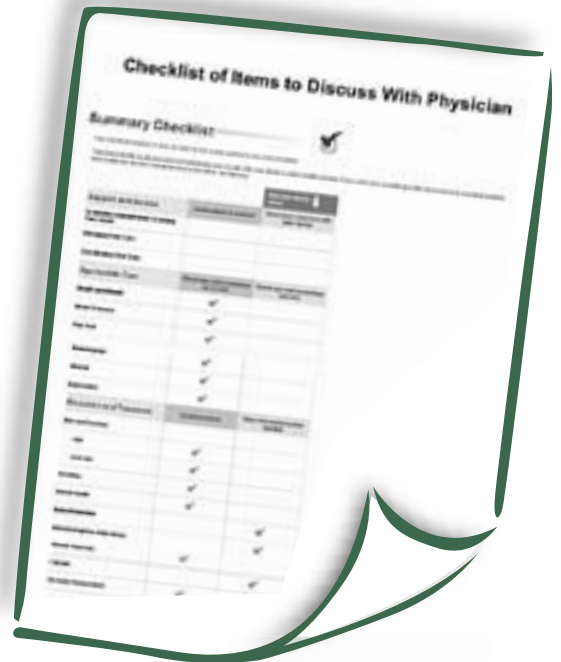
- Find out if your doctor is performing all of the recommended tests and treatments
- Discover what you can do to improve your health care
- Learn what questions to ask your doctor
- Get expert tips on receiving high quality health care

To access the *CompareYourCare* site, go to www.CompareYourCare.org/midwest and follow the instructions.

How does *CompareYourCare* work?

When you visit the site, you will be asked a few questions about your physical health and overall well-being. (To ensure your privacy, you will not be asked to provide any personally identifiable information.) Based on your responses, you'll receive information such as health

care tips specific to your health condition and a checklist of items to help you communicate more effectively with your health care provider.



You will also have an opportunity to anonymously rate the care you receive and see how it compares to national clinical guidelines. As more data is collected, results will show which area clinics and care systems are getting the highest scores from others in the community.

By becoming an active member of your health care team, learning more about your condition, and asking your caregivers relevant and important questions about your care, you can improve the quality of care delivered to you and your family. Visit www.CompareYourCare.org/midwest today and check out the quality of your care. ●

Patient Choice Helpline Medical Benefits

Monday-Friday, 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.

1-877-390-7632

TTY (for the hearing impaired): 1-800-627-3529

Patient Choice Web Site

Your source for the most up-to-date information and access to online customer service features

www.patientchoicesignature.com

Patient Choice Signature is administered by Wausau Benefits, Inc.

Medical Claims Submission:
Wausau Benefits, Inc.
Patient Choice Claims
P.O. Box 8013
Wausau, WI 54402-8013

All Other Correspondence:
Wausau Benefits, Inc.
Patient Choice Customer Service
P.O. Box 8013
Wausau, WI 54402-8013



Finding Fiber

The latest standard for fiber intake was set by the National Academies' Institute of Medicine (IOM) in 2002. Depending on calorie intake, the daily recommendation for women is 21-25 grams of fiber per day, for men, 30-38 grams.

How close are you to meeting your daily fiber quota?

Try this exercise: Record everything you eat for three days; then assess your fiber intake using the checklist below.

During the 3 days:

- 1. I usually ate bread products labeled *whole-wheat* or *whole-grain*.
- 2. I ate at least 2 servings of beans (legumes), such as kidney, white, soy or pinto.
- 3. I ate at least 2 servings of high-fiber cereal (minimum 5g per half-cup serving).
- 4. I ate at least 2 servings of cooked whole-grain, such as brown rice, bulgur or barley.
- 5. I ate at least 3 servings of vegetables per day.
- 6. I ate at least 2 servings of fruit per day.

SCORING: If you checked 5-6 boxes, your fiber intake is probably very good. If you checked fewer boxes, aim to add more fiber to your diet every day, using the guidelines of the checklist.



