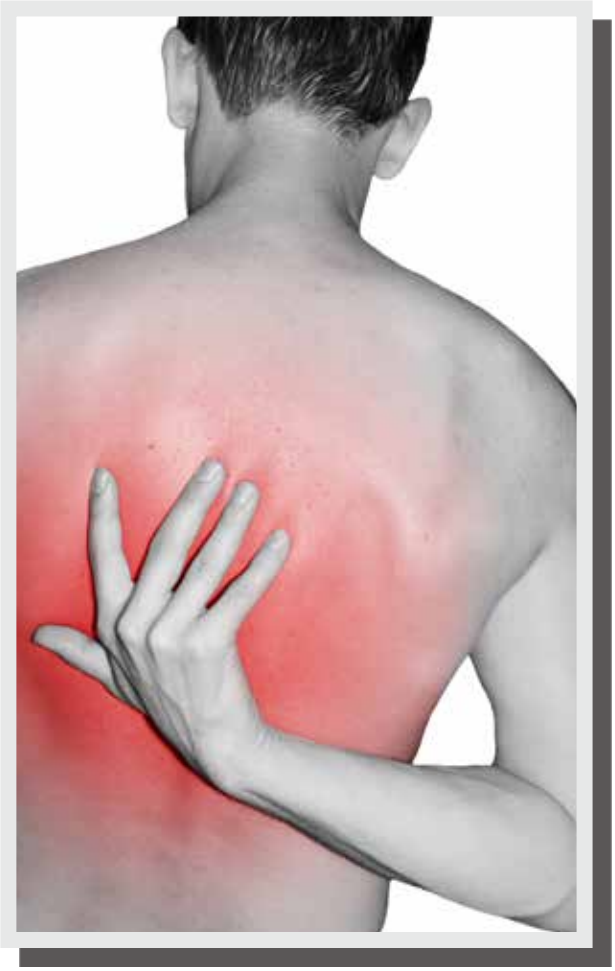
BetterSafe
WELCOA'S ONLINE BULLETIN FOR YOUR FAMILY'S SAFETY

The Sting Of Shingles

Vaccine, Treatments Reduce Risks



If you've ever had chickenpox, you may be at risk for a painful disease called shingles as you grow older. Shingles is a sometimes-agonizing skin rash and nerve disease that's caused by a virus. Fortunately, you can take steps to prevent shingles or ease its serious effects.

Shingles usually affects adults after age 50, although it can strike at any age. "In the U.S., the incidence of shingles is actually increasing," says Dr. Jeffrey Cohen, an infectious disease researcher at the National Institutes of Health (NIH). "If you live to be 85 years old, you have a 50% chance of getting shingles."

How Do You Get Shingles?

Shingles is caused by the varicella-zoster virus—the same virus that causes chickenpox. Once you've had chickenpox, the virus stays with you for life, hidden and inactive in your nerve cells. Your immune system helps keep chickenpox from returning. But later in life, the virus can re-emerge and cause shingles (also known as herpes zoster).

You can't "catch" shingles from someone else. But it is possible for a person with a blistery shingles rash to pass on the varicella-zoster virus to someone who's never had chickenpox or a chickenpox vaccine. If that happens, the other person would get chickenpox, not shingles.

Shingles may cause skin sensitivity ranging from mild itching to severe pain along with burning, tingling, or numbness. A rash with fluid-filled blisters nearly always appears on just one side of the body or

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When To Get A Shingles Vaccine

For most people 50 and older, the vaccine can help prevent shingles. If vaccinated people do get shingles, it's likely to be less severe.

- **At ages 50 to 59**, the Zostavax vaccine is FDA-approved for preventing shingles, but experts often advise waiting until age 60. Talk with your doctor if you have questions about the shingles vaccine.
- **At ages 60 and older**, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advises that most people get the vaccine, even if they've already had shingles. The vaccine can protect against post-herpetic neuralgia, one of the most serious complications of shingles.

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face. The rash usually lasts for 7 to 10 days. Other symptoms may include chills, fever, upset stomach, and headache.

Shingles can lead to some serious problems. If it appears on your face, it can affect your hearing and vision. It may cause lasting eye damage or blindness. After the rash fades, the pain may linger for months or years, especially in older people. This lasting pain, called post-herpetic neuralgia, affects nearly 1 out of every 3 older people with shingles. The pain can be so severe that even the gentlest touch or breeze can feel excruciating.

