

Health Notes

Many could benefit from simple at-home screening test

Colorectal cancer (cancer of the colon or rectum) is the number two cancer killer in the United States. Although March is Colorectal Cancer Awareness month, this killer ravages lives year-round. Despite the fact that it is highly preventable, approximately 145,000 new cases of colorectal cancer will be diagnosed in 2005. More than 56,000 people will die from the disease.

"Colorectal cancer is one of our most preventable cancers," says Dr. Anthony Simons of Longview Surgical Group. "Thousands of people will be affected by colorectal cancer this year. Many of those patients could be diagnosed and cured, often without surgery, if the cancer is discovered early using something as simple as a stool test. There are several screening options for colorectal cancer, and all of them can be successful."

A fecal occult blood test (FOBT) — can be used to discover occult (hidden) blood in feces. Because blood vessels at the surface of colorectal polyps or cancers are often fragile and easily damaged by the passage of feces, the damaged vessels usually release a small amount of blood into the feces. With the FOBT, a thin smear of stool is taken at home and then examined in a laboratory for the presence of blood. Small specks of blood in the

stool can indicate the presence of colorectal cancer or pre-cancerous polyps. If the FOBT is positive for blood, further investigation is needed to determine if the blood is from a polyp or a cancer.

The FOBT requires the collection of three stool samples. Because colon cancers may bleed inconsistently, the samples are taken one day apart. Many doctors recommend an annual fecal occult blood test for all adults beginning at age 50. This test should be done along with a flexible sigmoidoscopy every 5 years to check for colorectal polyps or cancer.

"Everyone over age 50 should have a set of stool cards tested for microscopic blood every year," says Gastroenterologist Dr. Donald Kirkpatrick. "Once that simple test is being done by a higher percentage of the population, we will be able to identify the patients who need further evaluation." Dr. Kirkpatrick suggests that an innovative and effective way to impact colon cancer screening could be as simple as "Putting stool cards in the grocery store checkout line."

"The best test is the one that is actually done," says Dr. Simons. "For many people, stool testing is the easiest. Doing nothing is not a logical option anymore."

For more information, talk to your health care professional.

Should you work out when feeling ill?

When sneezing and sniffles overtake you, it's hard to know if maintaining your regular workout schedule will hurt you more than help you. The average adult gets two to four respiratory infections each year, with children getting even more. The type and severity of the infection indicates whether or not to exercise.

Many people confuse colds with influenza. Influenza is a respiratory illness caused by a specific virus. It is characterized by fever and cough, often accompanied by a headache, congestion, fatigue, body aches or sore throat. Cold symptoms may include nasal congestion, sneezing, runny nose, and scratchy throat, but fever is experienced only 10 percent of the time.

So, when do you opt to curl up on the couch rather than curling up from your exercise mat? Many health experts exhort the neck up rule. If your symptoms are located from the neck up — runny nose, congestion, headache — go ahead and exercise. Just take it easy, as

you're obviously not at your physical best. If your symptoms include body aches and fever, however, stay home and get some rest!

While you're recuperating, drink plenty of fluids, down some Vitamin C and eat well-balanced meals. Fluids help flush toxins from your system. Although research indicates that Vitamin C doesn't do much to prevent colds and flu, taking 200 to 500 milligrams per day does appear to speed recovery, and healthy meals spur the body's virus fighters into action.

Of course, your best defense is a good offense. To prevent colds and flu be sure to wash your hands frequently, at least five times a day, for a minimum of 15 seconds each time. Germs are spread most often when people touch something infected then touch their own eyes or nose.

Protect your immune system as well! Avoid stress and loneliness, which deplete your disease-fighting reserves. Boost them, instead, by:

- Getting plenty of sleep.

- Eating a well-balanced diet, low in fat and high in fruits and vegetables.

- Drinking lots of water.

- Kicking the cigarette habit.

Smokers are twice as likely to catch respiratory infections and take longer to recover than non-smokers.

- Taking time to relax and do activities that bring you pleasure.

- Keeping a positive outlook.

A study at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center found that people who were negative, moody, nervous or easily stressed had a weaker immune response to a hepatitis vaccination than their more positive peers.

- Getting a flu shot.

- Exercising! Medical research supports the connection between regular exercise and improved immunity. One study found that active people have 25 percent fewer colds than inactive people. Another found that sedentary women who began taking a brisk 45-minute walk five days a week cut their sick days from colds in half.

Annual Walk F.A.R. for NAAR is benefit for autism research

April is National Autism Awareness Month. The National Alliance for Autism Research (NAAR) is participating in the Annual Walk F.A.R. for NAAR which takes place June 4 at Hillsboro Stadium.

The Walk F.A.R. for NAAR is a national event with walks taking place across the country and Canada. These walks are the primary fundraiser for autism research.

The NAAR is the oldest and largest non-governmental organization dedicated to funding autism research.

Autism is a complex brain disorder that often inhibits a person's ability to communicate, respond to surroundings

and form relationships with others. Most people with autism require lifelong supervision and care, the most severely affected will never be able to speak. Recent studies by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention suggest that the prevalence of autism has significantly increased, from approximately four in 10,000 in the early 1990s to as many as one in every 166 births today. Despite the strikingly high prevalence, autism research remains one of the lowest funded areas of medical research.

For more information on the event, call 206-464-5182 or go to <www.autismwalk.org>.

HIV testing is available at Col. Co. Public Health

Columbia County residents who are at risk of HIV are encouraged to be tested at Columbia County Public Health.

Testing takes about 30 minutes, and results are available in about a week. Charges are on a sliding scale. Appointments can be made by calling 503-397-4651.

Those who are HIV positive are eligible to enroll in the Case Management Program, which may also qualify them for help with housing emergencies, gas vouchers, medication cost reductions, and social support.

Alice Nemetz, R.N., is Program Manager for Counseling and Testing and Case Management.

Anyone with questions can call Nemetz at 503-397-4651, ext. 216.

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