

healthkeys[®]

Summer 2009

A message from Choice Medical Group

Choice Medical Group (CMG) continues to ensure that our High Desert residents have access to comprehensive care with choices. We strive to create programs that keep our senior patients healthy, proactive in their healthcare and aware of any changes in Medicare benefits.

CMG contracts with several Medicare Advantage Plans to provide our seniors with plans to fit their needs. CMG recognizes that seniors covered by a Medicare Advantage Plan enjoy coordinated healthcare and lower out-of-pocket costs while benefiting from efficiencies through investments in electronic medical records and other health-technology innovations. CMG ensures that more senior patients have access to healthcare with low or no co-pays, chronic disease management, preventive services and wellness programs.

Congress is considering drastic changes to America's Medicare system. For millions of seniors, these changes could increase their out-of-pocket costs and decrease their quality of care. CMG is asking all seniors to protect their Medicare benefits and voice their concerns to Congress. We encourage you to log on to www.americansforcoordinatedhealthcare.org. Register and make your voice heard. If you'd like our help making your voice heard, call **(760) 242-7777, ext. 224 or 228**. Remember, CMG is "Doing our part in our community ... to keep you healthy." HK

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Persistent pressure

Your doctor can help you fight resistant hypertension

Just can't drop your blood pressure below 140/90 mm Hg? If you've made lifestyle changes and are taking three or more medications to no avail, you may have *resistant hypertension*, or high blood pressure that won't budge. As with regular hypertension, most people don't feel anything until the condition reaches advanced stages. Then they might experience dull headaches, dizziness and nosebleeds.

Resistant hypertension is diagnosed more often in older people, African-Americans and women. Being


obese, having a high baseline blood pressure and consuming excessive salt increase the risk, as does having chronic kidney disease, diabetes or an enlarged left heart ventricle.

Some cases can be attributed to the use of nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as ibuprofen, as well as decongestants, excessive alcohol, natural licorice (not the candy but an ingredient in some tobacco products), some diet pills, ephedra and some stimulants and prescription steroids. Sometimes, you can chase away resistant hyper-

tension by eliminating use of these products, taking medicine and making lifestyle changes.

LOWER YOUR LEVELS

Talk with your healthcare provider if you've got stubbornly high blood pressure. Ask about taking these steps:

- Move one or more hypertension medications to bedtime, which can improve blood pressure control.
- Monitor your blood pressure at home.
- Lose weight.
- Exercise for 30 minutes most days of the week.
- Skip salt, cut back on saturated fat and limit alcoholic drinks. Load up on foods containing fiber, calcium, potassium and magnesium.
- If you have obstructive sleep apnea, treat it.
- See a hypertension specialist. 



Up to **30 percent of people** with high blood pressure **suffer from resistant hypertension.**

Danger zone

If you don't get resistant hypertension under control, you risk the following health complications:

- thickening and hardening of the arteries, which could lead to heart attack or stroke—even death
- heart failure
- aneurysm
- stroke
- kidney damage
- vision loss
- metabolic syndrome
- trouble remembering and understanding concepts



Go Greek to beat cancer

The Mediterranean diet sends disease packing

The Mediterranean diet, which borrows the best habits of our friends living on the faraway sea, has helped many people around the world drop pounds, protect their hearts and cut their diabetes risk. Now, the latest good news is that the Mediterranean diet may help keep cancer at bay, too.

A recent study followed more than 25,000 Greeks for nearly eight years and found that those who most closely adhered to the diet were less likely to develop any kind of cancer.

In fact, a simple change like eating lots more veggies and reaching for olive oil over butter lowered the risk by a whopping 12 percent. It appears that, when eaten together as part of a nutritious diet, the antioxidant properties of the individual foods conspire to keep you healthy. Here's how you can live life Mediterranean-style:

EMPHASIZE THESE FOODS

- **Fruits and vegetables.** Aim for seven to 10 servings a day, in a vari-

ety of colors. Think green peppers, purple eggplant and red tomatoes.

- **Whole grains.** Whether it's sandwich bread or rice, opt for the whole-grain version instead of the bleached-out stuff. It'll fill your belly faster and provide more nutrients.