The IOM's standard is based on studies that strongly support fiber's role in reducing heart disease risk. In addition to fighting high blood pressure and cholesterol levels, getting your daily fiber can help you prevent or control diabetes, weight, constipation and other gastrointestinal ailments. ●

Fiber Favorites

Good Sources (2-4 grams per serving)

- Orange (1)
- Almonds (1/4 cup)
- Blackberries (1/2 cup)
- Wheat bread (1 slice)
- Rye crisp cracker (1)

Better Sources (5-8 grams per serving)

- Kidney beans (1/2 cup)
- Broccoli (1 cup cooked)
- Peas (1/2 cup)
- Oat bran cereal (1/2 cup)
- Corn (1/2 cup)

Best Sources (9-13 grams per serving)

- Bran cereal (1 cup)
- Dates (1 cup)
- Pea soup (1 cup)
- Lentils (1/2 cup)

Note: Add fiber to your diet gradually to avoid indigestion. Drink plenty of fluids. Because fiber content may vary between sources or manufacturers, ranges shown are estimates only.

Source: USDA Nutrient Database.

Self Care: Practical Heartburn Relief

More than 60 million people experience occasional heartburn, while more than 15 million suffer from this annoyance every day. The good news is that lifestyle measures can often provide relief.

Heartburn occurs when stomach juices flow upward into your esophagus, the tube that connects your stomach and mouth. This may create a feeling of burning, warmth or heat underneath your breastbone. You might also get a sour taste in your mouth. Symptoms usually start after meals and may worsen if you lie down, bend over or strain.

Because heartburn is a common digestive problem, you'll find many remedies available over the counter. Antacids in liquid or tablet form neutralize stomach acid; other aids can reduce the production of stomach acid. You should also use over the counter painkillers with care. Nonsteroidal drugs, including aspirin, ibuprofen and naproxen can irritate the stomach lining and worsen heartburn.

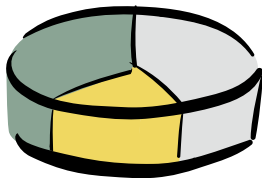
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Balancing the Work/Life Challenge

All of us have limits to the amount of things we can do. No matter how organized you are, your limited time and energy presents challenges common to many families. What does the current balance equation in your life look like? Is it healthy for you?

Try this exercise:

1. Draw a circle and imagine that the space within represents your typical 24-hour day. Estimate the percentage of time you currently focus on work, self care (including sleep) and other care.
2. Divide the circle into three pieces representing this ratio and label each segment with its corresponding percentage.



3. Then answer the following questions.

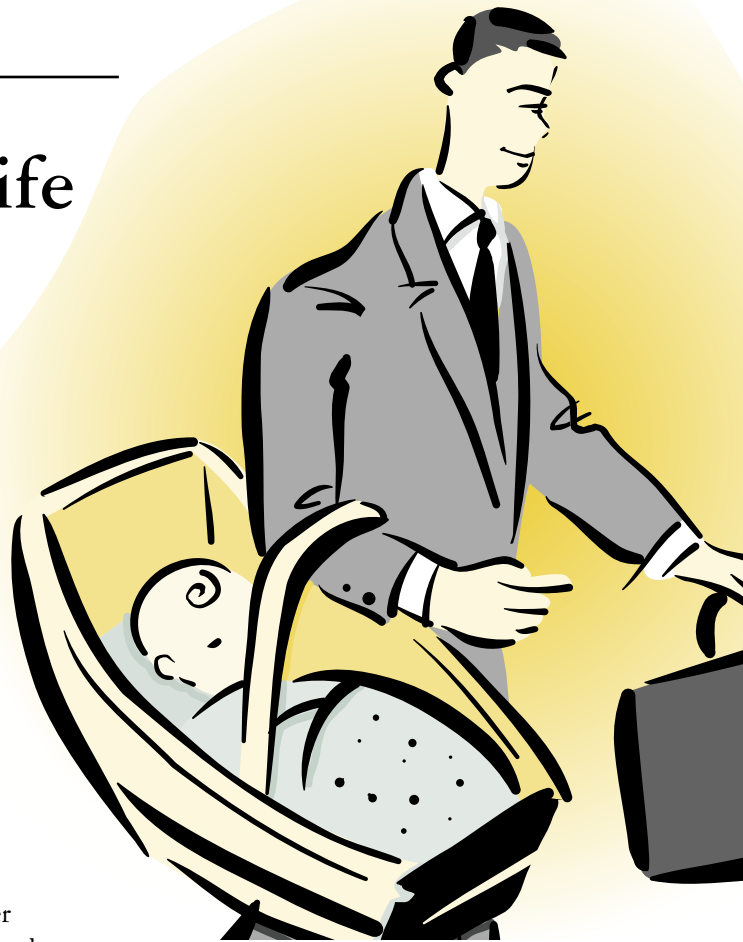
- How big of a slice does work (job) represent (30%, 50%)?