To help prevent these problems, see your doctor at the first sign of shingles. Early treatment can shorten the length of infection and reduce the risk of serious complications

Treating Shingles

To treat shingles, your doctor may prescribe antiviral drugs to help fight the varicella-zoster virus. Steroids can lessen pain and shorten the time you're sick. Other types of medicines can also relieve pain.

Fortunately, a vaccine called Zostavax can help prevent shingles or decrease its severity. It's been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for people ages 50 and older. "The vaccine can prevent shingles and reduce the risk of post-herpetic neuralgia, which can be very debilitating," Cohen says.

The shingles vaccine is available by prescription. Unfortunately, the vaccine is expensive, and the costs aren't always covered by health insurance. If you're considering the shingles vaccine, be sure to discuss the pros and cons of the vaccine with your doctor, and check with your insurance provider about coverage.

Now that people have been receiving the shingles vaccine for several years, researchers are evaluating whether booster shots might be appropriate. Scientists are also studying post-herpetic neuralgia to find better ways to treat this complication from shingles.

DayInDayOut

WELCOA'S ONLINE BULLETIN FOR YOUR LIFESTYLE

STAMP OUT SMOKING

Tobacco-Free Living

Most of us know that smoking is unhealthy. So why do so many people still do it? The answers are complex. Researchers have found effective ways to help people quit smoking—or prevent them from starting in the first place. The tricky part is putting these tools to use. We can all take steps to help stamp out smoking.

Fifty years ago, the first Surgeon General's Report on Smoking and Health revealed that smoking cigarettes raises your risk of developing several diseases. Since then, smoking rates have declined, saving millions of lives. But at the same time, more than 20 million Americans have died too soon because of smoking. And more than 3,200 children under age 18 smoke their first cigarette every day as a result of tobacco industry marketing and other influences.

We know a lot more than we used to about the dangers of tobacco smoke. "When you smoke, you inhale thousands of hazardous chemicals," explains Dr. Michele Bloch, a tobacco control expert at National Institutes of Health (NIH). "They travel all around inside your body and cause damage to numerous parts."

Cigarette smoke can quickly damage delicate lung tissue. It doesn't have a chance to heal when it's exposed to smoke day after day. The result can be a wide range of deadly lung conditions, such as emphysema and chronic bronchitis.

The chemicals from tobacco smoke travel from the lungs into the bloodstream. They damage your heart and blood vessels to cause cardiovascular problems, such as heart disease and stroke. Cardiovascular disease kills over 800,000 people a year nationwide.

The compounds in tobacco smoke can enter cells throughout your body and damage the DNA inside. DNA is the long threadlike molecule found in nearly all your cells. It's an essential "blueprint" that controls how your cells grow, where they go, and what they do.

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When DNA gets damaged, cells can begin to grow abnormally. The body usually attacks and kills such cells. But the toxic chemicals in cigarette smoke weaken this process, making it easier for the cells to multiply out of control. The result is cancer.

Smokers dramatically increase their risk of developing many types of cancer. Nearly all lung cancer—the number-one cancer killer—is caused by smoking. Smoking can lead to cancer in many parts of the body, including the throat, mouth, nasal cavity, stomach, pancreas, liver, kidney, bladder, colon, rectum, and cervix. It can also cause leukemia, a cancer of the blood.

Other Health Ills Caused By Smoking

Smoking can cause all sorts of other health issues, too. When the DNA in sperm becomes damaged, it can lead to infertility. Smoking while you're pregnant can cause a host of problems, including low birth weight and pre-term delivery. Smokers are 30% to 40% more likely to develop type 2 diabetes than nonsmokers. And smoking can make it harder for the body to fight disease.

The best way to prevent tobacco-related health problems is to keep kids from smoking in the first place. "The vast majority of new smokers begin when they are too young to appreciate the risk," Bloch says.

Tools To Quit

Researchers do know that the health of even long-time smokers can improve quickly after quitting. Within a year of quitting, heart attack risk drops dramatically. Within 5 years, the risk of stroke can fall to nearly that of a nonsmoker. Quitting also lowers the risk of cancer and other diseases.