- **Healthy oils.** Say yes to healthy unsaturated fats and pass on bad-for-you saturated varieties. Whether you're looking for something to spread on your bread or a tasty salad topper, opt for extra-virgin olive oil, which is rich in good-for-you monounsaturated fat.



EAT THESE FOODS IN MODERATION

- **Fish.** Have baked, broiled or grilled fish once or twice a week. Salmon, trout, mackerel, water-packed tuna and herring all contain healthy omega-3 fatty acids.


- **Nuts.** Grab a handful of polyunsaturated-fat-packed Brazil nuts, almonds, pecans and walnuts for a filling mid-afternoon snack.



AVOID THESE

- **Red meat and pork.** The saturated fat in these meats is bad news. You're better off eating meals with chicken, fish and veggies.

- **Full-fat dairy.** Choose skim, fat-free and low-fat milk, yogurt and cheese.

- **Trans fat.** Skip the butter tub and processed foods containing this unhealthy fat; walk away if "hydrogenated" appears in the ingredients list—even if the label says "no trans fat" (manufacturers can make that claim if products contain less than 0.5 grams a serving). 

Prescription for trouble?

Misusing your meds could mean a trip to the ER

Has your medicine cabinet turned into a sea of prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) pill bottles? More than half of older adults regularly use five or more prescription drugs, OTC medicines or dietary supplements. Not only is it confusing to take so many pills every day, it can be dangerous: A recent study found that almost one in every 25 people ages 57 to 85 were taking risky drug combinations that could land them in the hospital. And every year, ERs treat more than 175,000 cases of

adverse drug reactions among those ages 65 and older.

DANGEROUS DOSING

When used properly, medications improve our quality of life. But taking them incorrectly can cause serious side effects. For example, taking warfarin, a popular blood thinner used to prevent clots, with other drugs such as aspirin or the cholesterol drug simvastatin can thin the blood even more. In fact, warfarin, insulin and the heart drug digoxin are responsible for one-third of drug-related ER visits by people ages 65 and older.

Antacids can also cause problems, interfering with how well your body absorbs medicines for high blood pressure and Parkinson's disease. And don't swallow your daily pills with a glass of grapefruit juice: Substances in grapefruit products and oranges can prevent the proper breakdown of many drugs, including statins, antidepressants and heart and blood pressure meds, leaving too much medication in the blood.

Mixing alcohol with some medications is dangerous, too. It can make a drug useless or intensify side effects such as drowsiness and headaches. It can also lead to serious breathing or heart problems.



Pills and grapefruit juice don't mix.

BE SMART, STAY SAFE

Take steps to reduce your risk of medication errors and interactions:

► Talk with your provider:

- Tell him or her about every medicine you use, whether it's a daily tablet or something you take occasionally. Include all OTCs, especially nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory (NSAID) painkillers and supplements such as multivitamins and fiber.
- Ask which foods and beverages are safe to take (and which ones you should avoid) with your medicines.
- Remind him or her of any allergies you have.
- Report any first-time or serious side effects you may experience after starting a new medicine.

► **Use one pharmacy to fill all your prescriptions.** Tell your pharmacist about every medication you take. He or she will be able to monitor all your meds on one computer database and screen for possible interactions.

► **Make a list of your medicines.** You can create a free, personalized Pill Card from the U.S. Department




of Health and Human Services (www.ahrq.gov/qual/pillcard/pillcard.htm) that gives you a visual guide of when and how to take your regular medicines. Keep a list in your wallet or purse as well, in case you do end up in the emergency room.

► **Follow instructions exactly.** If you're on antibiotics, take the full course, even if you start to feel better. Taking less than the full treatment may allow the infection to come back or make it more resistant to the drug. And if you don't like a side effect of a particular drug, don't just stop taking it—talk with your healthcare provider.

► **Keep your medicines in a safe place.** Don't store them in your bathroom cabinet, where moisture and humidity can break down active ingredients and make them less effective. Carrying your pills around in your pants pocket can also raise temperatures and diminish their quality. Instead, follow label instructions. Many drugs are best kept in a cool, dark spot away from direct sunlight (and out of the reach of children and pets), but others require refrigeration.

