

Patient Choice Connection

Patient Choice News for Members

Winter 2004/2005

Two Minnesota Initiatives Arm Residents with Information About Health Care Quality

Thanks to two new major quality initiatives, Minnesota consumers have access to more comparative health care information than ever before. The recent efforts give consumers the information they need to work more closely with their doctors to improve the quality of their care.

Provider Group Information

The MN Community Measurement is a nonprofit entity dedicated to improving the quality of health care in Minnesota, and is comprised of area health plans and providers. The organization recently published the first of its kind report to examine the state's health care quality at the provider group level.

Now you can go online and find out how 52 provider groups, representing more than 700 clinics across the state, performed in six major care categories including: asthma, depression treatment, children's health, diabetes care, high blood pressure treatment and women's health.

The site also includes a variety of tools and resources to help you better manage certain health conditions, as



well as tips for talking with your doctor and information about recommended tests and treatments.

Report results and other health information are available on the MN Community Measurement web site at www.mnhealthcare.org. Links to the site are also available on the Patient Choice *Signature* web site at www.patientchoicesignature.com.

Hospital Information

In another first, the Minnesota Health Department issued a report last month that sheds light on errors made in area hospitals. This first in the nation report seeks to focus efforts on improving patient safety.

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Three-Step Plan for Better Sleep

Sleep deprivation can cause fatigue, depression, accidents and reduced productivity. To help prevent these problems, the National Sleep Foundation (NSF) says that adults need seven to eight hours of sleep daily, though individual needs can vary.

Do you usually wake up refreshed and alert? If so, you're probably getting enough zzzs—whether you sleep six hours or nine hours. But if you routinely feel tired and irritable or struggle to concentrate, you may need more or better sleep.

Here are some of the latest NSF recommendations for improving sleep or treating insomnia:

1. Keep a sleep journal.

Each day, for two or three weeks, record:

- The time you retired.
- How long it took you to fall asleep.
- The amount of time you slept.
- The number of times you woke up.
- How soundly you slept (create a scale of 1-5).
- Activities and feelings prior to retiring.
- How you felt upon rising.

- Any other related factors like snoring, dreams, diet or medications.

Later, record your energy level and how you felt during the day. For help with maintaining a sleep journal, visit the National Sleep Foundation web site at www.sleepfoundation.org.

2. Spend less time in bed.

This therapy promotes sound rest and can be used for treating chronic insomnia. Basically, it involves setting your bedtime to the amount of time you actually sleep, even if it is only for a few hours.

It requires that you retire two or three hours later than normal, but arise at your normal time. This creates a sleep “debt” that makes it easier to fall asleep and stay asleep on subsequent nights. You then gradually move your bedtime earlier as your sleep improves. The

training can take one to six weeks. For more details, visit the American Academy of Sleep Medicine web site at www.aasmnet.org/listing.htm.

Once you identify the amount of sleep that's best for you, it's essential to follow a routine bedtime—go to bed and rise at the same time every day, seven days a week.

3. Adopt sleep-friendly habits.

You should:

- Avoid caffeine, nicotine and alcohol, especially close to bedtime.
- Exercise daily, but not less than three to four hours before bedtime.
- Try not to go to bed worried—resolve to find a solution after you've rested.
- Practice mind/body relaxation or other stress control techniques.

Sleeping pills

Studies show changing sleep patterns with cognitive-behavior therapy (outlined in step #2 above), is more effective in treating insomnia than taking drugs. But if you're experiencing unusual stress or upheaval in your life, such as divorce or a death in the family, medication may help short-term. For those times, you should check with your provider to find out if mild temporary sleep aids are an option for you.

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

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Minnesota Initiatives

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State law now requires that Minnesota hospitals report on 27 types of errors or preventable mistakes such as wrong-site surgery and medication errors that contribute to patient death or disability. The report, titled “Adverse Health Events,” includes information about the number and type of events that occurred between July 2003 and October 2004, as well as summaries of the corrective actions individual hospitals have implemented.



To view the report, go to www.health.state.mn.us/patientsafety/index.html. You can also link to the site from www.patientchoicesignature.com.

