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Thyroid Cancer Rates Are on the Rise

Is that lump on your neck benign or something more?

Rates of thyroid cancer have tripled in the past 30 years. So, if you find or have a test that shows you have a lump on your neck, it's normal to be a little worried. But, what's also normal are benign neck lumps.

"Most of the time a lump on the neck that is a thyroid nodule is benign," explains endocrine surgeon Masha Livhits, MD, Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center. "We don't really know what causes it. But if we were to ultrasound everyone as they got older, more than half of those over age 70 would have a thyroid lump."



Most lumps are benign, but if you find one, see your physician for an assessment.

Incidental Discoveries Lead to Over-diagnosis

Papillary thyroid cancer is the most common type of thyroid cancer, and it is the one that has been skyrocketing in the United States and elsewhere. Thankfully, this is the least aggressive type of thyroid cancer. Canada, Australia, Western Europe, Korea, and Japan all show similar patterns of increase. Research studies show that the rise is very likely due to over-diagnosis.

"It's common to find thyroid nodules on imaging," says Dr. Livhits. "In cases where a patient feels a lump on the neck, most of those are benign, too. But what's really increased is thyroid nodules being discovered incidentally because someone gets a scan for neck pain or an ultrasound of the carotid arteries."

Over-diagnosis in medical terms refers to finding a disease, including cancer cells, which if left alone would not cause symptoms or fatality. A study published a few years ago in the journal *Thyroid* found that

while reported incidences of thyroid cancer have indeed jumped sharply during the past 30 years, mortality due to the disease has not.

Proposed Name Change

In 2016, researchers at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine along with an international panel of pathologists and clinicians gathered together to reclassify a common type of papillary thyroid cancer, which was formerly called encapsulated

follicular variant of papillary thyroid carcinoma (EFVPTC). The rationale behind the name change is to reflect that it is non-invasive and has a low risk of recurrence. The change, described in *JAMA Oncology*, is expected to reduce the psychological and medical consequences of a cancer diagnosis, potentially affecting thousands of people worldwide.

The new name "noninvasive follicular thyroid neoplasm with papillary-like nuclear features," or NIFTP, is meant to guide pathologists in diagnosis, but omits the word "cancer," indicating that it need not be treated with radioiodine or other aggressive approaches. NIFTP cannot be determined from a biopsy alone. The entire nodule needs to be removed surgically and analyzed by a pathologist to figure out whether it is NIFTP or an invasive cancer. It will take some time for this term and treatment approach to be universally adopted.

Dr. Livhits agrees that this type of thyroid tumor is typically very slow growing and has an excellent prognosis. "Over time, we've become less aggressive with

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B *Healthy Years*
(ISSN # 1551 4617)
is published
monthly for \$39
per year by Belvoir
Media Group, LLC,
535 Connecticut
Avenue, Norwalk, CT 06854-1713.
Robert Englander, Chairman and
CEO; Timothy H. Cole, Executive
Vice President, Editorial Director;
Philip L. Penny, Chief Operating
Officer; Greg King, Executive Vice
President, Marketing Director;
Ron Goldberg, Chief Financial
Officer; Tom Canfield, Vice
President, Circulation. © 2018
Belvoir Media Group, LLC.
Postmaster: Send address
corrections to *Healthy Years*,
PO Box 8535, Big Sandy, TX
75755-8535.

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account status, or contact a
customer service representative.**Electrical Brain Stimulation Improves Memory**

In a small study, neuroscientists at the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA have discovered precisely where and how to electrically stimulate the human brain to enhance people's recollection of distinct memories. Study participants with epilepsy who received low-current electrical pulses showed a significant improvement in their ability to recognize specific faces and ignore similar ones. Eight of nine patients' ability to recognize the faces of specific people improved after receiving electrical pulses to the right side of the brain's entorhinal area, which is critical to learning and memory. However, electrical stimulation delivered to the left side of the region resulted in no improvement in the patient's recall. Supported by funds from the National Institutes of Health, this study builds on 2012 UCLA research that demonstrated that human memory can be strengthened by electrically stimulating the brain's entorhinal cortex. The study suggests that even low currents of electricity can affect the brain circuits that control memory and human learning. It also illustrates the importance of precisely targeting the stimulation to the right entorhinal region. Other studies that applied stimulation over a wide swath of brain tissue have produced conflicting results. Electrical stimulation could offer promise for treating memory disorders like Alzheimer's disease.