► **Throw out anything that's well past its expiration date.** Keep kids and pets from getting to discarded pills by crushing them and placing them in a sealed plastic bag with coffee grounds, kitty litter or other undesirable trash—don't flush them down the toilet.

► **Take charge of your own health.** Learn as much as you can about the medicines you take by reading package inserts and talking to your provider. 




Helping you meet your weight-loss goals

At Choice Medical Group (CMG), we value your good health. Our Healthy Weight Program is designed to help you reach your healthy weight-loss goal. This medically supervised weight-loss program promotes healthy lifestyle changes for people who are obese. By providing sound guidance and a strict regimen, we help our members achieve and maintain a healthy weight.

Our program is based on sensible guidelines for eating and physical activity. We know that excessive weight is caused by an interaction of genetic and environmental factors, so we acknowledge obesity's metabolic and behavioral components. CMG has designed a program that keeps these factors in mind.

Beyond the scale

CMG also recognizes that claims of quick and effortless weight loss and maintenance methods are ineffective and that many are also dangerous. We also realize that many chronic diseases are a result of obesity. That alone is one of the reasons we make healthy lifestyles a program priority. Achieving and maintaining a modest weight loss can reduce the severity of illnesses associated with obesity.

At CMG, the Health & Wellness Center's medical staff helps patients be mindful of weight-loss barriers and has incorporated healthy factors to help our members be successful. For more information, call our Health & Wellness Center at **(760) 242-WELL**. 

healthkeys®



"Doing our part in our community ...
to keep you healthy."

Administrative Offices

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Quick quiz

Test your health savvy

When it comes to your well-being, knowledge is power. Brush up before your next checkup. Answers appear below.

1 What vaccination(s) does the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend for older adults?
A. shingles
B. pneumonia
C. flu
D. all of the above

2 Septic arthritis—an infection in one or more joints—can be detected by a:
A. blood sugar test
B. spinal tap
C. synovial fluid analysis
D. toenail examination

3 Which of the following is a symptom of tachycardia (a high resting heart rate)?
A. dizziness
B. vomiting
C. trouble sleeping
D. frequent urination

4 Alzheimer's disease has been linked to all of the following except:
A. diabetes
B. acid reflux
C. high cholesterol
D. head injury after age 50

5 Which group has the highest risk of glaucoma?
A. Caucasians
B. Mexican-Americans
C. African-Americans
D. Japanese-Americans

ANSWERS: 1. D, 2. C, 3. A, 4. B, 5. C

Big bellies, big problems

How obesity affects your digestive system

With 34 percent of American adults weighing in as obese, our collective waistline is a big deal. Excess weight has been linked to osteoarthritis, diabetes, heart disease and cancer. And it can do a number on digestion. Losing weight can help prevent digestive distress. Below are three common conditions obese people face:

GASTROESOPHAGEAL REFLUX DISEASE (GERD)

What it is: Stomach acid flows back into the esophagus, causing irritation and inflammation.

Why obesity matters: Excess weight puts pressure on your stomach and diaphragm.

See your healthcare provider if you have: Heartburn several times a week that keeps you up at night, difficulty swallowing, blood in your mouth or black stool.

Prevent it: Take prescribed medicines; sit up for three hours after meals; and avoid cigarettes, greasy and fatty foods, onions, garlic and chocolate.

DIVERTICULITIS

What it is: Half of people ages 60 and older have diverticula—harmless bulging pouches in their digestive tracts. But if the pouches become infected, it will cause diverticulitis.



Why obesity matters: No one's sure why, but it increases chances of developing diverticulitis.

See your healthcare provider if you have: Severe and sudden pain in your lower left abdomen, fever, nausea and stool changes.

Prevent it: Eat more fiber, drink more water, use the bathroom at first urge and exercise more.

HIATAL HERNIA

What it is: The stomach pushes through the diaphragm where it connects to the esophagus, causing heartburn and chest pain.

Why obesity matters: Excess weight puts pressure on your stomach and diaphragm.

