

Planning for healthy aging

In just two short years, the first wave of baby boomers will turn 65. For some, this milestone birthday may signal retirement; for others it may not. For all boomers, it should mean an increased focus on health care. Baby boomers can take steps now to help ensure many more healthy years.

A focus on early prevention - including regular tests for certain cancers and heart disease, a healthy diet and exercise - is an important start to staying healthy well into the golden years.

Most baby boomers will count on Medicare to support them in their efforts to stay healthy. In fact, Medicare has long been a source of comfort for those 65 and older who otherwise wouldn't have health coverage. But as more people older than 65 seek care, they may find it increasingly difficult to get in to see a doctor, or they may find that their choice of doctors is limited because of planned Medicare payment cuts to physicians.



Prevention

"As we age, we have an increasing role to play in our health care to ensure our golden years are healthy ones," says Dr. J. James Rohack, president of the American Medical Association. "Have regular discussions with your physician about any health problems or concerns you may have and make sure you are up-to-date on preventive exams."

At age 50, it's important to start annual exams for colorectal cancer, and men should have a prostate exam. For those boomers who weigh less than 154 pounds, screenings for osteoporosis should start at age 60. It's also important to start annual exams with a physician before you reach age 65 to:

- * Monitor and discuss blood pressure, cholesterol, needed vaccines and tests to monitor or prevent disease.
- * Identify activities and goals to address healthy eating, physical activity, tobacco use cessation, moderating alcohol use and attention to stress and mood.
- * Discuss screenings needed to prevent and/or monitor degenerative or chronic disorders in vision, hearing, bone density, cancer and obesity.

Access to care, choice of physician

Weighing in with legislators is another way boomers can take charge of their health care, because what happens in Washington in the next couple months, regarding the health-reform debate, could have a significant impact on their ability to see their doctor of choice.

A recent AMA/AARP poll shows that nearly 90 percent of people 50 and older are concerned that the current Medicare physician payment formula threatens their access to care. Without permanent repeal of the broken Medicare payment system as part of health reform, physicians face steep payment cuts which might force them to limit the number of new Medicare patients they can treat.

"Without health-reform action by Congress, the 21 percent payment cut planned for this January puts many physicians in the difficult position of not being able to treat new Medicare patients and still keep their practices open," says Rohack. "For years, Congress has taken short-term action to stop the cuts and preserve seniors' access to care, but they can no longer put a Band-Aid on the problem. It's time for permanent action to preserve the stability and security of Medicare and ensure seniors can keep their choice of physician."

As the health system reform debate continues, and final legislation approaches, a permanent fix for the broken Medicare physician payment formula must be included to preserve access to care for the millions of baby boomers headed toward Medicare enrollment age. Replacing the physician payment formula with a system that better reflects the costs and practice of 21st century medical care will help improve quality and reduce costs by allowing physicians to increase care coordination, reduce costly hospital admissions and adopt health information technology.

"I encourage all baby boomers to take preventive action now to prepare for a long, healthy life, and to ensure that their physician will still be there for them when they begin relying on Medicare," says Rohack.

To slow the spread of viruses, humidity matters

Relative humidity (RH) - the amount of moisture in the air - of 40 to 60 percent can help slow the transmission of viruses in indoor environments, according to a recent independent study by the Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York.

"Several studies have shown that dry air/environments are more conducive to virus transmission," says Jim Lundgreen, humidification systems engineer with DRI-STEEM, which designs and manufactures humidification systems for commercial, industrial and institutional facilities around the world.

Homeowners and building managers can measure indoor humidity by using a simple hygrometer. More sophisticated applications should have humidity levels tested by an air quality professional, such as an HVAC technician. If your RH is less than 40 percent, you should consider adding a humidifier to your home or building. If it's higher than 60 percent, you might want to consider dehumidifying, as high humidity levels can foster the growth of harmful fungus and mildew.

You can learn more about commercial and industrial humidification systems at www.DRISTEEM.com. Homeowners looking to learn more about humidifying their homes can visit www.Aprilaire.com.



Courtesy of ARA Content

Is it a cold or the flu? Here's how to tell

"My body aches and my head is throbbing. Do I have the flu or is it just because I'm stressed or tired? Do I need a flu shot? Do I need the H1N1 vaccine too?"

Millions of Americans will be asking themselves these and more questions this winter as news reports and health care providers continue to warn about seasonal influenza and novel H1N1 influenza, otherwise known as swine flu.

The flu symptoms self-assessment tool on MayoClinic.com can help you assess whether you or your loved ones have some form of flu, or just a cold. If you possibly or likely have the flu, you'll also learn whether antiviral medication is an option. And you can check a concise list of high-risk groups who should seek medical attention for the flu.

