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HealthNet News

January/February 2018

Linking Connecticut Patients and Families to Reliable Health Information

In this issue: Cost of childbirth, help for alcohol abuse, common medication problems in seniors, and more!

Why is Childbirth So Expensive in the U.S.?

According to [The Guardian](#), the average cost of an uncomplicated vaginal delivery in the U.S. is over \$32,000. Birth by caesarean section costs over \$51,000! This is especially shocking when the newspaper compared these figures with the \$18,000 charged for the Duchess of Cambridge's hospital stay to deliver her baby, Charlotte. The high cost of childbirth in the U.S., especially when there are complications, is believed to factor into thousands of family bankruptcies. This is especially alarming when the U.S. has the highest rate of maternal mortality in the developed world.

Wellness Toolkits for Your Healthiest Self:

New Year's resolutions are notoriously hard to keep. If health-related goals are among your 2018 objectives, you might want to check out the National Institutes of Health "[Wellness Toolkits](#)." There are four toolkits that cover your environment, feelings, body, and relationships. Each kit includes a set of cards with specific goals. Flip the cards and you see a checklist of activities you can follow to reach that goal.

Finding Help When You Want to Stop Drinking:

Finding high-quality, effective treatment for alcohol abuse is a complicated process. The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) has introduced an online tool called the "[Alcohol Treatment Navigator](#)" to simplify this process. According to NIAAA in 2015, over 15 million U.S. adults had an alcohol use disorder; only 1 in 12 received treatment. The "Navigator" has no commercial ties. The site recommends only scientifically proven methods to reduce or stop drinking and provides guidelines for evaluating the quality of alcohol treatment programs.

Common Medication Problems in Seniors and How to Solve Them:

A number of factors place older adults at risk for serious, potentially harmful effects from the medications they are prescribed. Seniors take an average of [14 - 18](#) prescriptions. With so many medications, there is the potential for confusion, missed doses, and taking too many or too few. And, because of the cost, simply not filling prescriptions. Multiple medications raise the likelihood of drugs interacting with each other. There are also problems with how medications affect older adults. Learn more about medication problems in seniors in this article on [DailyCaring.com](#). The article includes things you can do to minimize drug problems and links to additional resources, including the "[Beers List](#)" for Potentially Inappropriate Medication Use in Older Adults.

Home Repair Assistance for Seniors:

Would you like to help an older adult make her/his home safer or more energy efficient? [DailyCaring.com](#) lists seven government and nonprofit agencies and programs for [home repair assistance](#) seniors can use. [DailyCaring.com](#) also

features articles about how to make kitchens and bathrooms safer, and a room-by-room home modification guide for seniors.

DASH and Mediterranean Diets Tie for Best Diet in Annual Ranking:

Each year *U.S. News & World Report* ranks popular diets based on assessments by a panel of health experts. Diets are evaluated in nine categories including weight loss, nutrition, safety, and ease of compliance. 2018's best overall diet title is shared by the DASH and Mediterranean diets. Expert panelist, Eric Rimm, Professor of Epidemiology and Nutrition at the Harvard Chan School of Public Health notes "No single diet works for everybody...but the DASH and Mediterranean diets have been tested in the largest and longest studies." The Flexitarian Diet takes the third overall spot, followed by Weight Watchers in fourth place and in a three-way tie for fifth place: MIND Diet, TLC Diet and Volumetrics. The *US News & World Reports* "Best Diets" site enable you to compare over 40 diets based on factors that are important to you.

Updated Patient Guidelines for Treating Melanoma:

Looking for the most current recommendations for the treatment of melanoma? The National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) has updated their melanoma treatment guidelines. NCCN is an organization comprised of the nation's 27 leading cancer treatment centers. These institutions focus exclusively on patient care, cancer research, and education. NCCN patient guidelines are translations of clinician guidelines and are meant to help patients talk with their physicians about the best treatment options for their cancer.