These reports pave the way for ongoing improvements to Minnesota’s already highly regarded health care system and enable you to become more involved in your own health care. ●

Write Off Your Worries

Most of us can find plenty of worries, big and small, to take to bed each night. Even small stuff like an unpaid bill or conversation with a coworker can keep you restless and awake. Many sleep therapists suggest keeping a worry journal where you can record stressful events and anxieties.

Here’s the drill:

- Set aside a “worry” time (20-30 minutes) well before bedtime.
- Relax in a quiet place with your journal.
- Record your worries on one side of the page.
- On the opposite side write down at least one active step you can take or have taken to ease your anxiety.

- Update your journal every day, preferably close to the same time.

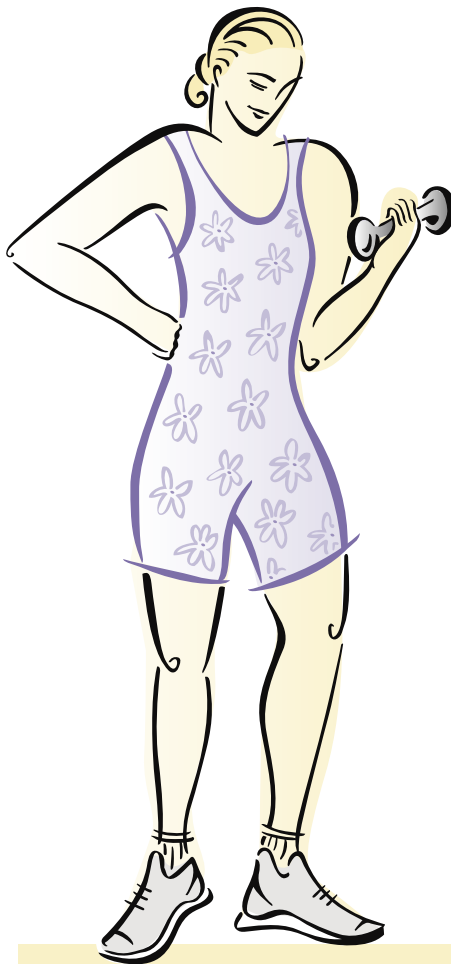
The mere act of writing down concerns can make your worries seem more manageable and help you gain perspective on them, even when nothing is immediately resolved.

You could also keep the journal by your bed in case a random pang jolts you awake—writing it down might help you avoid thinking about it all night and allow you to go back to sleep.

Keep worries and woes out of your bed. Deal with them so they don’t rob you of your rest and peace of mind. ●

Bone Boosters

According to the National Osteoporosis Foundation, after the age of 50, more than 50 percent of women and 25 percent of men will experience a fracture related to bone loss or osteoporosis. Yet most people are unaware of the risk—and do not realize that bone loss can begin as early as their 20s or 30s.



Osteoporosis is a major disability in the U.S. It can leave seniors stoop-shouldered and prone to pain and life-threatening fractures. A lifetime of too little exercise and inadequate calcium is often to blame.

It's never too early or too late to boost bone health. Here's how:

Perform regular weight-bearing activities.

Activities such as walking, stair climbing and weight lifting strengthen muscles and bones and slow bone loss.

Strengthen your back.

Building back muscles will help support the spine and improve posture, which may reduce stooping and the risk of compression fractures in the spine.

Eat a calcium-rich diet.

Include low-fat or non-fat dairy foods, tofu and other soy products, fortified orange juice, canned salmon, and leafy greens in your diet. For adults, daily calcium needs range from 1,000-1,300 mg, depending on age. See the chart below for examples of foods that are high in calcium.

Get enough Vitamin D.

Adults need between 400 and 800 international units (IU) of vitamin D daily. Vitamin D aids calcium absorption, produced when your skin is exposed to sunlight and is found in fortified dairy products. One cup of vitamin D fortified milk or orange juice provides 50 IU.

Quit smoking.

Tobacco use accelerates bone loss, so quitting is a priority.

Limit alcohol consumption.

Alcohol can reduce calcium absorption. Use moderately—no more than two drinks a day for men and one drink a day for women are recommended.

