



October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month

Breast cancer is the most common cancer diagnosed in women in America. When breast cancer is detected early and treated promptly, suffering and ultimately the loss of life can be significantly reduced. Women are encouraged to ask their doctors and other health care providers about mammography screening. Mammography (an x-ray picture of the breast) is the single most effective method to detect breast changes that may be cancer, long before physical symptoms can be seen or felt.

As women age, their risk of breast cancer increases. For most women, high-quality mammography screening should begin at age 40. As risk factors vary in everyone, each woman and her doctor should

discuss the plan that's right for her. Most organizations recommend screening every one to two years, some recommend it take place every year. Screening should continue throughout a woman's lifetime.

In addition to the use of mammography, health care providers should also examine a woman's breasts, called clinical breast examination (CBE), as part of routine health care to search for any abnormalities that may be missed by mammography. Breast self-examination (BSE) may alert a woman to any changes in her breasts, but it is not a substitute for mammography screening. The value of BSE is that it helps a woman become familiar with how her breasts normally feel and to notice any changes.

Breast Cancer Statistics

- When breast cancer is detected early (before it spreads outside the breast) the 5-year survival rate is 95%
- 203,500 new breast cancer cases were predicted to be identified in 2002
- In 1998, the number of new cases of breast cancer per year had risen to 121.3 per 100,000 for white women and 99.2 per 100,000 for black women.
- In 1998 the rate of death was 22.2 per 100,000 for white women
- In 1996 the rate of death was 29.6 per 100,000 for black women
- Breast cancer is the leading cause of cancer deaths in women aged 20 - 59

Source: *Cancer Facts and Figures 2003* from the American Cancer Society .

I N T H I S I S S U E

Flu Season
Time to protect yourselfPage 2

Put Your Cigarette Out for a Day or Forever
The Great American Smokeout.Page 3

When Do I Go To The Emergency Department?
Call your doctor or go to the hospital? . .Page 3

Diabetes Goes to the Heart
November is American Diabetes Month . .Page 4



Flu Season

Time to Protect Yourself

October through early November is the ideal time to get the flu shot. This is an illness worth trying to prevent. Unlike a cold, the flu has a very good chance of leading to the very-severe pneumonia.

If you don't want to have the shot to protect yourself against the flu, you can opt for a humanitarian reason: protecting those around you. Babies younger than six months, for example, cannot have the flu shot but those babies also have very high rates of influenza-related hospitalizations. Vaccinating caregivers and family members is the best protection.

Who should receive the flu shot?

- People age 50 or older
- People of any age with diabetes; with chronic diseases of the heart, lung, or kidney; or with weakened immune systems
- Women who will be more than 3 months pregnant during flu season (roughly November through March)
- People who live with someone in these groups

Can the flu shot make me sick or give me the flu?

You cannot get the flu from a flu shot because the vaccine is made from inactivated virus. That said, there have been isolated reports of mild symptoms such as fever or muscle aches for a day or two.

Can I still come down with the flu if I get the vaccine?

No vaccine is 100 percent effective. In healthy young adults, however, it prevents the flu in 70 percent to 90 percent of cases. The vaccine does not prevent every virus, so you may become sick with a virus that the vaccine was not designed to prevent.

Where can I get the vaccine?

Your first stop is your physician. In recent years, the vaccine has been in short supply, forcing doctors to prioritize who gets them. If your doctor's office turns you down and if you happen to be in one of the high-risk groups referenced above,

you should mention that to the doctor's staff. That sometimes bumps you up on the priority list. If that doesn't help, you may be able to obtain it through your municipality, at a community center, or even a local drug store or grocery store.

Flu vs Cold:

Not All Sneezes Are Created Equal

Colds and the flu (also called influenza) have similarities but they are not the same. A mild case of the flu may start out like a cold, but a typical flu will come on much more suddenly and severely and will high fever, chills, muscle aches, and extreme exhaustion.

A cold typically causes a runny nose, congestion, sneezing, scratchy throat, and cough. Fever and body aches are uncommon.

Both the common cold and the flu are viruses for which there is no cure. Four antiviral agents for the flu are available that can prevent the flu, or shorten its duration if they are started within 2 days of symptoms. However, these drugs are not for everyone. All have side effects, and some are effective only against certain strains of the flu virus. Your doctor is the best person to decide if they are right for you.