"If you are a smoker, the single most important thing you can do to protect your health and the health of your family is to quit," Bloch says. "And help is available."

Research has revealed effective strategies to help people quit smoking. That's partly why quit rates for smokers are on the rise.

More than half of all people who've smoked have already quit.

Studies show that people who talk to their doctors about quitting or call quit lines for advice are more successful than those who go it alone. Quitters can double or triple their chances of success by using medications approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and nicotine patches, gum, or lozenges, along with coaching support.

TOPPLE TOBACCO USE

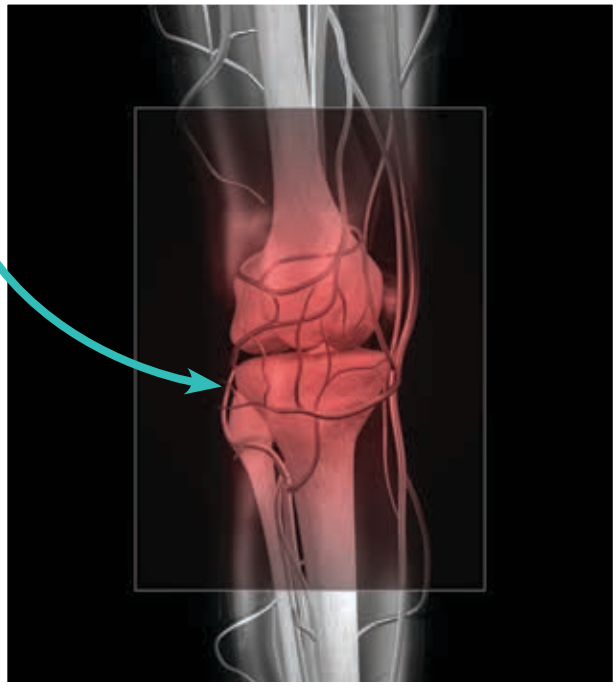
Communities and government at all levels can come together to help break the cycle of sickness and death caused by smoking:

- **Work in your community to protect youth from advertising that makes smoking seem appealing.**
- **Make smoking less accessible, less affordable, less acceptable.**
- **Make stop-smoking resources readily available.**
- **Be persistent. Most people need to try quitting several times before they succeed, but more than half of smokers have successfully quit.**
- **If you're a smoker, free help is available at 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669) and online at http://smokefree.gov.**

TakeCharge

WELCOA'S ONLINE SELF-CARE BULLETIN

Who Needs A Knee Replacement?



Knee replacement involves removing parts of your natural knee joint and replacing them with artificial parts. Knee replacement is the most common type of joint replacement surgery.

Several forms of arthritis can damage knees and cause so much pain and disability that knees need to be replaced. Certain knee deformities—such as bowed legs or knock knees—can wear down cartilage and create difficulties. Over time, this creates stress on the joints that can wear down cartilage and lead to pain and disability. In these cases, knee replacement can restore the normal alignment of the knee and correct disability.

Knee damage can also result from a problem called avascular necrosis, or osteonecrosis, in which the bones lose their blood supply, die, and eventually collapse. If other treatments haven't helped, your doctor may suggest knee replacement when pain and stiffness begin to interfere with your everyday activities.

If you'd like to consider knee replacement, ask your doctor to refer you to an orthopedic surgeon, a doctor specially trained to treat problems of the bones and joints.

Other Treatments

Your doctor may recommend knee replacement if pain and stiffness interfere with your ability to do everyday activities—particularly if other treatments have not helped.

Treatments your doctor will likely recommend before knee replacement include:

- **exercises** to strengthen the muscles around the wknee and improve flexibility
- **weight loss**, if needed, to reduce the load the knee must bear
- **walking aids** such as canes to reduce stress on the joint
- **shoe inserts** to improve the knee's alignment
- **medicines** to relieve pain

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TakeCharge

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Medicines To Relieve Knee Pain

Several different medicines can be useful for knee pain. Some medicines are taken by mouth. These include analgesic medications such as acetaminophen and tramadol, and nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as ibuprofen or naproxen. Some, referred to as topical analgesics, are rubbed into the skin directly over the knee. Others are injected into the knee joint. These include corticosteroids, which are strong inflammation-fighting drugs, and hyaluronic acid substitutes, also called viscosupplements, which are designed to replace a substance that gives joint fluid its "slipperiness."