For more information, visit the National Osteoporosis Foundation web site at www.nof.org/prevention/index.htm. ●

Here are some examples of high calcium foods

Food	Calcium (mg)
Fortified oatmeal, 1 packet	350
Cheddar cheese, 1 1/2 oz. shredded	306
Milk, nonfat, 1 cup	302
Orange juice, fortified with calcium, 1 cup	300
Yogurt, plain, low-fat, 1 cup	300
Soybeans, cooked, 1 cup	261
Tofu, firm, with calcium, 1/2 cup	204
Salmon, canned, with edible bones, 3 oz.	181



Protect Your Eyes—Wear Sunglasses

We all know that being out in the sun can damage your skin. But, the sun's powerful ultraviolet (UV) radiation can also damage your eyes. If you spend long hours in the sun without eye protection, you could be harming your eyesight.

Damage can be temporary or permanent

A common temporary condition called "Photokeratitis," is an inflammation of the cornea. The condition is sometimes compared to a "sunburn" of the eye and appears within a few hours of exposure to the sun. Your eyes redden, tear and feel uncomfortable, as though something is in them. Although it can be painful, it rarely causes any permanent damage.

An extreme form of Photokeratitis is snow blindness, which typically affects skiers and hikers. The condition is most often caused from exposure to excessive UV light levels due to high altitude and strong ground reflection with fresh snow. Generally, those affected with the condition will have their vision restored within a few days.

Chronic eye exposure to direct sunlight can result in more serious damage. Over a period of years, the effects of UV light can produce long-term vision damage such as

cataracts, macular degeneration or growths on the eye, including cancer.

Avoiding UV

The American Academy of Ophthalmology and The American Cancer Society recommend wearing sunglasses anytime you are outdoors. Here are some things to keep in mind:

- You are at risk year-round, not just in the summer.
- The sun is most intense during the peak hours of 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- Exposure to UV radiation is further increased when sunlight reflects off sand, water or snow.

While most sunglasses offer some protection from the harmful effects of the sun, look for a pair that blocks 99 percent to 100 percent of all UV light. UV radiation in sunlight is commonly divided into UVA and UVB light. The American National Standards Institute (ANSI) sets standards for the amount of UV protection in sunglasses. They require that sunglasses block a minimum of 50 percent of UVA and 70 percent of UVB light.

Don't forget, your children are also at risk. Fit them with smaller versions of real, protective sunglasses. Toy sunglasses will not provide proper UV protection needed to keep their eyes safe.

Check the Label

When shopping for sunglasses, look to see if they have a label that specifically states the amount of

protection against UV light. If the glasses are not labeled, they may not offer the proper safeguards to prevent damage to your eyes. Some labels may say "UV absorption up to 400 nm," which is the same as 100 percent UV absorption.

The Shade of Your Shades

A common misunderstanding is that darker lenses offer more protection. This is not the case. UV protection comes from an invisible chemical applied to the lenses—not from the color or darkness of lenses.

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Soft Drinks May Be Hard on Your Health

Most of us don't consider soft drinks a hazard to our health. However, according to a study published in the Journal of American Medical Association (JAMA) last year, we need to think again.



Watch What You Drink

The study results are startling, especially for women, when looking at the amount of sugar-sweetened beverages they drank, and the impact on weight gain and the development of Type 2 diabetes. Women in the study who increased their consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages from low (less than one drink per week) to high (one or more per day), experienced the highest weight gain. In addition, these women had a substantially higher risk of developing diabetes when compared to women who drank less than one sugar-sweetened beverage per month.

Authors of the study indicate that about half of the increase in risk for Type 2 diabetes was due to weight gain from the high intake of sugar-sweetened drinks. The other half may have been related to the fact that these sugars are so rapidly absorbed by the body. High-fructose corn syrup, the major component in regular soft drinks,

leads to fast and dramatic rises in blood glucose and insulin levels. This can lead to insulin resistance and the development of Type 2 diabetes.

Women who drank large amounts of the sugar-sweetened beverages also tended to eat more. The exact reason for this is unclear, but the authors indicate this may be related to the fact that the drinks do not necessarily make you feel full or satisfied.

Lower Your Risk

While sugar-sweetened soft drinks are not single-handedly causing the epidemic of obesity and Type 2 diabetes, the study indicates that they are a significant contributing factor. Other important risk factors

include a diet high in fat and calories, large portion sizes and lack of daily physical activity.

Reducing your intake of added sugars, especially sugar-sweetened beverages, can help you prevent weight gain and have a positive impact on weight loss efforts. By achieving and maintaining a healthy weight, you can lower your risk for diabetes and other health problems related to obesity.