Gut Bacteria May Play a Role in Cancer Treatment

According to a recent report in the journal *Science*, bacteria that live in the human digestive tract (also known as the microbiome) can influence how cancer responds to immunotherapy, opening a new avenue for research to improve treatment. Research in humans and mice showed that gut bacteria play an important role in how the immune system works. Researchers compared patient responses to newer cancer drugs called PD-1 inhibitors and patients' gut bacteria. They found that patients with metastatic melanoma treated with PD-1 drugs have their disease controlled longer if they have a more diverse population of bacteria in the gut or an abundance of certain types of bacteria. "You can change your microbiome, it's really not that difficult, so we think these findings open up huge new opportunities," says study leader Jennifer Wargo, MD, associate professor of Surgical Oncology and Genomic Medicine, at the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center. Dr. Wargo and colleagues are working to develop a clinical trial that combines checkpoint blockade drugs (such as PD-1 therapy) with microbiome modulation. Meanwhile, the researchers note that there is still much to learn about the relationship between the microbiome and cancer treatment. Because the wrong supplements can do more harm than good, they urge cancer patients not to attempt self-medication with probiotics or other methods.

Double Vision Can Be Common in Seniors

A study from the University of Michigan Kellogg Eye Centers reveals just how common double vision, called diplopia, is in the United States. An estimated 850,000 visits to doctor's offices and emergency departments occur each year for double vision, though life-threatening diagnoses are rare, according to a study published in *JAMA Ophthalmology*. Researchers analyzed data from a 10-year period and found that most visits for diplopia were by patients age 50 and older. Most, 95 percent, were outpatient visits, and diagnoses were rarely serious in this setting. But diplopia-related emergency department visits were potentially life threatening in 16 percent of cases. Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes can be a sign of stroke, and an imaging test can tell doctors if seeing double is caused by a lack of blood flow to the brain, or another abnormality, such as a tumor. But there are other stroke signs and symptoms, like numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg, loss of balance, confusion or trouble speaking. If stroke is suspected, emergency medical care is a must. But if double vision is the only issue, patients should see an eye doctor who is skilled at evaluating the problem rather than ordering imaging, according to the researchers. The same may not be true in the emergency department. Patients brought to the emergency department primarily for double vision were more likely to have a serious neurological condition, so the threshold for neuroimaging should be lower. ■

The Value of Medicare Annual Wellness Visits

This benefit initiated by the Affordable Care Act may help you age more healthfully.

Are you planning for your healthcare? If you're like most people, you probably don't have much of a plan. But with age come many changes, including an increased need for healthcare services. The Annual Wellness Visit (AWV) helps older adults better plan for their healthcare needs. Few eligible seniors, however, have taken advantage of it.

"There is certainly a great deal of misinformation regarding these visits," says geriatrician Jonathan Wanagat, MD, UCLA Division of Geriatrics. "Many patients believe they are akin to a Complete Physical Exam, but Annual Wellness Visits do not involve exams like those associated with annual physicals."

That's a very important point because while the Annual Wellness Visit is free, there are very strict parameters for what's included. It is not a head-to-toe exam. Rather the objective is to build a plan of preventive healthcare based on forms, assessments, and in-depth conversations.

The person with whom you meet may be a clinician, such as a nurse from your doctor's office, or it could be your physician. Each office makes its own determination on who will administer the AWV.

The AWV: Your Personalized Prevention Plan

If you've had Medicare Part B for longer than 12 months, you are eligible for this visit. It starts by filling out a questionnaire called a "Health risk assessment." Filling out healthcare forms can feel like a tedious chore, but much of what you do for your AWV can be helpful beyond your doctor's door.

The following are some of the items available during an AWV. Dr. Wanagat recommends that patients review the covered preventive services and be prepared to discuss



You can discuss a wide variety of subjects, including healthcare directives and the necessity of current medications.

which ones interest you. A comprehensive list can be found at www.medicare.gov/coverage/preventive-visit-and-yearly-wellness-exams.html

➔ **A review of your medical and family history.** This is useful because some conditions have a genetic component. As part of a prevention plan, knowing your history can inform which screenings or tests are especially relevant to you.