- What is your primary commitment, or biggest slice, in self care pursuits (physical, mental and spiritual)?
- What is your primary commitment, or biggest slice, in other care (family, friends and community)?
- Are you satisfied with this balance? If not, which slice would you like to decrease to allow more time for other priorities?
- What are those priorities?

Most of us struggle with the issue of balance throughout our lives. There are no easy or permanent solutions. And while a balanced equation between work and life may not always be possible, strive to make choices that are best for you and your family.

Stop living so fast.

Many people are too rushed to enjoy what they have. Review the things that demand your time. It's likely you'll find you have the time to do the things you'd like—but it may mean getting rid



of stuff. Decreasing the number of your activities and possessions can increase your enjoyment of them.

Stop trying to please all of the people all of the time.

No matter how hard you try, you'll eventually disappoint someone when you make too many commitments. Weigh outside commitments with your family obligations in mind, and avoid spreading yourself too thin. Learn to live with others' reactions if you say no.

Stop doing things for your children that they can do for themselves.

Parents are not servants; they are teachers. Teaching (rather than serving) children helps them learn to be independent and builds their confidence. Children can be taught tasks such as fixing simple

meals, emptying the dishwasher, folding their laundry, and getting themselves out of bed and ready for school on time.

Work with your family periodically to satisfy everyone's needs—including your own. It can lead you to better health and balance. ●

Fitting In Fitness, Too

- First, commit. Build an exercise habit.
- Be an opportunist—tuck in activity where you can.
- Do you spend 30 minutes reading the paper at lunch? Skip the news for now and take a walk in the fresh air.
- Set up a treadmill or free weights in front of the television and work out when you watch.
- If you have children, ride your bikes around the neighborhood or kick a soccer ball in the yard or nearby park.
- Walk through a shopping mall or visit museums.
- Get active indoors—clean floors, walls or windows.
- Turn outdoor chores into exercise—garden, rake leaves or shovel snow.
- Always say yes to walking.

Teen Talk

Despite all the education and care we give them, even smart, self-respecting teens can yield to peer pressure. Experimenting with tobacco, alcohol and/or other drugs at a young age can quickly lead to addiction.