Soft Drink Facts:

- Soft drinks are the leading source of added sugars in the American diet.
- One 12-ounce can of regular soda has the equivalent of nine teaspoons of sugar.
- Between 1977 and 1997 the amount of non-diet soft drinks consumed in the United States increased by 61 percent for adults, and more than doubled for adolescents.
- During this same time period, the prevalence of obesity and Type 2 diabetes increased dramatically.

(Sources: The Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) Volume 292, No. 8, August 25, 2004: pp.927-934, Sugar-Sweetened Beverages, Weight Gain, and Incidence of Type 2 Diabetes in Young and Middle-Aged Women, MB Schulze, et al.; USDA Dietary Guidelines for Americans, www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines/dga2005/report; American Diabetes Association, www.diabetes.org/diabetesprevention/nutrition/healthyfoodchoices.jsp.) ●

Mental Health Assessment

Are You Seriously Depressed?

In any given year, nearly 20 million American adults suffer from depression. Depression can interfere with normal functioning—not only for those with the disorder, but also those who care for them.

Signs of serious depression can show up in your emotions, behavior and physical state. Review the statements below and check the boxes that apply to you:

EMOTIONAL Signs

- I often feel restless, irritable and anxious.
- I persistently feel sad, hopeless and worthless.
- I have periods of excessive crying.
- I have lost interest and pleasure in most activities.
- I have lost feelings for family and friends.
- I have suicidal thoughts.

BEHAVIOR Signs

- I neglect duties.
- I have difficulty concentrating and making decisions.

- I use alcohol or drugs to cope.
- I have loss of appetite or regularly overeat.
- I tend to avoid others.

PHYSICAL Signs

- I frequently have trouble sleeping.
- I have lost or gained weight for no apparent reason.
- I am usually tired and have no energy for normal daily activities.
- I have recurring physical symptoms such as headache, digestive problems and chronic muscle or joint pain.

Not everyone who is depressed experiences every symptom, and the severity of symptoms varies among individuals. But if you checked several statements, it's time to consider a professional evaluation. Depression is a treatable disease. ●

People rarely “snap out” of depression. If you are suffering from depression be patient and caring with yourself. Allow the time you need to feel better.

Protect Your Eyes - Wear Sunglasses

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Lenses should be dark enough to reduce glare, but not so dark to interfere with your ability to recognize colors (such as traffic signals). For daily wear, look for lenses that are medium darkness. You may want an extra pair of sunglasses with darker lenses for use in extremely bright conditions or during special activities.

The most important feature to keep in mind when choosing sunglasses is whether or not your eyes will be protected from the damaging effects of the sun's UV radiation. Always choose sunglasses that block 99 percent to 100 percent of UV light. The other features simply offer you choices for personal preference and style.

For more information about what to look for in a pair of sunglasses, go to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's web site at www.fda.gov/fdac/features/2002/402_sun.html.

Sources: (The American Cancer Society: Sunlight and Ultraviolet Radiation, May 2003; Medem Medical Library: American Academy of Ophthalmology—Sunglasses, July 2003) ●





Commonly asked questions and answers

Q: Where do I go for the most appropriate care when I have an injury or illness after my primary care provider's office has closed for the weekend?

A: If your injury or illness is serious or life-threatening, you should call 911 or go directly to the nearest hospital emergency department.

For health conditions that are not life-threatening, but require immediate attention that cannot wait for an appointment with your primary care provider, you should consider using an urgent care center. You don't need an appointment and most

centers are open in the evening and on weekends and holidays. Examples of urgent medical problems can include ear infections, sprains or cuts that may require stitches.

Convenience care centers, such as MinuteClinic® are also open evenings and weekends, but treat a more limited set of common conditions than urgent care centers. These centers can treat problems such as ear infections, but not sprains or cuts that may require stitches.

For minor illnesses and injuries, call your primary care provider. Even if the office is closed, you may leave a message or, if available, speak to an on-call staff member.

Q: Can the cost group that a Care System falls into change from year to year?

A: Yes. Each year Patient Choice analyzes Care Systems on measures of cost and performance, compares results and then tiers them into low, medium and high cost groups. Depending on a Care System's ability to effectively and efficiently manage their patients' care and their willingness to price themselves competitively to consumers, they may change cost groups. ●

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