


healthkeys®

Winter 2008-2009

A message from Choice Medical Group

Choice Medical Group contracts with many health plans, giving our members access to benefit packages that best fit their needs. Our extensive network includes board-certified physicians who have been part of the community for years. They live and work in the community and are affiliated with St. Mary Medical Center, Victor Valley Community Hospital and Barstow Community Hospital. Choice Medical Group provides additional services to enrich your quality of life and give you and your family comprehensive medical services.

No matter where you live, Choice Medical Group provides you with choices and access to more physicians in more locations than any other medical group in the High Desert. Our mission is to deliver superior medical services, ensuring health and quality of life to the people within the community we serve. That's why we're dedicated to keeping you and your family healthy.

Our members regularly receive reminders for preventive screenings. If you're interested in becoming a member of Choice Medical Group or would like more information, call our member services liaison at **(760) 242-7777, ext. 224.** 

2 8 promising pain relievers

4 Get moving, feel younger

7 Smart solutions for hearing loss





Break free of chronic pain

How medication, meditation and massage can help

You bang your knee on a coffee table, and feel a sharp, shooting pain. It hurts, but the throbbing quickly goes away. That's acute pain. Chronic pain is a completely different story. Whether it's a backache courtesy of a long-forgotten car accident or constant soreness caused by arthritis, cancer or another condition, chronic pain persists. And it can be very difficult to cope with. It's frustrating, tricky to treat and can even lead to depression.

ACHING FOR RELIEF

The first step to overcoming the agony is making sure your healthcare provider knows how you feel. Tell him or her everywhere you hurt, exactly what it feels like (Is it burning? Throbbing? Tight? Shooting?), how bad the pain is on a scale of 1 to 10 (with 10 being the worst pain

imaginable), how often it occurs and what makes you feel better or worse. This information can help your doctor determine the root of your problem and treat it.

There's no magic pill when it comes to treating chronic pain, so your healthcare provider may suggest several therapies, including:

- **Medication.** Your healthcare provider may recommend over-the-counter or prescription painkillers, anticonvulsants or other drugs, depending on the severity and cause of your pain. If pain is taking its toll on you mentally or keeping you up at night, your healthcare provider may also recommend antidepressants or sleep aids.
- **Exercise.** Low-impact activities such as walking or swimming can help release endorphins, your body's natural pain relievers. Staying active


can also help you get stronger and improve flexibility, sleep and energy. And by helping you maintain a healthy weight, exercise can take some of the stress off your joints. Ask your healthcare provider which exercises are appropriate for you.

- **Soothing soaks.** Taking a hot bath can relieve arthritis pains or spasms; cool baths can help reduce swelling and inflammation.
- **Meditation.** Whether it's deep-breathing exercises, guided imagery (for example, visualizing a pleasant scene), prayer, tai chi or yoga, thinking better can help you physically feel better.
- **Hands-on care.** Massage, acupuncture (using needles), acupressure (applying pressure to specific points on the body) and reflexology (applying pressure to the feet or hands) may help you relax and ease aches.

- **Transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS).** Sometimes described as "electrical massage," TENS may block or prevent pain. TENS involves attaching two electrodes to your skin near the source of your pain. The electrodes are connected to a unit that emits a mild electrical current, which seems to block or stop pain signals.

- **Injections.** Your healthcare provider can inject nerve-blocking substances to relieve soreness, reduce inflammation and prevent the spread of certain types of pain.

- **Surgery.** If conservative measures fail, a surgeon can sometimes implant a device that delivers pain-relieving electrical impulses or medications.

Again, there's no cure-all when it comes to chronic pain. But you and your healthcare provider can work together to create the perfect prescription for relieving your pain. 

Wounded? What to do

Seek care now to avoid problems later

Whether you've got a simple scrape, cut or gash, a bed-sore or a surgical incision, taking care of any wound is key—especially for those who suffer from diabetes or other conditions that make healing difficult. For these people, a seemingly innocent injury can lead to gangrene, amputation or even death if it's not properly treated.

LOOK FOR THE SIGNS

When a wound has become infected, there may be:

- redness, warmth and tenderness around the wound
- pus (a yellowish-white fluid coming from the wound, sometimes

Bruise control

As you age, your skin thins out and capillaries become more fragile, making bruises a pretty common occurrence. Some medicines, such as blood thinners, can also cause you to bruise easily.