Ultimately, getting vaccinated is the best way to protect yourself and your loved ones from contracting the flu. Talk to your health care provider about getting vaccinated. Visit www.MayoClinic.com for more information on managing your health.



Courtesy of ARA Content

Food safety: Protect your family's health this year

Every January people make New Year's resolutions that focus on exercise, diet or other ways to stay healthy. But the best resolution to keep the entire family healthy is food safety in the kitchen.

Here are a couple of tips from the Institute of Food Technologists and the Partnership for Food Safety Education to start your 2010 in a healthy way:

- * Mark the date on everything you put into your freezer or refrigerator so you know how long it's been in there.

- * Consume uncooked beef stored in the freezer within three to four months, or one to two days for refrigerated beef.

- * Keep cooked poultry up to four months in the freezer and three to four days in the fridge, but uncooked poultry should be eaten within nine months of freezing and one to two days of refrigeration.

- * Wash your cutting boards, dishes, utensils and countertops with hot soapy water after preparing each food item, and before you cut the next item.

- * Use two cutting boards, one for raw meats that you plan to cook and one for ready-to-eat foods.

Food safety is important for keeping your family healthy this year. For more tips, visit www.IFTFoodFacts.org or www.fightbac.org.



Courtesy of ARA Content

Wholesome cooking at home

We all want to eat a nutritious diet that helps reduce the risk of chronic diseases and manage cholesterol levels. The same holds true for diabetics; in fact, many of the guidelines for a balanced diabetic diet are useful for anyone who wants to stick to a healthful diet.

With all the refined sugars and processed carbohydrates found in today's grocery aisles and neighborhood markets, it's easy to see why anyone who is concerned about his or her health is intimidated by the idea of whipping up a healthy meal at home. Even though you have countless, long-forgotten cookbooks on your shelves and have visited various cooking Web sites, there aren't many recipes there that can offer you a healthful meal that won't send your blood sugar through the roof.

The American Diabetes Association recommends choosing whole grain, high-fiber foods and plenty of vegetables and fruits - the same foods that most people eat when they decide to follow a nutritious meal plan. Additionally, the ADA encourages diabetics to include "good" fats in appropriate portion sizes to reap the benefits of polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats, and omega-3 fatty acids. While many recipes might appear incompatible with nutritious diabetic eating, it's easier than you think to make them friendlier to a flavorful carbohydrate-controlled diet. Here are some tips:

Have a recipe that calls for a cup of sugar? Try cutting the amount in half and increasing the amount of spices in the recipe to amp up the natural sweetness.

Trying a recipe that asks for half a cup of butter or cream? Puree a medium-sized avocado in a blender or food processor and add more liquid to your mixture until you get the same creamy consistency.

The American Diabetes Association recommends avocados as a source of monounsaturated fat. Avocados have only 50 calories and less than 3 grams of carbohydrates per three-slice serving (or 1 ounce). The fat in avocados is two-thirds monounsaturated fat. According to the American Heart Association, mono- and polyunsaturated fats may actually help reduce cholesterol when consumed in moderation and substituted for saturated fat or trans fat in your diet.

Try incorporating avocados into your everyday meals to reap the benefits of nearly 20 vitamins and minerals and 1 gram of fiber per serving. By using appropriate amounts in pasta sauce, dips and garnishes for your favorite soups and salads, you can include avocados from Mexico year-round in your favorite dishes to add smooth texture and rich taste without putting your cholesterol levels at risk.

To get the best taste out of your avocado, buy avocados from Mexico ripe for immediate use, or firm for creating nutritious meals later in the week. Firm avocados will ripen to perfection when held at room temperature for one to three days. When they yield to gentle pressure, they're ready for the cooking to begin.

This holiday season, what better way to use your turkey leftovers than in a healthy, delicious sandwich? Try this recipe for a turkey sandwich with spicy avocado spread. For more recipes and ideas on how to incorporate avocados into your diet, visit www.theamazingavocado.com.

Turkey Sandwich with Spicy Avocado Spread

Makes: Four servings (1 cup of avocado spread)

Ingredients:

2 fully ripened avocados from Mexico, halved, pitted and peeled
1 1/2 tablespoons lime juice
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/4 to 1/2 teaspoon chipotle hot sauce
8 slices whole grain bread, toasted
8 ounces sliced cooked turkey
1 large ripe tomato, sliced
1 cup alfalfa sprouts

Directions:

In large bowl, mash together avocados, lime juice, salt and chipotle sauce. Spread on each bread slice. Top four of the bread slices with turkey, tomato and sprouts, dividing equally; cover with remaining bread slices. Garnish with sliced avocado, if desired.

Per serving: 355 calories, 22 grams protein, 16 grams fat, 36 grams carbohydrate

