

Living 50 Plus

News and Information for Nash County Seniors

The importance of knowing your family medical history

When visiting a physician for the first time, patients may notice an extensive section on family history on one of the requisite forms they fill out before meeting the doctor. Though it can be hard to remember family members’ conditions, doctors have good reason to ask about their patients’ family’s medical histories.

Family medical histories can be vital to one’s own health care. The National Center for Biotechnology Information states that family history might be one of the strongest influences on a person’s risk for developing cancer, heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and more. While you cannot modify your genetic make-

up, knowing your family’s medical history can help you take the steps necessary to protect yourself.

Family history reports can serve as warning signs for illnesses. These clues can help doctors prescribe certain screening tests at earlier ages to catch potential diseases when they are most treatable. For example, the U.S. National Library of Medicine says that healthcare professionals may recommend more frequent screenings (such as mammography or colonoscopy) and screening at an earlier age for people at an increased risk of certain cancers. Doctors may recommend biannual check-ups to stay apprised of any

changes in health that may signal a risk.

A thorough health care professional will record your family medical history and ask you to update it routinely in an effort to ensure you get the best, most effective care possible. You can help the process by having the information needed at the ready. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention suggests the following.

- Talk to family. Make a list of close family members and discuss any conditions or issues they might have had and at what ages.
- Learn about chronic diseases. Speak to your relatives about chronic diseases like diabetes or high blood

pressure, being sure to ask how severe such issues were and if any required hospitalization.

- Plot your ancestry. Learn about your ancestry and if any medical issues are more common among people who share that ancestry.
- Record everything you learn. Keep the information where it can be easily accessed and updated. For example, My Family Health Portrait is a free web-based tool to organize family health information and share it with doctors.

Family history plays a key role in how doctors will approach patients’ treatment and preventive care.



Tips for dementia caregivers during the pandemic

Caregivers play vital roles in the lives of the people they look after. That’s especially true for people caring for dementia patients, many of whom require round-the-clock help every day.

A caregiver’s role is never easy, but the demands have been even greater during the global COVID-19 pandemic. Despite social distancing guidelines and recommendations to reduce interactions with those vulnerable to COVID-19, including the elderly, dementia caregivers must continue to help patients in need.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notes that older adults are at the highest risk of severe illness from COVID-19. That puts dementia caregivers in difficult positions, as data from the World Health Organization indicates that age is the strongest known risk factor for dementia. The Alzheimer’s Association urges dementia caregivers to follow guidelines established by the CDC as they continue to provide care for dementia patients.

- Wear face masks or cloth coverings. Face masks

or cloth coverings should be worn when tending to dementia patients. This includes when preparing meals for dementia patients or cleaning their homes. The CDC urges caregivers to wear personal protective equipment when providing personal or medical services to people with dementia, including when helping them bathe.

- Arrange for a substitute caregiver if you are ill or exhibiting any symptoms of COVID-19. Caregivers should have a backup caregiver lined up in case they

feel ill or if they are exhibiting any symptoms of COVID-19 or if they have been exposed to anyone with the virus. The CDC notes that symptoms of COVID-19 include fever or chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, and muscle or body aches. A full list of COVID-19 symptoms can be found at www.cdc.gov.

- Wash your hands frequently. Frequent handwashing can help dementia caregivers keep their patients safe. Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds

upon arriving at your patient’s home, and continue to wash your hands frequently throughout the day. If visitors arrive, insist they follow the same handwashing routine. If you cough or sneeze during the day, wash your hands immediately, and always wash hands before preparing meals.

- Look for virtual programs that encourage social engagement. Virtual gatherings have become the new normal as people try to maintain connections with family and friends while respecting social distancing

guidelines. The Alzheimer’s Association urges dementia caregivers to consider programs that offer virtual activities that encourage dementia patients to engage socially. Such engagement can lift patients’ spirits and remaining socially active supports brain health.

Caring for dementia patients during the COVID-19 outbreak requires embracing various strategies to reduce patients’ risk of exposure to the potentially deadly virus.

The right foods can fight inflammation

The human body and its immune system excels at fighting foreign invaders like bacteria and viruses. Signaling chemicals called interleukins tell cells whether they are needed to fight illness or they should wait in the wings. While these immune defenders are doing their jobs, soreness, fatigue and swelling can occur — the natural side effects of an immune system response — but will soon dissipate.

However, many people deal with immune systems that are consistently

revved up, even when no invaders are present. This is the problem with many chronic diseases and immune system dysfunction. Unfortunately, the inflammation that is a hallmark of immune defense becomes a daily problem that may result in chronic pain and other complications. What many people may not realize is that the foods that they are putting into their bodies may exacerbate inflammatory responses, while others may help keep inflammation at bay.

People with rheumatoid

arthritis, Crohn’s disease, Hashimoto’s, and other chronic illnesses may find that turning to the right diet can tame inflammation and other symptoms. Recently, many health experts, including Dr. Barry Sears, founder of the Inflammation and Research Foundation and author of the “Zone Diet,” and Dr. Andrew Weil, who offers the Anti-Inflammatory Food Pyramid, have begun to tout certain foods that are purported to reduce inflammatory response over an extended period of time.