See your healthcare provider if you have: Frequent heartburn, belching, nausea and chest pain that worsen when leaning forward, straining, lifting or lying down, or are coupled with a sore throat or trouble breathing or swallowing.

Prevent it: Skip alcohol and cigarettes, avoid tight clothing, keep meals small and, after eating, wait two hours to exercise and three hours to lie down.

The facts about Parkinson's disease

Shaky hands and slow movements may be signs of the neurological disorder

Aches and pains are a normal part of aging. But they may be a sign of Parkinson's disease, a disorder that affects movement and balance. It's triggered by the loss of dopamine, a brain chemical that controls how you move.

COULD IT BE PARKINSON'S?

The classic signs are trembling in the hands, arms, legs or face; stiff muscles; balance problems; or slowed movement.

The changes are subtle but worsen over time and can lead to difficulty doing daily activities, such as using a fork and knife, writing or dressing. Parkinson's starts at age 60 on average. Having an immediate family member with the disease can raise your risk.

Parkinson's disease can be difficult to diagnose, so talk with your healthcare provider if

you suspect you have the condition. Your provider will likely do a medical history and neurological exam. He or she may also recommend physical or speech therapies.

EXAMINING YOUR OPTIONS

There's no cure for Parkinson's, but medicine can ease symptoms.

Medication. The drug levodopa works for most people. The drug amantadine can help reduce fatigue and tremor in early stages and can improve movement in those who have more advanced disease.

Surgery. In deep brain stimulation, a surgeon implants a small, battery-operated device in the brain. It sends out electrical impulses that block signals that cause symptoms.

Joining a support group, such as those sponsored by the National Parkinson Foundation, can also help newly diagnosed patients. ^{HK}



Health

dollars & sense

Want to cut medical expenses without compromising your health? Try the following tips to help keep your costs in check.

Use snail mail

If you take medication for a chronic illness such as asthma, diabetes or heart disease, you can save a bundle using a mail-order drug program. Many insurance companies offer a 90-day supply for the cost of a single refill at a brick-and-mortar pharmacy. Just ask your healthcare provider to write scripts for an entire year, dispensing three months at a time. Delivery can take a week or more, so initiate refills well in advance of your last dose. And stick with your local pharmacy for short-term prescriptions.

Be a copy cat

Take charge of your own health recordkeeping and save big bucks. Ask your healthcare provider for copies of screening results, such as X-rays and scans, complete with analysis notes. Collect them all in a dedicated folder, then take them whenever you see a specialist, undergo an outpatient procedure or check into the hospital. Not only will you avoid costly duplicate tests, but you'll get more comprehensive care that takes into account past diagnoses and gathers all your caretakers at the table.



HEALTH EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND MORE

For more than 19 years, Choice Medical Group (CMG) has been committed to our mission statement to “deliver superior medical services, ensuring health and quality of life to the people within the community they serve.” For more information about CMG and our programs, call our member services liaison at **(760) 242-7777, ext. 224**.

<p>■ Diabetes class for Choice members</p>	<p>First and third Mondays of each month</p>	<p>1:30–4 p.m.</p>	<p>Ask your primary care provider for a referral to attend this class.</p>
<p>■ Nutrition class for Choice members</p>	<p>Third Wednesday of each month</p> <p>Third Monday of each month</p>	<p>4–8 p.m.</p> <p>8:30–11:30 a.m.</p>	<p>Ask your primary care provider for a referral to attend this class.</p>
<p>■ Senior flexibility class for Choice members</p> <p>■ Senior flexibility class for nonmembers</p>	<p>Every Tuesday and Thursday</p> <p>Every Thursday</p>	<p>8:45–10:15 a.m.</p> <p>8:45–10:15 a.m.</p>	<p>Call (760) 242-7777, ext. 228, for more details. There's no charge for Choice members. A \$5 per-session fee applies to nonmembers.</p>
<p>■ Clinically supervised weight management</p>	<p>By appointment only</p>	<p>Various</p>	<p>Call (760) 242-WELL for more information.</p>
<p>■ Free physicals for Choice members</p>	<p>Monday–Friday, by appointment only</p>	<p>8 a.m.–5 p.m.</p>	<p>Call (760) 242-WELL for more information.</p>