

Diabetes Disease Management Newsletter

summer 2009

Taking Care of Yourself in Summer Heat

Humidity above 70% and temperatures above 70°F can interfere with your body's natural cooling process. You should avoid exercising in hot and humid conditions. Your body cools itself by sweating, but sweating too much causes you to lose fluid and decreases your blood volume. Decreased blood volume makes your heart work harder to supply blood and oxygen to the working muscles, organs and skin. Your nervous system can not work properly if you lose too much fluid and your body temperature rises. This can also lead to heart and brain damage. If you have a chronic disease such as hypertension, heart failure, diabetes or asthma, speak with your doctor before starting any activity in the heat.

Monitor your fluid level by weighing yourself in the morning after using the bathroom. If you weigh two or more pounds less than normal, you may be dehydrated. Speak with your doctor about your limitations and ask for guidelines for adding fluid if your weight decreases quickly overnight.

Wearing light and comfortable clothes, working or playing in the early morning or late evening, avoiding mid-day sun and heat and taking frequent rest periods will decrease your risks. If you notice any of the symptoms shown to the right, stop your activity and get into an air conditioned, shaded area. Take immediate steps to cool down by applying cool water to your skin and drinking cool, non alcoholic beverages. Seek medical attention at once. Remember: the symptoms of heat stroke and exhaustion can come on quickly and you may not be aware you are experiencing them - they can be deadly. Symptoms to watch for are:



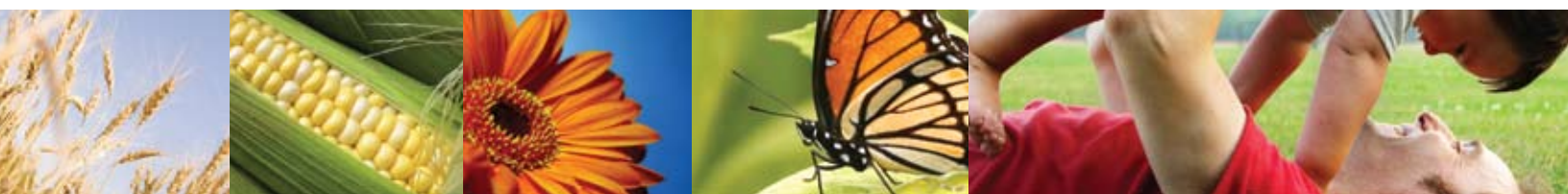
The symptoms of heat exhaustion

- heavy sweating
- cold, clammy skin
- dizziness or fainting
- a weak and rapid pulse
- muscle cramps
- fast, shallow breathing
- nausea, vomiting or both

The symptoms of heat stroke

- warm, dry skin with no sweating
- strong and rapid pulse
- confusion and/or unconsciousness
- high fever
- throbbing headaches
- nausea, vomiting or both

Resource: American Heart Association
<http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=4660>



Diabetes Disease Management Newsletter

Insulin and Syringe Safety

Insulin manufacturers recommend storing insulin in a refrigerator, but injecting cold insulin can be uncomfortable. Insulin can be stored at room temperature for up to one month. It is important to keep insulin away from extreme heat or cold and direct sunlight. Never store your insulin in the freezer or leave it in your car. Store your extra bottles in the refrigerator. Write the date you open the bottle on the label and always check the bottle expiration date. Never use insulin past the expiration date. Check the color of the insulin. Insulin should be clear. Any insulin bottle containing particles, discoloration, frosting, clumps or crystals should not be used and should be returned to your pharmacy.

Many diabetics reuse insulin syringes to save money but you should speak with your physician before attempting to reuse the syringes. Sterility is not guaranteed on reused syringes. The Center for Disease Control warns that the reuse of needles and syringes is a threat to the patient's health. Never reuse someone else's syringe or allow others to use yours. Keep the needle clean by recapping immediately and do not allow it to touch anything except clean skin or the top of the insulin bottle. Wiping needles with alcohol

removes the coating that helps the needle slide through the skin.

Improper syringe disposal can cause injury to yourself and others. Insulin syringes are medical waste and should never be placed in a recycling container. Use a heavy duty, opaque (not clear) plastic container with a screw top or a metal box that closes tightly and contact your local refuse company for disposal instructions. Removing needles prevents their reuse, but you must do so carefully by clipping. Never cut needles off with scissors because the needles can fly and hurt someone. Bring your used syringes home with you when you are traveling. Never discard a syringe or needle in a public trash bin.

References:

American Diabetes Association, *Insulin Storage and Syringe Safety Information* @ <http://www.diabetes.org/type-1-diabetes/safety.jsp>
Center for Disease Control and Prevention, *A Patient Safety Threat-Syringe Reuse* @ http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/PS_SyringeReuseFS.html



Importance of Annual Retinal Eye Exams

Dr. Robert Phelps, O.D., is a certified diabetic educator with more than thirty years of experience. He is working with the American Diabetes Association to get information to everyone with diabetes about the importance of annual retinal eye exams.

People with diabetes often worry about going blind. Dr. Phelps wants patients to know most diabetes-related blindness is preventable if they get annual retinal eye exams and control their diabetes. The retina of the eye undergoes changes when subjected to chronic elevated levels of blood sugar. Without control, diabetic retinopathy can lead to blindness.