IS IT A COLD OR THE FLU?		
SYMPTOMS	COLD	FLU
Fever	Rare	Common, high (102-104°F), often lasts 3 to 4 days
Headache	Rare	Prominent symptom
Aches and pains	Mild	Common, often severe
Tired, weak	Mild	Can last 2-3 weeks
Extreme exhaustion	Never	Early, prominent symptom
Stuffy nose	Common	Sometimes
Sneezing	Usually	Sometimes
Sore throat	Common	Sometimes
Chest discomfort, cough	Mild to moderate; hacking cough	Common, can be severe
POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS	Sinus or ear infections, bronchitis	All those of a cold, plus pneumonia, hospitalization, or death

Sources: National Institute of Allergies and Infectious Diseases, Food and Drug Administration, American Lung Association, National Center for Infectious Diseases



Put Your Cigarette Out For A Day or Forever

The Great American Smokeout

If you've ever wanted to try quitting smoking, November 20 is the day this year when you'll have plenty of company. The American Cancer Society (ACS) reports that more people quit smoking on this day than any other day of the year. Since its national start in 1977 (statewide efforts began in Massachusetts in 1971), ACS has used the third Thursday of November to use camaraderie to help millions quit the habit.

The idea is to use the same psychology that gets many young people to start smoking—peer pressure—as a means of helping them stop. The incentives are strong. Last year, the government reported 430,700 deaths directly attributable to tobacco use.

ACS suggests setting a quit day and telling your friends/family about your plan. Also, decide on an ongoing support plan such as nicotine replacement therapy, smoking cessation class and identifying a friend you can call.



When Should I Go To The Emergency Department?

Sometimes the answer is easy - if you think that you have a life-threatening illness that requires immediate medical care, you should go to the nearest Emergency Department (ED). Some examples of life-threatening illnesses include loss of consciousness, a heart attack, a stroke, and severe breathing problems. If you have been in a serious accident giving you severe pain in your neck, arms or legs, and you are concerned about a broken bone or other injury that needs immediate medical care, you should go to the ED.

But what if you have had back pain for the prior month and it isn't getting better? What if you have had a cough for several days and you can't sleep? What if you have a migraine headache? These are concerns that you can take to your personal physician. According to HealthSpring's medical director, Craig W. Gage, MD, "A member's personal physician is the best place to turn when he or she has a minor illness or chronic and recurring symptoms. Your doctor knows your medical history and can provide the best follow up care. In the ED, you are likely to see a different doctor each time. In addition, ED physicians are likely to perform more tests because they don't know your history or if they will

see you again. This increases the cost of medical care and health insurance."

Occasionally you may not be sure if you need to go to the ED or you find yourself in need of medical

care at times when your physician's office is not open. You should call your doctor who will usually be able to call you back within a short period and discuss the best options for your care. Your doctor may advise you to make an appointment the next day or be able to give you some self-care advice to help you feel better.

You should not go to the Emergency Department without calling your doctor unless you think that it is a true emergency.

Otherwise your health insurance benefits may not pay for the ED visit and you will be financially responsible for payment. The Alabama Department of Health defines emergency as the presence of "acute symptoms of sufficient severity such that a prudent layperson, who possesses average knowledge of health and medicine could reasonably expect the absence of immediate medical attention to result in (a) placing the health of the member in serious jeopardy, (b) serious impairment to bodily functions or (c) serious dysfunction of any bodily organ or part."

The Emergency Department is the place to go if you have a life threatening condition or serious injury. For everything else, call your personal physician.

Examples of life-threatening illnesses:

- Loss of consciousness
- Heart attack
- Stroke
- Severe breathing problems

Examples of life-threatening trauma:

- Severe pain in your neck, arms, or legs
- Broken bones

Diabetes Goes to the Heart

November is American Diabetes Month

Diabetes is considered a very manageable condition if treated properly. But the most frightening fact about diabetes is government medical officials today believe that there are 5.9 million people in the United States today who have diabetes but don't know it. By definition, an undiagnosed case of diabetes is an untreated case.

About 450,000 diabetics die every year, many from heart disease. The chance of diabetic having heart disease is as much as four times higher than the general population. This heightens the importance of managing blood pressure and cholesterol as well as blood sugar.

If you do not have diabetes, then you can lower your risk of developing it by maintaining normal weight and exercising at least 3 times weekly.

Information taken from the American Diabetes Association's web site, [www,diabetes.org](http://www.diabetes.org).



The following persons should receive a blood glucose test to determine whether they have diabetes:

- * 45 years or older and overweight
- * Family history of diabetes
- * African-American, Asian-American and Hispanic-American
- * High blood pressure
- * Abnormal cholesterol levels

*When Do I Go To
The Emergency
Department?
Call your doctor or
go to the hospital? Page 3*

*Put Your Cigarette
Out for a Day
or Forever
The Great
American Smokeout Page 4*

*Flu Season
Time to Protect Yourself . . . Page 2*

*October is Breast Cancer
Awareness Month
Make sure you are doing
all you can for prevention
and early detection Page 1*

IN THIS ISSUE

Two Perimeter Park South, Suite 300 West
Birmingham, AL 35243

1026 4th Ave SE
Decatur, AL 35602

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POSTAGE
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