



Improving Quality of Life for Seniors

Keep a Watch on These Meds

What medical problems land more than 175,000 older Americans in the emergency department each year: falls, heart problems, or diabetes? None of these answers is correct. The answer is adverse reactions to medications—mostly to diabetes and heart disease medications. Help keep your residents safe from medication-related emergency events with these tips from the March 2008 issue of *Harvard Heart Letter* on medications commonly prescribe to seniors, including warfarin, insulin, digoxin, aspirin, clopidogrel, and oral diabetes medications.

Regularly monitor the bleeding time (INR) of residents who take warfarin; carefully monitor these residents if they also take a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug; instruct them to have a steady diet of green, leafy vegetables.

Be sure that those taking insulin or oral medications for diabetes check their blood sugar several times daily. Residents should store insulin properly, carry a supply of insulin at all time, and know the signs of low blood sugar. Residents who take oral diabetes medications must be careful if they also have kidney or heart disease.

Check the pulse of residents who take digoxin when they are calm and relaxed, and call the physician if the pulse rate is slower than it should be. These individuals must be careful taking over-the-counter medications such as antacids, cold or sinus medicine, or laxatives. Vision changes, drowsiness, or confusion are warning signs that require a call to the doctor.

Residents who take aspirin and clopidogrel must be careful to always take the correct dose and be extremely careful to avoid injury if they also take warfarin. Bleeding should be reported to the physician.

Get Up From That Couch Now!

It's probably no surprise that those of us who are physically active during our leisure time seem to be younger than those with sedentary lifestyles—but a new report in the *Archives of Internal Medicine* (January 28 issue) shows that active adults actually are biologically younger. Regular exercisers have lower rates of cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, cancer, high blood pressure, obesity,



and osteoporosis. A sedentary lifestyle leads to aging-related disease and premature death by influencing the aging process itself, according to researchers who studied 2401 twins, using a questionnaire to determine activity level. DNA extracted from a blood sample was used to examine the length of leukocyte telomeres—the repeated sequences at the end of chromosomes. Although length decreased with age in all subjects, those who were less active physically had shorter telomeres. In fact, “the most active subjects had telomeres the same length as sedentary individuals up to 10 years younger, on average.” Read more at <http://archinte.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/abstract/168/2/159>.

Routine Screening for Alzheimer's

A device that could allow inexpensive testing of mild cognitive impairment (the earliest stage of Alzheimer's) has been developed by Georgia Tech and Emory University researchers. Called DETECT, the instrument gives individuals a 10-minute test to gauge reaction time and memory—functions that, when impaired, are associated with the earliest stages of Alzheimer's disease. The test can easily be included as part of routine screening exams. For more information, see www.gatech.edu/newsroom/release.html?id=554.

Are Fewer Older Adults Losing Their Memory?

According to researchers of a new nationally representative study, the rate of cognitive impairment among people aged 70 and older is trending downward—a decline of 3.5% between 1993 and 2002 (12.2% to 8.7%). However, the researchers note that the current epidemic of type 2 diabetes may reverse this trend. The full study is available in *Alzheimer's & Dementia* at www.alzheimersanddementia.org/webfiles/images/journals/jalz/JALZ_731.pdf.

Rates of Diabetes Increasing Among Older Americans

According to a report in the *Archives of Internal Medicine*, the number of Americans over 65 years who are newly diagnosed with diabetes increased by 23% from 1994 to 2004. Once individuals were diagnosed with diabetes, say the researchers, most “experienced at least 1 complication within the next 6 years; for example, almost half had congestive heart failure.” Researchers further reported that the prevalence of adverse outcomes is 90%. Read more at <http://archinte.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/abstract/168/2/192>.

Changing Behavior and Improving Health among Patients with Diabetes

The Diabetes Education and Self Management of Ongoing and Newly Diagnosed (DESMOND) program for patients with newly diagnosed type 2 diabetes has shown some success in a study of 824 patients (average age 59.5 years) at 207 practices in England and Scotland. The intervention was a 6-hour structured educational program delivered in the community by 2 trained healthcare educators. Patients were monitored over 12 months. The intervention group has a greater (1.1 kg) weight loss, but there was no difference in blood glucose levels (HbA1c) between groups. However, researchers reported that understanding of their disease was greater among those receiving education, and trends were seen in lifestyle modifications. Read more at <http://press.psprings.co.uk/bmj/february/diabetes.pdf>.



Arkansas Breaks Ground on First AL Center in State

Legacy Village, a 6-building assisted living center, will be the first of its kind for the state of Arkansas. Groundbreaking began on the facility in Bentonville. Each building will house 10 seniors, and 20 of the 60 units will meet qualifications for affordable housing. The project is partially funded with low-income housing tax credits.