Most bruises have a predictable pattern: The blemish starts out as a black and blue or purple blob, then turns greenish and fades away in about two weeks. But if you have bruises that won't heal, develop for no reason or are unusually large or painful, you could have a blood-clotting disorder or a blood disease. See your healthcare provider immediately.

with a foul odor)

- fever

If you have any of these symptoms, make an appointment to see your healthcare provider right away. Other possible complications include infections in your bloodstream and septic shock, a critical illness that can cause organ failure and death.

WHEN IT JUST WON'T HEAL

Any open sore needs to be cleaned, and debris, dirt or splinters removed. But if the wound is infected, or just won't heal, your healthcare provider may also recommend one or more of the following treatments:

- **Dressings.** Made of gauze, foam or other materials, special dressings contain antibacterial or antiviral substances. They prevent further injury, protect against germs and infection and give a wound enough moisture to help it heal.
- **Skin substitutes.** People with diabetes may get help for slow-healing wounds from a material made from dissolvable mesh and human cells. It's placed over the wound, and as it's slowly absorbed into the body, the human cells replace the damaged tissue in the wound.
- **Hyperbaric therapy.** Spending time inside a special chamber, where the air pressure is much higher than you're used to, brings more oxygen to the body. This can improve circulation and speed wound healing.
- **Off-loading.** This means keep-




ing pressure off the affected area. If you have diabetes, you may need special footwear or require crutches to stay off a foot wound.

- **Super-charging your diet.**

When the body's healing, it needs more protein and vitamins A and C. Get them from lean beef, fish, poultry, low-fat dairy, dark-green leafy vegetables, orange or yellow vegetables, citrus fruits and spinach.

Discuss your diet with your healthcare provider, especially if you have diabetes.




- **Surgery.** To remove dead tissue from the wound, your healthcare provider may perform a procedure called surgical debridement. He or she will use a scalpel or other tool to remove damaged, dead or infected tissue. Some patients may need flap reconstruction. In this procedure, a pad of skin or other tissue (usually taken from a patient's own body) is used to cover the wound. 

Feel-better fitness

5 easy exercises to combat aging

Have you begun to notice that you're not as strong as you used to be or that you can't get around like you used to? Or maybe your balance is a little off.

It happens to all of us eventually, but it's not something you have to take lying down. The answer? Functional fitness: exercises that focus on flexibility, coordination, balance and endurance, so you can do your daily tasks without risking injury.

Functional fitness can help you remain healthy and independent. In a small study conducted by the American Council on Exercise, people ages 58 to 78 who normally engaged in traditional workouts (think cardio routines and exercise machines) greatly improved their lower- and upper-body strength, agility and shoulder flexibility in as little as four weeks using these techniques. Try the following exercises. But before you do, make sure you have your healthcare provider's OK—especially if you have a history of falls. 



1 SQUATS

➤ Good for easier walking, jogging or climbing stairs; all you need is a chair.

HOW TO DO IT

- [1] Stand with feet slightly more than shoulder-width apart in front of an armless chair.
- [2] Lift your arms in front of you so they're parallel to the ground. Lean forward slightly at the hips.
- [3] Slowly lower yourself until you're almost sitting. Make sure your knees never come past your toes.
- [4] Pause, then slowly rise back up to a standing position, as you count to two. Keep your back straight.
- [5] Repeat 10 times. Rest for two minutes. Then do another set of 10.

2 BICEPS CURLS

➤ Good for strengthening your arms so you can lift heavier objects. You'll need dumbbells of a comfortable weight or two cans of vegetables and a chair.

HOW TO DO IT

- [1] With a dumbbell or can in each hand, stand or sit in an armless chair with your arms at your sides and palms facing your thighs.
- [2] Slowly lift the weights, rotating your forearms so your palms are facing up. Keep your upper arms and elbows close to your sides, wrists straight, weights parallel to the floor.
- [3] Hold, then slowly lower the weights toward your thighs, rotating your forearms so your arms are at your sides, palms facing your thighs.
- [4] Repeat 10 times. Rest for two minutes. Then do another set of 10.

3 TOE STANDS

➤ Good for strengthening your calves and ankles and restoring stability and balance. You'll need a countertop or a chair.