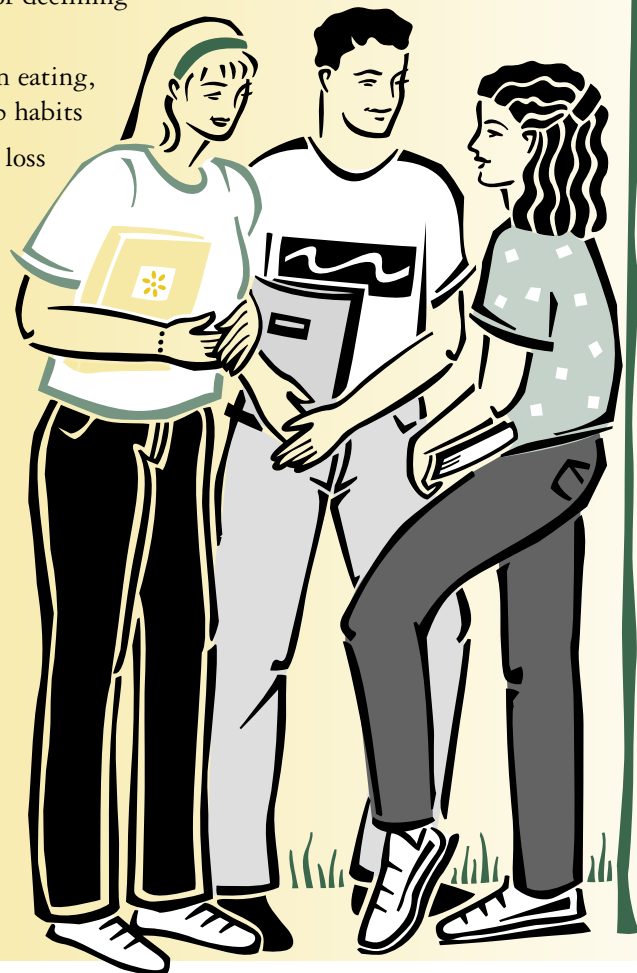
As a parent, it's important to pay attention to your child's behavior. Watch for radical changes that might indicate alcohol or drug abuse such as:

- Withdrawal or isolation
- Major change in attitude, interests or friends
- Missing school or declining grades
- Major changes in eating, clothing or sleep habits
- Unusual weight loss or gain
- Unusual or chronic fatigue
- Chronic ailments such as cough, headaches or abdominal pain
- Using "secretive" or coded language with friends
- Excessive use of over-the-counter medications or household products containing

inhalants (nail polish, spray paint, hair spray)

- Increase in borrowing money

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Children Act Fast ... So Do Poisons!

That's the message of the Poison Prevention Week Council. And home is the likeliest place a child will be exposed to potentially poisonous substances such as medicines and household products, according to poison control experts.

In a poisoning emergency, it's important to act quickly, but the first step is to stay calm. If you think your child has swallowed a harmful substance, here's what do:

1. Check the child's mouth for evidence of the substance or item and remove it; or have the child spit it out.
2. Keep the container and the contents from the child's mouth to aid the health care provider in proper treatment.
3. Do not make your child vomit or use syrup of ipecac, unless directed by the Poison Control Center or your doctor. Doing so may cause more injury.
4. Do not give your child anything to eat or drink.
5. If the poisonous substance is in the eyes, flush them with lukewarm water for 15 minutes.
6. If your child is unconscious, not breathing, having convulsions or seizures, call 911 (or other local emergency number).

If your child does not have these emergency symptoms, call the Poison Control Center at 800-222-1222, available 24 hours a day. Be ready to provide the following information:

- Victim's age and weight.
- Symptoms and whether or not victim has vomited.
- Known health conditions or problems.
- Substance or item swallowed.
- Type of exposure—was it swallowed, inhaled, absorbed through skin, or splashed into the eyes? Approximate time of exposure?
- Any first aid which may have been given.
- Your location and the amount of time needed to get victim to the hospital.

Symptoms of poisoning: A child's reactions, such as vomiting, drowsiness or burns, may vary depending on the product. Symptoms may not appear immediately after exposure.

For more information, visit the Poison Prevention Week Council web site at www.poisonprevention.org.



Good advice:

Establish a pattern of listening to your children at a young age. It improves the chances that as they get older they will listen to you and even seek your advice about tobacco and drugs.

For children dealing with alcohol or drug abuse, it's never too late to help. Take action as soon as you suspect risky behavior.