Origami Inspires Cancer Drug Delivery Device:

Origami inspired a tiny folded device to deliver chemotherapy drugs for ovarian cancer. Watch an interview with the Harvard/MIT PhD student and the graduate research assistant who created a mold of that folded device using a 3D printer. Their device may lead to a more efficient and effective way to deliver chemo drugs over the patient's entire course of treatment.

Can the Flu Trigger Heart Attacks?

It has been nine months since the flu arrived, and according to the CDC, we may be only [halfway through the season](#). With high levels of flu activity across the country, another cause for concern is the possibility that the flu may be linked to heart attack. A new study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* found a significant association between acute myocardial infarction (heart attack) and serious respiratory infections, especially influenza. This is the first study based on laboratory confirmed influenza diagnosis.

Walmart Pharmacies Offer Innovative Opioid Disposal Solution:

Patients filling opioid prescriptions at Walmart pharmacies will now have an easy in-home option for safely disposing of unused pills. "[DisposeRx](#)" is a new technology in the fight against opioid abuse and misuse. It is a small packet containing chemicals, that "when emptied into the pill bottle with warm water, allows patients to responsibly dispose of leftover medications in their trash."

A recent study by [Johns Hopkins](#) found the majority of surgery patients prescribed opioid pain relievers do not use them or do not use the entire prescription. Up to 92% of patients in the study held onto their left over pills increasing the risk for misuse. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration reports, [50% of people](#) who misuse prescription painkillers get them from a friend or relative for free.

EWG Offers Consumer Guide to Greening Your Home:

According to the Environmental Working Group (EWG) the air inside our homes is [two - five times more polluted](#) than the air outdoors. Chemicals are released into indoor air from paints, cleaners, building supplies, and furniture. EWG offers a "[Healthy Living Home Guide](#)" for greening up your home. Search broad categories like "Home Building Supplies," "Kitchen and Bath," "Nursery," and "Easy Changes" for specific steps you can take to make your home healthier.

Hooray for Mucus...Really?!

Mucus may have a big yuck factor, but according to MIT professor Katharina Ribbeck, mucus is an "unsung hero" in the war against all sorts of disease-causing microorganisms. Dr. Ribbeck's lab is trying to learn how this sticky substance acts like a gatekeeper allowing certain molecules and microbes in

and keeping others out. The hope is that mucus may lead to personalized treatments where drugs are designed to work with the patient's own mucus. Check out Dr. Ribbeck's [TED-Ed video](#) "How Mucus Keeps Us Healthy."

Heart Disease Risk Tied to Breast Cancer Drugs:

The American Heart Association (AHA) released a warning that breast cancer survivors treated with chemotherapy drugs have an increased risk of heart failure and other heart diseases. The [AHA statement](#) encourages cancer doctors to weigh the benefits of chemotherapies with the heart risks they pose.

Stand Up and Burn More Calories:

A new study in the [European Journal of Preventive Cardiology](#) found that people burn more calories standing than sitting -- 0.15 kcal more per minute, to be exact. Not impressed? If you were to stand for 6 hours a day, that calorie loss would add up to 54 kcal. Over the course of a year those extra calories burned would translate into a weight loss of 5.5 pounds. If you were to do something while standing, say fidgeting or pacing, (non-exercise activity thermogenesis or NEAT) calories burned would increase even more. An [LA Times](#) article explores the link between standing and fitness. For fun, test the calorie calculators on the [JustStand.org](#) website. You might also want to read James Levine's book, [Get Up! Why Your Chair is Killing You and What You Can Do About It](#). Dr. Levine is an endocrinologist with the Mayo Clinic.

More Health Information You Can Use:

- [Smart glove](#) that turns sign language into speech.
- Apple [Heart Study app](#) uses data from Apple Watch to identify irregular heart rhythms.
- Plan, track, and record your next outdoor adventure with [Natural Atlas](#) app for iPhones.
- [Canada's answer](#) to opioid crisis: Vending machine narcotics.

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