Who Shouldn't Have Knee Replacement Surgery

Although knee replacement is a common surgery, it is not for everyone. For example, you should not have a knee replacement if you have an infection of the knee, a severe nerve disorder, or severe blood vessel disease. Your doctor may also advise against surgery if you are severely overweight, have heart or lung disorders that could complicate surgery or anesthesia, or have a skin condition such as psoriasis where the incisions would be made.

Remember, the decision to have knee replacement surgery is one you must make with your doctor and your family. If you would like to consider knee replacement surgery, ask your doctor to refer you for evaluation to an orthopedic surgeon, a doctor specially trained to treat problems with the bones and joints.

The surgeon must consider many factors before recommending knee replacement. People who are generally healthy are the best candidates for the surgery, and those who have surgery before advanced joint damage occurs tend to recover more quickly and have better outcomes.

Remember, the decision to have knee replacement surgery is one you must make with your doctors and your family.

To Your Health

WELCOA'S ONLINE GENERAL WELLNESS BULLETIN

& BODY WEIGHT

Overweight and obese adults who drink diet beverages take in more calories from solid foods—especially snacks—than those who drink sugary beverages, according to a new study. The findings raise questions about using diet drinks for weight control in heavier adults.

Excess weight can raise your risk for many health problems, including type 2 diabetes, cancer, and heart disease. Many people use diet drinks to help control their weight. But studies of how these beverages affect weight control have had mixed results.

To examine the link between diet drinks and calories, National Institutes of Health (NIH)-funded scientists looked at data on nearly 24,000 adults. The researchers found that about 10% of healthy-weight adults drank diet beverages, compared to about 20% of over-weight and obese adults.

Healthy-weight adults who drank diet beverages ate less food and fewer total calories on a typical day than those who drank sugared beverages.

Among adults who were over-weight or obese, total calorie intake was similar between those who drank diet or sugary beverages. Heavier adults who drank diet beverages tended to eat more calories in the form of solid foods.

The Link Between Diet Drinks & Weight

Taking a look at solid-food intake, the scientists found that obese adults who consumed diet drinks ate significantly more calories per day in salty snacks and sweet snacks than those who drank sugared beverages.

"The results suggest that overweight and obese adults looking to lose or maintain their weight—who have already made the switch from sugary to diet beverages—may need to look carefully at other components of their solid-food diet," says study coauthor Dr. Sara N. Bleich at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

Future studies might test whether diet drinks help healthy-weight adults maintain their weight.

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Physical Activity & Your Health

Physical activity is any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles; such movement results in an expenditure of energy. Physical activity is a critical component of energy balance, a term used to describe how weight, diet, and physical activity influence health, including cancer risk.

How is physical activity related to health?

Researchers have established that regular physical activity can improve health by:

- Helping to control weight.
- Maintaining healthy bones, muscles, and joints.
- Reducing the risk of developing high blood pressure and diabetes.
- Promoting psychological well-being.
- Reducing the risk of death from heart disease.
- Reducing the risk of premature death.

In addition to these health benefits, researchers are learning that physical activity can also affect the risk of cancer. There is convincing evidence that physical activity is associated with a reduced risk of cancers of the colon and breast. Several studies also have reported links between physical activity and a reduced risk of cancers of the prostate, lung, and lining of the uterus (endometrial cancer). Despite these health benefits, recent studies have shown that more than 50 percent of Americans do not engage in enough regular physical activity

How much physical activity do adults need?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend that adults "engage in moderate-intensity physical activity (like brisk walking) for at least 30 minutes on five or more days of the week," or "engage in vigorous-intensity physical activity (like running or swimming) for at least 20 minutes on three or more days of the week".

THE BENEFITS OF MOVEMENT

- **Physical activity is a critical component of energy balance, the term researchers use to describe how weight, diet, and physical activity influence health.**
- **There is strong evidence that physical activity is associated with reduced risk of cancers of the colon and breast.**
- **Several studies have also reported links between physical activity and reduced risk of endometrial (lining of the uterus), lung, and prostate cancers.**
- **Current National Cancer Institute-funded studies are exploring the role of physical activity in cancer survivorship and quality of life, cancer risk, and the needs of populations at increased risk.**