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WANT A HEALTHIER HEART?

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Volunteer!

People who volunteer have lower rates of heart disease and live longer than those who don't volunteer, according to a recent report in the *Mayo Clinic Women's HealthSource* newsletter.

Volunteering can boost mental health, too. It's a great way to stay connected socially, and those social connections can help buffer stress and get a person through hard times. Volunteering can help provide a sense of purpose — something all of us can use during these uncertain times.

To realize the health benefits of volunteering, a commitment of 40 to 100 hours a year is

needed, studies have shown. That equates to a couple of hours per week.

Think about your interests, then phone or visit the organization you're interested in to determine if the fit is a good one. If it's not, keep looking. Many organizations would welcome the skills and wisdom you can share.

Visit www.HealthMart.com to learn more about heart health.



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DIABETES UPDATE

Help Control Diabetes with Healthful Eating

If you have diabetes, the National Diabetes Education Program reminds you to talk with your doctor about using a diabetes meal plan to help you choose healthy food. Some tips to get you started:

- Choose fruits, vegetables, fish, lean meats and poultry, dry peas or beans, skim milk, and low-fat cheese.
- Avoid foods that have a lot of sugar, salt, and fat.
- Eat smaller portions of meat, fish, and poultry and larger portions of fruits and veggies.

Child Safety Update

How Does Your Child's Car Seat Rate?

For parents, a sometimes-confusing purchase is now a bit easier thanks to a five-star government rating system that grades child-safety seats on ease of installation.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration says 7 out of 10 child-safety seats are either the wrong size for the child or are seriously misused, reducing their effectiveness in a crash. When properly used, child-restraint systems reduce fatal injury by 71% for infants and 54% for toddlers in passenger cars. In light trucks, fatal injuries are reduced by 58% for infants and 59% for toddlers.

The rating system doesn't measure how effective a seat is in protecting a child in the event of a crash, but rather compares how easy one seat is to properly use over another. All child restraints sold in the U.S. already are required to comply with federal safety standards to provide a high level of crash protection for children.

For a complete list of rankings, visit www.nhtsa.gov and click on "Child Passenger Safety: seat ratings, inspection stations, LATCH, and more" under "Quick Clicks."

Want more information on child safety? Visit www.HealthMart.com.



GARDASIL APPROVED FOR USE IN MALES

Vaccine Helps Protect Against HPV

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved the Gardasil vaccine for preventing genital warts in males ages 9 through 26. The vaccine helps protect against human papillomavirus (HPV), a sexually transmitted infection that can lead to genital warts. It was previously approved for preventing HPV in girls and women. HPV can lead to genital warts in women, and certain strains of HPV have been associated with cervical cancer.

The approval is based on a trial that included more than 4,000 boys and men ages 16 to 26. Researchers found Gardasil to be nearly

90% effective in preventing genital warts caused by two particular types of HPV.

Other studies looked at the immune response of Gardasil in boys ages 9 through 15. They concluded that the vaccine would be equally effective in this group. It has not yet been decided if Gardasil will be added to the standard immunization schedule for boys.

Merck, the manufacturer of Gardasil, is conducting further studies to look at both safety and effectiveness.

TEEN HEALTH

Smoking by Young Teens Strongly Tied to Drug and Alcohol Use

Attitudes toward smoking influence young teenagers' use of drugs and alcohol, say researchers at Weill Cornell Medical College in New York City. The researchers analyzed confidential surveys taken by 2,400 sixth- and seventh-graders in New York City. Questions dealt with substance use and several psychological factors that previous research suggests may be related to drug use.

For girls, friends were shown to be central. Ambivalent or permissive attitudes within their social group toward smoking were associated with multiple-drug use, defined as two or more of the following behaviors: smoking, drinking, and marijuana use.

This wasn't the case with boys, whose multiple-drug use was instead predicted by the extent to which they perceived smoking to be prevalent in their age group — not just among their friends.

Want more information on smoking and health? Visit www.HealthMart.com.



DID YOU KNOW?

- Vitamin C toxicity is very rare, because the body cannot store the vitamin. However, amounts greater than 2,000 mg/day are not recommended because such high doses can lead to stomach upset and diarrhea.

— Source: National Institutes of Health



- Over-the-counter pain medications can have varying degrees of side effects (including gastrointestinal, kidney, and liver problems). Taking the proper dosage is important. Questions? See your doctor or pharmacist. And always tell your doctor about all the medications you take — both prescription and non-prescription.

— Source: University of Southern California School of Pharmacy



"How Bad Is My Child's Ear Infection?"

Simple Scoring System Can Help Parents Monitor Symptoms

A simple 13-point symptom score can help track improvement in infants and toddlers with middle-ear infection, according to a study reported in *The Pediatric Infectious Disease Journal*.

Nader Shaikh, M.D., and colleagues at Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh created a list of 28 symptoms associated with middle-ear infection. They then narrowed the list to the seven most important symptoms: ear pain, ear tugging, irritability, decreased play, decreased appetite, difficulty sleeping, and fever. These symptoms were incorporated into the 13-point score. The first six symptoms were rated on a 0-to-2 scale (none = 0, a little = 1, a lot = 2). The final symptom, fever, was rated either absent (0) or present (1).

The researchers evaluated how well the scores reflected the presence and severity of middle-ear infection. The scoring done by parents turned out to be a good indicator of infection. At visits where an ear infection was present, the children's average score was 3.7, compared with less than 1.0 when there was no ear infection.

Such scoring is not intended for use in determining whether an infection is present. That diagnosis can only be made by a healthcare professional after a physical examination. The scoring should be used to help follow the course of the infection after diagnosis, Shaikh says.



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ARE AMALGAM TOOTH FILLINGS SAFE FOR KIDS?

Yes, Researchers Say

Amalgam tooth fillings don't adversely affect children's brain development and neurological status, researchers report in the *Journal of the American Dental Association*.

The study's authors — a joint team from the University of Lisbon, Portugal and the University of Washington, Seattle — looked at the possible neurological effects of dental-amalgam tooth restorations. Dental amalgam contains mercury combined with other metals such as silver, copper, tin, and zinc to form a safe, stable alloy. Dental amalgam has been used for generations to fill decayed teeth that might otherwise have been lost.

For seven years, the authors studied 507 children ages 8 through 12 years who received either amalgam or resin-based composite fillings. They conducted routine clinical neurological examinations. After seven years, the two groups of children did not differ in terms of the presence of neurological abnormalities.

“Even at the levels of amalgam exposure in this study (a mean of 7.7 to 10.7 amalgam surfaces per subject across the seven years of follow-up),” the authors write, “we conclude that exposure to mercury from dental amalgam does not adversely affect neurological status.”

HEALTH TIP



The Importance of Vitamin D

Many otherwise healthy children have low vitamin D levels, which may put them at risk for health problems. Vitamin D is crucial for musculoskeletal health and immune function. Sources include fortified milk and exposure to sunshine.

— Source: *The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia*

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