

Health Briefs

Introduction

ConnectCare has compiled this collection of health-related news items from *The Harvard Health Letter* and *The University of California, Berkeley Wellness Letter*. These briefs are not meant to be a definitive reference, but rather to provide a brief oversight of current healthcare research. We will distribute this newsletter periodically throughout the year. As always, your best resource for health information is your healthcare provider. If you wish to receive additional information about a topic, you may contact us at (989) 839-3370 or via e-mail peggy.cameron@connectcare.com and nikkolette.garno@connectcare.com

7 reasons why you may need a medication check-up

A medication regimen isn't something you can set and forget. You and your doctor need to keep tabs on what you're taking and how it's affecting your health. Sometimes things change between visits, and adjustments need to be made. It's up to you to schedule an appointment. Here are seven reasons why that may need to happen.

- 1) You take a lot of pills: It's estimated that more than a third of older adults take five or more prescription medications, over-the-counter drugs, or dietary supplements. If your regimen is too complicated or confusing it increases the risk that you will forget to take your medicine or have take too much of particular medicine and have a dangerous reaction.
- 2) You're experiencing side effects: You might think to call your doctor about an obvious side effect, such as nausea or drowsiness. They may actually indicate that the dose of your medications needs adjustment.
- 3) You're self-prescribing: When you take over-the-counter drugs without consulting your doctor, you may be risking an adverse interaction with your other medications.
- 4) You just got out of the hospital: If you received new medications during your stay; its important to see how they're working and if they need to be adjusted.
- 5) You're seeing other doctors: Patients often assume that their doctors all know what the other ones are doing, but they all don't share the same computers. A cardiologist might change a blood pressure regimen, and the primary care physician may not know about it.
- 6) You don't need the drug anymore: If you're self-prescribing at the drug store or if your doctor has given you a prescription with refills but hasn't provided clear instructions about how long to take it, you may be taking a pill unnecessarily.
- 7) Your symptoms aren't controlled: Your doctor may start you on the lowest medication dose possible. But if you are still having symptoms, they dose may need to be increased.

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Briefer Briefs

To provide a method of obtaining interpreter services for Mid-Michigan Health Network (MHN) customers who are hearing-impaired or speak a language other than English, MHN provides telecommunications (TDD) devices or telephone typewriter (TTY) services for deaf, hard of hearing, or speech impaired enrollees. A separate phone number (989) 839-1689 option three is available for enrollees to call for either of these services. In the event that interpreter services are needed at MHN's office, a laptop is available to provide sign language via Video Remote Interpreting, V.O.I.C.E may be contacted at (989) 497-7111, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m., to 4:30 p.m., or after 4:30 p.m. at (989) 284-5182 to arrange a face-to-face interpreter, or communication boards may be signed out for use with the enrollee. MHN also provides language assistance services for all enrollees who speak a language other than English. Language Services Associates (LSA) may be contacted at (866) 406-0021 account code 2831 to provide translation services using a dual handset for communication.

Did You Know?

ConnectCare maintains a website that provides enrollees with access to look up physicians, hospitals and healthcare service providers online. Just go to www.connectcare.com and on the home page, click on the *Find a Doctor* link for physicians and practitioners, or the *Find A Facility* link to find hospitals, durable medical equipment providers and other services that are in network for your health plan.

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Bracing for flu season: Steps to protect yourself right now

Get your flu shot as soon as possible, wash your hands often, and watch for signs of this dangerous virus.

Flu season is under way, and doctors are hopeful this year's influenza outbreak will be far less severe than the last one. The 2017-18 flu season ranked in the high-severity category for every age group, hospitalizing hundreds of thousands of people and killing almost 200 children and tens of thousands of adults—most of them ages 65 or older. Why was the last flu season so vicious? "The flu vaccine wasn't a great match for the actual virus that wound up infecting people," Dr. Poznansky, director of the vaccine immunotherapy center at Harvard-affiliated Massachusetts General Hospital explains. The vaccine was only about 40% effective, meaning that people who received the vaccine were 40% less likely to get sick. The FDA is trying to figure out why.

A tricky cocktail

Predicting which flu strains will be floating around, and thus which ones should go into a vaccine, is always a gamble. It's done many months in advance, because it takes months to make enough vaccine for hundreds of millions of people. "Flu viruses are constantly changing, and the viruses that months ago were chosen for the vaccine may morph by the time the epidemic strikes. This year's trivalent flu shot will cover two influenza A viruses and one influenza B virus, with two of the strains swapped out from last year. The quadrivalent vaccine (which covers four types of flu viruses) adds another B virus into the mix.

Trivalent vs. quadrivalent

Dr. Poznansky recommends that older adults get the quadrivalent vaccine if possible, it's risky for adults if you don't get the shot. The CDC estimates that the vast majority of flu-related deaths (71%-85%) and flu-related hospitalizations (*54%-70%) occur in people ages 65 or older. You are especially susceptible for flu complications if you have diabetes or health, lung, or kidney disease, or if you take medication that suppressed your immune system. Skipping a flu shot is risky for kids too. Of the 179 children who died from the flu last season, 80% had not received a flu shot.