Geriatricians Provide Better Oversight of Patient Medications

Seniors whose care is provided by geriatricians are less likely to receive medications that are inappropriate for their age, according to a new study published in *Medical Care*. The authors state that geriatricians are trained to look more closely at medications and how they might affect older adults. An analysis of the records of 850,154 patients at 124 VA facilities from 1999 to 2000 showed that 26.2% of elderly patients were given drugs identified as inappropriate or suboptimal for older adults. Those who were cared for by a geriatrician had lower rates of inappropriate medication use.

A History of Caregiving Supports LGB Seniors

According to a survey published in the *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services*, of 199 lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB) adults, the creation of a network of caring people who support one another during their senior years has developed over years of experience

of giving and receiving care. Thirty-eight percent of participants reported they had received care from non-healthcare professionals during the previous 5 years. Sixty-seven percent had provided care to others. Having received help was strongly related to providing help. Of those who had received help, 76% had taken care of others. The researchers observed that networks of support are especially significant for LGB seniors, who may be physically or emotionally distant from their biological family, may be closeted, or may fear or suffer discrimination based on their sexual orientation. Many of these LGB seniors may not know for certain who will provide care in a crisis, or they face financial issues because they are not covered under partner health plans as would be true for married heterosexual couples.

Recognizing Stroke

Recognizing stroke can be made simpler through the use of the mnemonic STR—that is, the first 3 letters of the word *stroke*. If you suspect a person may be having a stroke, ask 3 simple questions:

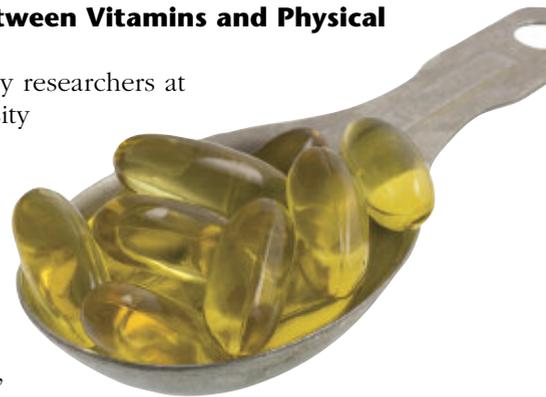
S Ask the individual to SMILE.

T Ask the person to TALK and SPEAK A SIMPLE SENTENCE (Coherently) (eg, It is sunny out today.)

R Ask him or her to RAISE BOTH ARMS.

Connection between Vitamins and Physical Decline?

A new study by researchers at Yale University School of Medicine of 698 community-living individuals 65 or older analyzed nutritional state and physical function, focusing on micronutrients serum folate and vitamins B6, B12, D, and E over a 3-year period. The only nutrient associated with decline in physical function during the 3 years was vitamin E. Age older than 81 years and low vitamin E concentration were strongly correlated with physical decline. The researchers stated that “3 different mechanisms may explain the effect of low concentration of vitamin E on subsequent decline in physical function: (1) increased oxidative stress leading to muscle or DNA damage, (2) exacerbation of atherosclerosis or other pathologic conditions, and (3) development of neurodegenerative disorders.” To read more, see <http://jama.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/short/299/3/308>.



Silverado Senior Living Takes Dementia Care on the Road

Through its Silverado at Home program, Silverado Senior Living has expanded its care for seniors to include in-home health-care services in the Dallas area. Nurse's aides provide care to seniors with dementia



in the home. First a geriatric care manager—usually a registered nurse or trained social worker—assesses individuals in the community who are not yet ready to move into AL facilities. The care manager evaluates the prospective client's mental and physical abilities and provides a safety check of the home, and then recommends the use of a nurse's aide for in-home help with patients who have dementia. The aides help with grooming, housekeeping, and meals, but they also try to engage clients' minds by reading to them, gardening with them, or accompanying them on shopping trips.

For more information about Silverado at Home, see www.silveradosenior.com/senior_home_care/senior_home_care.htm.

You're Never Too Old To Do What You Love

Thanks to the Wii Bowling League at the Lafayette-Redeemer AL and LTC facility outside of Philadelphia, PA, 92-year-old lifelong bowler Dorothy Rovin continues bowling—virtually.



Despite a knee problem that

Sidonia Miller (left) and Nora Greenberg enjoy a game of Wii bowling.

forced her off the wooden lanes 20 years ago, Dorothy never lost her interest in the sport of bowling, in which she'd participated for 60 years. In recent tournaments, Dorothy rolled a 136 and a 97. And mind you, this is a video game, not the more concrete version she used to play.

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