As beneficial as some foods can be, it’s important to note that individuals are unique and certain foods may produce a particular response in some but not in others. Systematically isolating certain foods can help paint a picture of foods that can be problematic. But generally speaking, refined carbohydrates, sugar-sweetened beverages, fried foods, and processed meats may increase inflammation, advises Harvard Health Publishing. Conversely, certain foods and beverages

that have been identified as reducing inflammation for many people. These include:

- tomatoes
- olive oil
- green leafy vegetables and cruciferous vegetables
- nuts, like almonds and walnuts
- fatty fish
- berries
- avocados
- green tea
- peppers
- grapes
- turmeric
- dark chocolate

Including these foods in one’s daily diet may help to relieve the pain, bloating and fatigue associated with inflammation.

It is important to speak with a doctor before making any dietary changes. Discuss any inflammation issues you have been having and which foods might help. Generally speaking, a diet full of diverse, antioxidant-rich foods can provide relief for those with various levels of inflammation.

High Blood Pressure

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Plan Ahead

You’ve got to admit it; no one should have to make these decisions for you. Giving a pre-plan to those you love gives everyone greater peace-of-mind. You can then live your life to the fullest, knowing you’ve done the right thing.

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Signs of unsafe driving in older drivers

A license to drive has long been symbolic of independence. Teenage drivers long for the day they earn their licenses and can take to the road without mom or dad riding shotgun, while aging drivers want to keep driving as long as possible so they can come and go as they please in their golden years.

There's no formula drivers and their families can employ to determine when it's time to take the car keys away from senior citizens. Thankfully, fatal collisions involving older drivers have declined considerably in recent decades. According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, collision-related fatalities among drivers ages 70 and older declined by 15 percent between 1997 and 2018. A host of factors have no doubt contributed to that decline, including lane-assist technology and forward collision warning systems that have become standard offerings on many modern vehicles.

As much as technology has helped make driving safer for everyone, aging drivers should still keep an eye out for certain signs that may indicate their skills behind the wheel are diminishing and potentially compromising their ability to drive safely. According to AARP, the following are warning signs of unsafe driving.

- Delayed response to unexpected situations: Frequent close calls and narrowly avoiding collisions when other drivers stop suddenly indicate reduced response time that can put aging drivers at an elevated risk of being involved in an accident.
- Becoming easily distracted while driving: Distracted driving has become a significant concern in recent decades, but it's often associated with young drivers who are easily distracted also pose a safety risk to themselves and other motorists.
- Decrease in confidence while driving: Only drivers will know if they feel confident enough to drive safely, and it's vital that aging drivers be honest with themselves when assessing how they feel when driving.
- Having difficulty moving into or maintaining the correct lane of traffic: Lane-assist technology can help drivers recognize how often they're staying in the correct lane of traffic. When the warning bell goes off frequently, it might be time for older drivers to reconsider if it's safe for them to be behind the wheel.
- Hitting curbs when making right turns or backing up: Hitting curbs when turning or backing up indicates drivers may be having difficulty controlling their vehicles and/or seeing the road, both of which indicate it's no longer safe for drivers to get behind the wheel.
- Getting scrapes or dents on car, garage or mailbox: These signs also indicate drivers are having trouble controlling their vehicles.
- Driving too fast or too slow for road conditions: This indicates drivers are not as alert to their surroundings as they need to be to stay safe on the road.

It's not easy for aging drivers to relinquish their drivers' licenses. Learning to recognize potential warning signs of unsafe driving can help aging drivers make the safest decisions for themselves, their passengers and their fellow motorists.

Women's guide to menopause

Menopause is a natural occurrence in a woman's life. Menopause occurs 12 months after a woman's last period. It marks the end of the reproductive years and the cessation of menstruation.

Many women mistakenly believe that the years leading up to the end of their periods is menopause. In fact, this time of potential hot flashes and changes in their monthly cycles is a transitional period known as perimenopause.

The National Institute on Aging says menopause can take place between ages 45 and 55. Perimenopause may occur several years before that.



night, hot flashes are called night sweats.

Mood changes/sleep issues

Fluctuating hormones can cause other changes in the body. It's common for women in perimenopause to experience mood changes. However, mood also may be affected by disruptions to sleep that can occur at this time. Women can speak to their doctors about remedies that can help with mood and sleep issues.

Additional changes

Since hormones are responsible for many operations in the female body, additional changes are possible at this point in a woman's life. Thinning hair and dry skin may occur. Many women also complain of vaginal dryness. Loss of breast fullness might be evident. Furthermore, weight gain and slowed metabolism are possible.

The Mayo Clinic says women may still experience pregnancy in midlife despite irregular periods. This can be a confusing time for women, as they may not be sure if they're pregnant or if they've started the menopause transition.

After a woman experiences menopause and enters post-menopause, she is more vulnerable to heart disease and osteoporosis. Women should continue to see their doctors for routine health visits and screenings.

Menopause is often accompanied by various side effects. Women can speak with their physicians if they have any questions or concerns during this unique time in their lives.

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