Talk less, LISTEN more. Avoid using conversations as opportunities to lecture, nag or judge. When teens ask, "Can we talk?" stop and listen, even if it's inconvenient for you. This builds trust and tells them what they have to say is important.

With careful listening, love, guidance and good example, you can give your children the power to solve problems and make healthful choices as they grow into responsible adults.

Remember, parents are the key influence in a child's life.

America's teens get a mixed report card on smoking, alcohol, and drug use, according to a federal report released last fall. On the plus side, fewer youngsters are smoking cigarettes and marijuana.

But the nation's youth continue to drink alcohol as early as age 13, and millions use illegal drugs by age 12. Abuse of over-the-counter medications containing the cough suppressant *dextromethorphan* is on the rise. About 1 in 5 kids say they have used inhalants by the 8th grade.

For more information, visit The Anti-Drug web site at www.theantidrug.com or call 800-788-2800.

To prevent heartburn:

- Avoid large meals.
- Wear loose-fitting clothes that don't put pressure on your abdomen.
- Avoid exercising, bending over or straining right after eating.
- Don't eat or drink for 3-4 hours before bedtime.
- Avoid consuming common heartburn triggers: alcohol, caffeinated and carbonated beverages, chocolate, and fatty, spicy or acidic foods (e.g., citrus or tomatoes).
- Avoid eating when you are emotionally tense; relax at mealtimes.

For recurrent heartburn:

- Replace large meals with 4-6 small meals throughout the day. Smaller meals are easier on your digestive tract.
- Raise the head of your bed about 4 to 6 inches. Elevating your upper body may prevent stomach acid from refluxing up into the esophagus.
- Lose excess weight and stop smoking, both known triggers of heartburn.
- Consult your health care provider if you are using medicine regularly to relieve or control heartburn, or if symptoms persist beyond two weeks.

Note: For severe heartburn, call for medical care immediately, as symptoms of a heart attack can be similar to heartburn.

(Sources: American College of Gastroenterology, National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse at www.niddk.nih.gov/health) ●



Brown-bag checkup keeps your medications up-to-date

If you take several medications and have forgotten what some of them are for, it may be time for a brown-bag checkup. Here's what to do:

When scheduling your next appointment with your primary care physician, tell the staff that you will be bringing in your medications for review. The day of your appointment, gather up all the medications you take, in their original containers, including:

- All medicine prescribed by a doctor
- Over-the-counter drugs such as cough syrup, aspirin and antacids
- Dietary supplements and herbal remedies

Put them all in a paper bag, bring them to your appointment and ask your doctor to review them with you. Your doctor will explain what each of your medicines does and why you need to take it. You should also review your drug regimen to ensure you are taking the right doses at the right times.

Remember, you should always call your doctor or pharmacists anytime you have questions about your medications. ●



Q: How can I find more information about area health care providers and hospitals?

A: The Patient Choice web site at www.patientchoicesignature.com, includes links to a variety of useful tools and resources that can help you learn more about your health care providers and hospitals. In addition to *CompareYourCare*, that can assist you in determining the quality of the care you receive (see the story on page 2), you can:

- Find information about best practice guidelines;
- Check if your physician is board certified;

- Get tips for choosing a doctor;
- Use the Compare Hospital Quality tool to see how area hospitals perform;
- See if your hospital has been accredited by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations;
- Review how your hospital fared on the patient safety survey administered by the Leapfrog Group and more.

Q: Can I obtain care at any clinic in the Patient Choice network, if the Care System I selected when I enrolled is in cost tier III (\$\$\$)?

A: Yes, however, if the clinic you plan to visit is in a different Care System, you will need to change your Care System selection prior to receiving services. If you obtain care from a clinic in a different Care System without first changing your selection, your plan's out-of-network benefits will apply.

You may change your Care System selection, as long as your new selection is in the same or lower-level cost tier, as often as once a month by calling the Patient Choice Helpline at 1-877-390-7632. ●



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