➔ **Developing or updating a list of current providers and prescriptions.** This list is helpful to your physician and anyone who may be involved in your care. For example, you might give this list to a trusted friend or a family member. It's also something you can place in your home (such as on your refrigerator or medicine cabinet), where emergency medical personnel can easily find it.

➔ **Height, weight, blood pressure, and other routine measurements.** Though these are very basic measurements, they do have meaning to your health. Weight loss or gain can spark a conversation about what you are eating; a change in height could be related to something as simple as

poor posture or something more serious, such as osteoporosis of the spine.

➔ **Screening for cognitive impairment.** Many seniors worry about their brain health. Occasionally forgetting where you parked your car, someone's name, or the day of week is considered normal as people get older. Cognitive tests can reveal if there is anything more substantial regarding your mental health.

➔ **A screening schedule for appropriate preventive services.** This is typically a personalized checklist that can help you stay on top of important screening services and reveal which ones may be needed. For example, Baby Boomers (born between 1946-1964) are five times more likely to have the hepatitis C virus than other adults. This virus can lead to liver damage, cirrhosis and even liver cancer. A timely screening test can catch the virus before such serious damage occurs.

➔ **Advance Care Planning.** These are very important but often overlooked documents. It is your opportunity to state your plan of care if you are suddenly unable to speak for yourself, such as if you have a stroke or fall into a coma. Your healthcare provider can explain which forms are especially important and can help you fill them out.

Future Visits

After your first AWV, subsequent visits update the items already provided. Any service or test beyond AWV's scope may result in an additional charge, copay, or deductible. For example, blood and urine tests are not part of the AWV.

To find out if a particular screening, shot, or other preventive service is included under Medicare, you can enter the name of the test, item, or service into an online search box at www.medicare.gov/coverage/your-medicare-coverage.html. ■

A Sharp Sudden Pain in Your Big Toe

It could be gout, and the right food choices can quell symptoms.

The pain of an acute gout attack, which often occurs in the early hours of the morning, can be so severe that even the weight of a blanket can be excruciatingly painful. It is among the most common and painful joint problems. Gout, a type of arthritis, is caused by an excess of uric acid. While any joint in the body can be affected, an acute attack typically affects only one joint, and it's usually the big toe. The affected joint can swell up within just a few hours of gout onset, becoming red and extremely tender. It can take up to two weeks for the pain and inflammation to subside. During that time, even putting on a shoe can be impossible.

Gout occurs more often in men, though women's risk for it rises after menopause. Treatment options include nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as ibuprofen or naproxen, and cold packs (if you can stand the pressure). Some people may need prescription medication. Though months or years can pass before another gout attack occurs, avoiding certain food and drinks may prevent another painful encounter.

Reducing Gout Recurrence

Uric acid is a waste product of substances called purines, which are normally excreted through urine. But some people's kidneys don't remove enough. Gout symptoms occur when uric acid builds up, accumulates around a joint, and forms needle-shaped crystals causing pain. Once you've had one attack, you are at greater risk for another.

"Consuming high amounts of purine-rich foods can contribute to more uric acid," explains registered dietitian Lia Berjis, MS, Clinical Dietitian, Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center. "To help keep the uric acid production in check, it is often

helpful to reduce the consumption of foods high in purine."

In addition to high-purine foods, beer and high-proof alcohol can increase gout risk, studies have shown. Wine, in moderation, appeared to have no influence.

According to Berjis, diet alone, without medication, may not be enough to control uric acid levels, but avoiding high-purine foods can help reduce the number of flare-ups and their severity. Maintaining a healthy body weight, staying well-hydrated, and following a heart-healthy diet also helps avoid recurrence. Left untreated, gout can permanently damage joints.

The journal *Arthritis & Rheumatology* recently reported that the drug febuxostat reduced gout attacks in a double-blind, placebo-controlled study of 314 adults with early gout. Febuxostat treatment also reduced synovitis, or inflammation of the joint lining. According to the study author, current clinical practice guidelines do not recommend routine use of urate-lowering therapy for people after the first gout flare. "This study indicates that even for people who have had only one or two prior gout flares, urate-lowering therapy to reduce serum urate may have benefit in reducing future flares," says lead author rheumatologist Nicola Dalbeth,

WHEN IT FEELS LIKE GOUT, BUT ISN'T.