HOW TO DO IT

- [1] Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart.
- [2] Using the counter or chair for balance (don't lean on it), slowly push up as far as you can onto the balls of your feet. Hold for four seconds.
- [3] Slowly lower your heels back to the floor.
- [4] Repeat 10 times. Rest for two minutes. Then do another set of 10.

4 EYE BALANCE EXERCISE

➤ Good for improving balance; all you need is a chair.

HOW TO DO IT

- [1] From a seated position, focus on an object 10 to 20 feet away. Stand.
- [2] Keeping your eyes focused on the object, sit down, making sure to land softly when you sit.
- [3] As you move, keep your weight on the balls of your feet, with your knees apart, chest forward and spine erect.
- [4] When you feel comfortable enough, repeat the exercise with your eyes closed.

5 SEATED LEG EXTENSIONS

➤ Good for strengthening your leg muscles; all you need is a chair.

HOW TO DO IT

- [1] Sit in a chair, torso upright (don't lean on the chair back). Plant your feet flat on the floor, hip-width apart. Place one palm flat on each thigh.
- [2] Without moving your hips or back, slowly extend your right leg, raising it until it's parallel to the floor (if you can't do that, lift it as high as you're able to or use the backrest for support). Hold for two seconds. Relax and return to the starting position.
- [3] Do repeatedly for 30 seconds, then switch to the other leg.

SOURCES: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, American Council on Exercise, American Physical Therapy Association




You
can do
biceps curls
on a fitness ball
to **strengthen**
your arms
and **abs.**

Health & Wellness Center

The Health & Wellness Center is dedicated to our members and is open Monday–Friday, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Located in the Choice Plaza in Apple Valley, at 18522 Highway 18, Suite 206, on the second floor, the center provides comprehensive services for all members. Members can access services at the Health & Wellness Center without a referral from their primary care physician. We offer several services with a special focus on women’s and seniors’ wellness:

- Free physicals
- Flu shots
- Congestive heart failure management
- Clinically supervised weight management
- Coumadin clinic
- Bone density scans
- Fall-prevention screenings and management
- After-hospitalization care
- Dementia clinic
- Hypertension management
- Daily case management
- Diabetes education in English and Spanish
- Senior flexibility classes
- “Nurse Is In” program

The programs and services provided at the Health & Wellness Center aren’t limited to Choice Medical Group members. For more information, call **(760) 242-WELL.** 

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“Doing our part in our community ...
to keep you healthy.”

Administrative Offices

18564 Highway 18, Suite 105, Apple Valley, CA 92307

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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 Postherpetic neuralgia can cause sharp pain or extreme sensitivity to touch or temperatures and is a complication of:

- A. diabetes
- B. shingles
- C. stroke
- D. flu

2 Which of the following is *not* a normal change as you age?

- A. falling blood pressure
- B. loss of fat
- C. breathing problems
- D. lower exercise tolerance

3 Loss of taste and smell is treatable if it's caused by:

- A. allergies
- B. blood pressure drugs
- C. cigarette smoking
- D. all of the above

4 To prevent food-borne illness, toss perishable food that's been kept at room temperature for more than:

- A. 30 minutes
- B. two hours
- C. four hours
- D. six hours

5 Prostate cancer occurs most often in:

- A. African-American men
- B. Caucasian men
- C. Asian men
- D. Hispanic/Latino men

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

Danger zone

Why you need to know your blood pressure numbers

You'd think your body would give you some kind of warning sign that something was wrong. But you may never even know you have high blood pressure, or hypertension, until you suffer a heart attack or stroke.

HYPERTENSION, DEFINED

High blood pressure means your readings are consistently 140 mm Hg over 90 mm Hg or higher. If your reading is 120 to 139 over 80 to 89, you've got pre-hypertension, which means you may be on your way to developing full-blown high blood pressure, usually within a few years. A normal, healthy reading is below 120/80 mm Hg.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

For many people, making the following lifestyle changes can play a huge part in managing high blood pressure:

- **Revamp your diet.** Make sure you eat lots of fruits, vegetables, whole grains and plenty of potassium-rich foods like sweet potatoes, winter squash, bananas and spinach, which can help you



manage your blood pressure. Cocoa, cod-liver oil, omega-3 fatty acids and garlic may also lower your levels. Discuss your options with your healthcare provider.