You may think your vision is fine and you don't need an eye exam. This is one of the biggest mistakes patients with diabetes make according to Dr. Phelps: you may think your vision is perfect and still have a dangerous level of retinopathy.

If you have not had a retinal eye examination within the last year, schedule an appointment today. TRICARE covers diagnostic retinal eye exams for patients with diabetes. If you are a prime beneficiary, you are allowed to set up your own appointment for a routine eye examination with any network optometrist and/or ophthalmologist.

Resources: American Diabetes Association
TRICARE Policy Manual



How to Talk to Your Doctor

How often have you left a doctor's appointment and wished you had asked a few more questions? Ever left a clinic or urgent care center and realized you didn't remember all the instructions?

Sadly, these are all-too-common occurrences, and ones you can avoid by learning how to talk with your doctor instead of just listening.

Sure, doctors are busy and don't seem to have the time to talk-but you are busy too, right? To make sure you get the most out of your doctor visit, it's important to know how to talk with your doctor. Here are some suggestions from a doctor who sees patients regularly:

1. Write questions and have the topics you'd like to discuss beforehand. When you're prepared, the doctor can focus on answering the questions you have and you can leave with more information.
2. Help keep your doctor on track. A lot of physicians may fall into chit-chat with their patients. That may be great socially, but may not impart much information.
3. Ask for instructions in writing. Generally, doctors try to give patients something in writing to help jog their memory about their conversation. But if they forget to give you an instruction sheet or a hand-written set of information, please ask them to give you something in writing.
4. Internet for conversation – The Internet can be a great place to get additional information. But just because it's on the Internet doesn't mean it's accurate. Ask your doctor for Web sites that have high-quality information.



5. It's OK to stop the doctor for questions. For most doctors, it's very difficult to have a patient who gives them a blank look. In general, they'd much rather a patient stop and ask questions to clarify what was said.
6. Be sure when you arrive at the office, you bring all your current medications – including medications other doctors may have prescribed. That includes herbs, vitamins, and over-the-counter medications that may trigger allergic reactions or drug interactions.
7. Make sure that you bring a pen and paper with you.

Using these simple techniques can make you better at asking questions that can help you in the long run. Simple preparation can lead to better results from your doctor visits.

By: Dr. Tom James, Healthcare Advisor for Humana. Dr. James is board certified in Internal Medicine and in Pediatrics.

Consider Aspirin Therapy

Studies have shown that taking a low dose aspirin every day significantly lowers the risk of having a heart attack. People at high risk for a heart attack include those with diabetes and high blood pressure.

The VA/DoD clinical practice guideline for the management of diabetes recommends aspirin therapy for all adult patients with type 2 diabetes and evidence of cardiovascular disease (disease of the heart and blood vessels). The guideline further recommends physicians consider beginning aspirin therapy for prevention of cardiovascular disease in patients age 40 with type 2 diabetes and one or more other cardiovascular risk factors. Patients age 30 to 40 years of age with type 2 diabetes require individual evaluation by their physician.

Daily aspirin use is not safe for everyone. People who are allergic to aspirin, bleed easily, have liver disease or recent bleeding from their digestive tract should not take aspirin. As with any medication, check with your doctor before beginning daily aspirin use.

Sources: VA/DoD Clinical Practice Guideline For the Management of Diabetes Mellitus
American Diabetes Association "Taking Aspirin to Protect Your Heart"



Health Information Audio Library
Available 24 hours a day,
7 days a week at: 877-217-7946

Health and Wellness web site:
www.humana-military.com

HUMANA MILITARY
HEALTHCARE SERVICES
★ ★ ★ ★ ★

summer 2009

TP-2847.3

Fish and Omega-3 Fatty Acids Supplements

The American Heart Association recommends eating fish at least two times a week. Fatty fish such as mackerel, lake trout, herring, albacore tuna, and salmon are a good source of protein and don't have the high saturated fat that fatty meat products have. Fatty fish are also high in omega-3 fatty acids.

In 2002, the American Heart Association released a scientific statement "Fish Consumption, Fish Oil, Omega-3 Fatty Acids and Cardiovascular Disease," on the effects of omega-3 fatty acids on heart functions. While research continues on the link between omega-3 fatty acids and cardiovascular disease (disease of the heart and blood vessels), research has shown omega-3 fatty acids:

- Decrease risk of arrhythmias (irregular heart beats)
- Decrease triglyceride levels
- Lower blood pressure (slightly)
- Decrease the growth rate of plaque build up in the arteries

Fish oil supplements are another way to get omega-3 fatty acids. The amount of fish oil or omega-3 fatty acid supplements to take is not clear. Patients taking more than 3 grams of omega-3 fatty acids from capsules should do so only under a physician's care. High intakes can cause excessive bleeding in some people.

The bottom line with omega-3 fatty acid supplements is the same as for any over the counter medication (OTC). Talk to your doctor about the benefits and any pros and cons before you purchase or take them.

Reference: American Heart Association



Humana Military Healthcare Services
P.O. Box 740017
Louisville, KY 40201