Pseudogout refers to a condition that mimics gout but is actually caused by deposits of calcium phosphate crystals, not uric acid crystals. The symptoms are similar, but this condition mostly affects the knee and rarely the big toe. There are no medications to dissolve these crystal formations. One underlying cause is hypothyroidism, and treating that disorder may reduce the accumulation of calcium phosphate crystals.



Gout can attack any joint, but it's usually the big toe.

© Keechuan | Dreamstime.com

MD, University of Auckland, New Zealand.

Some medications can increase gout risk, including:

- ➔ Diuretics, which are taken to rid the body of excess fluid in conditions like hypertension, edema, and heart disease. Diuretics reduce the amount of uric acid passed in the urine.
- ➔ Drugs with salicylate, such as aspirin.
- ➔ Niacin, a vitamin also known as nicotinic acid.
- ➔ Cyclosporine, a medication that blocks the body's immune system to treat some autoimmune diseases and to prevent the body from rejecting transplanted organs.
- ➔ Levodopa, a medicine used to treat Parkinson's disease.

Always check with your physician before you stop or add any medication.

Gout Food Awareness

These are some foods to avoid and those which can be helpful.

➔ **Avoid high-purine foods** such as: agave, anchovies, bacon, beef, beer, herring, lamb, high-fructose corn syrup, mackerel, mussels, salmon, pork, sardines, scallops, shrimp, tuna, and organ meats.

➔ **Limit foods that have moderate purine content**, including apricots, artichokes, broccoli, dried beans, lentils, green peas, green peppers, fish (other than the ones mentioned under "high"), oatmeal, poultry, wheat bran, and yeast.

➔ **Enjoy foods low in purine**, such as cauliflower, peas, beans, sweet potatoes and low-fat dairy. Studies suggest that eating 10-12 cherries every day may lower the risk of an attack. ■

When Valentine's Day Comes

It's an opportunity to love yourself and cultivate positive emotions.

The hearts and flowers that flood our consciousness around Valentine's Day can conjure up sad emotions for some people, especially if loved ones are no longer near. But there is a way to reframe thinking that can help lift spirits. Experts don't suggest that grief should be ignored or suppressed; rather the idea is to adopt practices that foster and help maintain positive emotions.

Like depositing small coins in a piggybank, practices that remind us to reflect on what's right and good in life can result in a wealth spring from which to draw strength during difficult times.

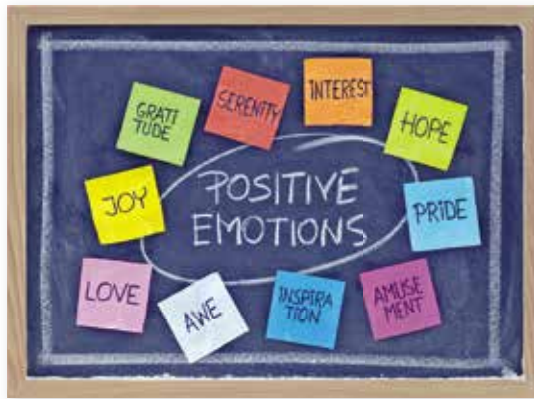
Numerous studies have shown that a mind tuned toward positivity has many health benefits for the brain and the body, such as lower blood pressure, less heart disease, and a stronger immune system.

"Positive emotions help buffer us from depressive symptoms and help us to recover from stressful experiences," explains Natalie Bell, certified mindfulness instructor for the UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center. "You don't have to force yourself to feel happy or pretend to be positive, but it helps to *commit* to noticing and practicing being positive."

Bell offers workshops to help people develop a mindset that leans toward compassion, hope, and joy. The following are some of her positivity practices, which can be especially helpful if you're feeling lonely, disconnected, or missing a loved one.

Three Ways to Usher in Positivity

"Our natural negativity bias, the tendency to look at things negatively or to focus on what's not working, can create a skewed perspective on ourselves and our lives," explains Bell. "So, it's important to balance out the strong negativity bias we all have by practicing positivity."



Build a more joyful and happier disposition with positive emotion practices.

Build up your positivity reserve by trying some of these ideas:

1 Create Positive Emotions Calendar.

Intentionally notice positive things and jot them down on your calendar. It's a handy way to document good things with short entries. After a month or two, flipping through the calendar can further reinforce the positivity in your life. Here are some guiding questions:

- *What happened that felt good today?* Pick at least three things small or large. For example, enjoyed a great meal, saw a friend, helped my neighbor, called someone to say hello, exercised, appreciated nature, laughed.