- **Shake your salt habit.**

2,400 mg of sodium (1 teaspoon of salt) a day is the maximum for healthy adults. Cut back to 1,500 mg if you're looking to lower high blood pressure.

- **Shake your body, too.**

At least 30 minutes of exercise a day is ideal. It'll help you lose weight, and dropping just five or 10 pounds can make a big difference in your readings.

- **Stay off the sauce.**

Heavy drinking is bad for your heart, and throwing back several alcoholic drinks at one sitting can temporarily raise your blood pressure.

- **Turn out the lights.**

If you smoke, quit. It does long-term damage to your artery walls, increasing blood pressure.

- **Unwind.**

Ask your healthcare provider about techniques to de-stress. Deep breathing and yoga may work for you.

For some people, no amount of dieting or exercise can lower their blood pressure. For these people, prescription medications can help.

Hear today, gone tomorrow

Don't let hearing loss derail you

Your hearing problems have left you out of the loop and unable to engage in conversations with friends and family. It's a common complaint, especially as you age. About one-third of Americans 65 to 75 years old have some hearing loss, and nearly half of those over age 75 do.

WHAT'S THAT?

If you're cranking up the volume on the TV more often than usual, or having trouble understanding what's being said during phone conversations or in noisy places such as restaurants, ask your healthcare provider to test your ears. You may have age-related hearing loss, also known as presbycusis. Your troubles could also be caused by medications (chemotherapy drugs and high doses of aspirin, for example, can affect your hearing), heredity, illnesses (such as meningitis), head injury, exposure to loud noises or blood circulation problems, such as high blood pressure.


NOW HEAR THIS

Today's hearing devices are much improved, but many people don't take advantage of them. If you're suffering from hearing loss, ask your healthcare provider if any of the following could benefit you:

- **Hearing aids.** This isn't your mother's clunky old device.

Modern hearing aids can be discreet, fitting in the ear or completely hidden in the ear canal, and they're extremely effective. Digital hearing aids use a computer chip to process sound and can easily adjust to different environments.

- **Cochlear implants.** Severe hearing loss may be treated with a cochlear implant, a device that's surgically implanted underneath the skin behind the ear. Inside the implant is a processor that collects sound waves and turns them into electrical impulses. These impulses are sent to the brain, where they're interpreted as sound. The implant doesn't restore hearing or make you hear normally, but it can help you understand speech.

- **Assistive listening devices.** TV, radio and telephone listening systems can help you listen without hearing noises around you. Some hearing aids can be plugged into these devices to help you hear. 



Health dollars & sense

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

Split decision

You may be able to cut your prescription costs in half by cutting your pills in half. Pill splitting can help people who take daily drugs for high cholesterol, high blood pressure, depression and other conditions. But it doesn't work for every drug. For example, you can't cut capsules or slow-release pills. There's often little difference in price between a higher dosage of medication and a lower one, so if you take 100 mg of a particular drug, your healthcare provider may be able to prescribe a 200-mg dose for the same price. Ask him or her if pill-splitting is safe for you, and how to do it.

Save yourself a trip

Got hypertension? Start checking your blood pressure at home. It's a good way to stay on top of your condition and make sure your medication is working. Home monitoring can also reduce the number of office visits you need, cutting your healthcare costs and travel-related expenses. Ask your healthcare provider about monitoring your blood pressure at home and what type of device might be best for you.



HEALTH EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND MORE

Choice Medical Group (CMG) is 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**.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Diabetes class for Choice members 	First and third Mondays of each month	1:30–4 p.m.	Ask your primary care provider for a referral to attend this class.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Nutrition class for Choice members 	Third Wednesday of each month	4–8 p.m.	Ask your primary care provider for a referral to attend this class.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Senior flexibility class 	Every Tuesday	8:45–10:15 a.m.	Call (760) 242-7777, ext. 228 , for more details.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Open enrollment sales meetings <p>Benefit information and enrollment applications for any of the health plans will be available at each meeting.</p>	Varies	Varies	Call (760) 242-7777, ext. 228 , for a list of meetings.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Clinically supervised weight management 	By appointment only	Varies	Call (760) 242-WELL for more information.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Flu shots <p>Flu shots will be available at the Health & Wellness Center until early 2009.</p>	Monday–Friday Walk-in and by appointment	8 a.m.–5 p.m.	Call (760) 242-WELL for more information.

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