2 Savor Positive Experiences.

Slowing down to allow good events to sink in helps rewire your brain for positivity. Give yourself at least 20 seconds to savor. Here are some ways to achieve that.

- If you notice a positive feeling, strengthen it by naming your experience, "I feel happy," "I'm in awe." "I feel inspired." Close your eyes and let yourself feel all the details of the goodness inside your body and mind.
- If someone gives you a compliment, say "thank you" as you let

yourself *feel and believe* the compliment. If you can add in a hug or hand shake, that may also add oxytocin and other positive chemicals to your state of feeling good.

It enables positive energy to linger longer.

3 Ignite the Day with a Positive Phrase.

Optimistic words cultivate goodwill inside of us, and goodwill cultivates more positive thoughts, behaviors, and overall attitudes.

Sometimes such phrases may feel like you're forcing yourself to be happy or pretending. "Just try it on," suggests Bell. "Choose a positive phrase and just practice saying it even if you're not quite feeling it. You may notice that

you start paying attention to positive things."

Here are a few ideas:

- "I commit to seeing positive things"
- "I wish to be kind today"
- "May I be happy" or "May I feel free to be happy"

During triggering events like holidays, positive practices can help us see more possibilities, expand our mindset, and provide us with an internal reserve to support us during difficult times.

Opening to Life

Feeling connected to other people is an important part of healthy living. You can build and share goodwill throughout your day. Say hello to a neighbor or store clerk, and take that extra moment to look into their eyes.

According to Bell, allowing yourself to have these encounters helps everyone feel more connected and part of a greater whole.

Information about Natalie Bell's upcoming workshops can be found at NatalieBell.com. ■

Relieving Rheumatoid Arthritis with Exercise

Slow, gentle movement can help improve circulation and relieve the pain of RA.

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is an inflammatory autoimmune disease in which the immune system malfunctions and attacks the body, causing pain, stiffness, swelling, and loss of function in the joints. It often begins in middle age and occurs more frequently in women than men. Conventional medical treatments are highly effective for RA. Adding exercise can help with physical discomfort as well as improve overall wellbeing. The best exercises for RA are those with minimal impact on the joints.

“Slow, controlled movements are great for maintaining strength and mobility without placing too much stress on already irritated joints,” explains physical therapist Ashley McLeish, DPT, UCLA Department of Rehabilitation Services. “Water aerobics and qi gong are perfect examples of gentle exercises that are appropriate for RA.”

The Benefits of Water Workouts

The buoyancy of water naturally takes stress off joints while also providing resistance. Some facilities have warm water therapy pools (typically heated between 82 and 88 degrees). These pools are excellent for people with RA because the warm water helps reduce pain and stiffness more quickly. Working out in any pool, however, is beneficial.

You can burn more calories walking in the water than walking on land because it requires greater effort to move through water. The constant movement of the water also requires more balance, so you'll automatically work your core (trunk) muscles in order to stay upright. Aquatic classes are offered at many YMCAs as well as community centers and health clubs. You can also design your own water workouts with these movement ideas:

➔ **Many Ways to Walk the Pool.**

Start with a simple walk, and



The flowing, gentle movements of tai chi and qi gong are excellent low-impact exercise choices for anyone with RA or other joint issues.

then vary your leg movements by speeding up and slowing down and lifting your legs higher to increase the use of hip muscles. You can also work different muscle groups by walking in different directions (i.e., forward, backward, side-to-side). Build arm strength and increase your heart rate by adding pool weights. Just doing simple bicep curls and tricep pushbacks, with or even without pool weights, can completely change and intensify the workout.

- ➔ **Bicycle on the Edge.** Lean against the side of the pool and bicycle your legs. Bicycling in this way requires use of your core and shoulders to stabilize the body so you don't float away. Add some variety by scissoring your legs to work the inner and outer thighs. Try crossing your ankles and alternating which leg is on top each time. This builds concentration, control, and coordination.

Healing Movements of Qi Gong and Tai Chi

More than 4,000 years old, qi gong has been influenced by yoga, Buddhism, and Taoism. There are thousands of styles and adaptations, which includes the many versions of

tai chi. All are fundamentally based on the idea of harnessing existing natural energy for self-healing.

This ancient way of healing through movement differs from Western modes of exercise in that it asks for a relaxed mind and body while moving slowly. Nothing should be forced or uncomfortable.

Instructor Joe Pinella (JoePinella.com) has studied these ancient healing arts for more than 50 years. When he was paralyzed in a traffic crash in 1991 and told he'd never walk again, he used what he learned to eventually recover all movement.

“I suffer from none of the so-called aches and pains of aging,” says Pinella. “People frequently ask me how I stay in such good shape. *Surely you must lift weights or do cardio.* My response is that I do only qi gong.”

His classes often begin with simple joint rotations that increase mobility. He has a DVD available on his website.

- ➔ **Shoulder Rotations.** In a relaxed standing position, lift the shoulders up back and around nine times, and then reverse in the opposition direction. Be sure to do this slowly. A second exercise requires arms extended out to the sides. Do slow, small circles in each direction nine times.
- ➔ **Wrist Rotations.** RA often affects hands and wrists, and this exercise can help reduce stiffness in both. Arms are at your side with elbows bent to 90 degrees. Make a fist as best you can and slowly and gently rotate wrists in one direction and then the other.

According to Pinella, if your body is hurt or depleted, qi gong helps you repair and gain energy, without pain or exhaustion. These healing arts also soothe stress and help calm the mind, both of which can increase wellbeing in anyone, including those who have rheumatoid arthritis. ■

Thyroid Lumps—cont. from page 1

our treatment,” she explains. “If you have a small thyroid cancer that is less than a centimeter in size, one option may be to just watch it with serial ultrasounds. Like with prostate cancer, there is now an option for an active surveillance approach in certain cases.”

Diagnosis and Surgical Interventions

All of this does not mean that all lumps should be ignored. Larger nodules and those that grow over time need further examination. Usually that means an ultrasound followed by fine needle biopsy, if warranted. It's best to consult with an experienced endocrinologist who lists thyroid as their clinical interest and specializes in thyroid diseases (some may focus mostly on diabetes, for example). Likewise, a radiologist who does a lot of thyroid ultrasounds is more likely to be skilled in identifying nodules that need further investigation. A fine needle biopsy is quick, outpatient, and should be guided by ultrasound. The radiologist removes cells from the nodule with a small-gauge needle, which are then assessed for cancer.

Most thyroid cancers are removed

surgically, and removal of the entire thyroid gland has been the standard. But that may not always be necessary. “We used to remove the whole thyroid with any thyroid cancer,” says Dr. Livhits. “Now we just remove half of it in a lot of cases, so potentially most people can avoid being on thyroid medication afterwards. Half a thyroid usually has an 80 percent chance of working on its own.”

Risk Factors and Prevention

According to the American Cancer Society, thyroid cancer can occur at any age, but the risk peaks earlier for women (who are usually in their 40s or 50s when diagnosed) than for men (who are typically in their 60s or 70s). Women are also three times more likely to have a thyroid cancer and other thyroid diseases as compared to men.

Most people who have thyroid cancer don't have any risk factors, so it's not a preventable disease. Childhood exposure to radiation does raise risk, but the scant amounts of radiation from imaging tests are, according to research, unlikely to raise risk. Similarly, lack of iodine, which can lead to thyroid nodules, is usually not

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

Thyroid cancer can cause any of the following signs or symptoms:

- A lump in the neck, sometimes growing quickly
- Swelling in the neck
- Pain in the front of the neck, sometimes going up to the ears
- Hoarseness or other voice changes that do not go away
- Trouble swallowing or trouble breathing
- A constant cough that is not due to a cold

If you have any of these signs or symptoms, talk to your doctor right away. Many of these symptoms can also be caused by non-cancerous conditions or even other cancers of the neck area.

Source: American Cancer Society

a problem in the Western world.

Some thyroid cancers are associated with gene mutations. If you have a family history of thyroid cancer a blood test can reveal a genetic mutation for familial medullary thyroid cancer. This type of cancer is usually treated and prevented by removing the entire gland. ■

SLEEP

Restless Legs Syndrome Steals Sleep

Iron deficiency is one of many causes of RLS.

If you have tingling, itching, or creepy-crawling sensations on your feet or legs when you're trying to fall asleep, and these feelings are only relieved by getting up or massaging the area, you could have restless legs syndrome (RLS). Because inactivity triggers RLS, this disorder can also extend into daytime hours and makes sitting still difficult. It's no surprise that people with this disorder complain of fatigue.

“There are many reasons why RLS can develop,” says neurologist Indira Subramanian, MD, UCLA Medical Center. “It's associated with nerve

damage, B12 deficiency, diabetes, and iron-deficiency anemia.”

Know that an annual complete blood count (CBC) test is useful, but labs need to specifically test for iron (ferritin) in the blood. You can have a normal CBC and still be iron deficient.

Experts also suspect that RLS may be related to a disruption in dopamine, the brain chemical involved with body movement. A malfunction in the dopamine system can thwart proper brain cell communication, leading to involuntary movement. Because low iron levels can also dis-



rupt the dopamine production channel, physician-prescribed iron supplements or medication can also be effective in managing the condition.

“Exercise, stretching, cold compresses and warm baths can help,” adds Dr. Subramanian. “There's no one absolute treatment because there are so many different reasons why RLS occurs.”

Weight loss, not smoking, and no or moderate drinking can reduce the risk of developing RLS and relieve symptoms if you already have it. ■



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Q Is coronary artery disease different in men compared to women?

A There are similarities and differences between men and women in how the disease manifests. Coronary artery disease (CAD) tends to affect the smaller arteries in women and larger vessels in men, but the way plaques grow, rupture, and lead to heart attacks is the same for both genders. There are differences, however, in the timing and severity of CAD. Men are at higher risk than women for developing the disease and also tend to have heart attacks at a younger age than women. Common heart attack symptoms for men and women include chest tightness, shortness of breath, and nausea. Though both genders can also experience pain in the neck, jaw, or back, women are more likely to have these less common heart attack symptoms. Regardless of gender, once a person has had a heart attack, the likelihood of having another is much greater.

Both men and women can reduce their risk of developing CAD using the same approach: Eat healthfully, exercise regularly, and don't smoke. Most people know these are the steps to an overall healthier life, but it can be difficult to change, especially as we get older. The good news is you don't have to go it alone. For example, an exercise buddy can help you move more, a healthy eating program can provide new and tasty recipe ideas, and if you smoke, go to smokefree.gov for supportive tools to help you quit. If you have high blood pressure or diabetes, managing these conditions is essential to reducing heart attack risk, so be sure to take any medications as directed by your physician.

Q I've heard that the body can't tell the difference between the sugar in fruit and the sugar in cookies. So, why not just eat cookies when I crave something sweet?

A The sugar in fruit is fructose. And it's true, the body processes fructose in the same way as it does cane sugar, honey, sucrose, dextrose or one of the many other types of sugar. But there

are important differences between eating a piece of fruit versus a cookie. The sugar in fruit is accompanied by fiber as well as other nutrients that are typically not in many foods and beverages containing added sugar. The processed food products may also contain undesirable additives, such as trans fat and artificial ingredients, that do nothing helpful for your body, and in the case of trans fat is actually harmful, raising bad (LDL) cholesterol and lowering the good (HDL) cholesterol. When eating a whole piece of fruit, the soluble fiber in it slows the rate at which natural sugar is broken down and absorbed, so fiber helps you feel fuller longer. It aids in digestion and can reduce LDL cholesterol. While it's fine to enjoy an occasional cookie or sweet, on a daily basis, it is much better for health to eat whole fruits. If you forgo the cookies for a while, you'll find that fruits such as mangos, grapes, and bananas can satisfy your sweet tooth. They're also quite good as frozen treats, too.

Q My jaw is often quite sore and it pops and clicks sometimes when I chew or yawn. What could this be?

A It could be a disorder called TMJ, temporomandibular joint disorder. The temporomandibular joints connect your lower jaw (mandible) to the temporal bone at each side of your face. The muscles and bones of the joints control the movements your jaw makes as you chew, swallow, and speak. A TMJ disorder can involve one or more of these joints. A dentist can best diagnose a TMJ disorder. The problem can arise from arthritis and/or mechanical forces, such as grinding or clenching teeth, cheek biting, and aggressive gum chewing. Conservative treatments are generally tried first, for example using a plastic guard if you grind your teeth at night, or assessing how you swallow food. Some people clench their teeth when swallowing, which can put too much stress on jaw muscles. Tight neck muscles can also result in TMJ. Physical therapists can treat TMJ by realigning the head, neck and jaw, and by releasing overly tight muscles. ■

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