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Wellness Through Answers News

May/June 2019

*Linking Connecticut Patients, Families, and Residents to
Reliable Health Information*

New Name

The name "HealthNet" is no longer used by our library's consumer health information service. Our service is now called "Wellness Through Answers." To be consistent, we have renamed our newsletter, too. Although our name has changed, our focus remains the same: linking you to reliable health information.

Have a Personal Health Question?

Wellness Through Answers staff can help you find answers. Our medical librarians research personal health questions for Connecticut residents. Our service is free and confidential. Call or email us with your question: (860) 679-4055 / hnet@uchc.edu

Most Pregnancy-Related Deaths Are Preventable

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), **700 women die** of pregnancy complications in the U.S. each year; **three out of five** of those deaths are preventable, and **one out of three** deaths occur one week to one year after the baby is born. Overall, the most common causes of death are **heart attack and stroke**. Factors contributing to pregnancy deaths include access to care, missed or delayed diagnoses, and failure to recognize warning signs of complications. Read the CDC's full report in the *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*.

What can a women and her family do to prevent pregnancy death? The CDC advises to know the symptoms of complications and speak up when they occur, and also share the mother's medical history any time she receives medical care in the year following childbirth.

Maternity Care Ratings for U.S. Hospitals

Maternity care can vary greatly from one hospital to another. Leapfrog's annual survey of maternity care can help those expecting a baby to choose the hospital where their child will be delivered. Leapfrog is a nonprofit that evaluates the quality and safety of U.S. hospitals. Their "**Maternity Care Report**" compares hospitals on three procedures experts say unnecessarily increase risks for mothers and babies: cesarean sections, episiotomy, and early elective deliveries. Leapfrog uses nationally-agreed-upon quality and safety standards to assess whether hospitals are performing too many of these procedures. In 2018, **only one in five hospitals** surveyed met Leapfrog's standards for all three procedures. Expectant individuals can research the quality of maternity care for hospitals in their area on the [Leapfrog website](#).

Anti-Vaxxers Use Outdated Gene Study for Vaccination Exemptions

In the early days of genetic research a lot of attention was focused on a gene called MTHFR. Scientists linked variations in this gene to **a host of health conditions** from heart disease to pregnancy complications. One of these early gene studies was published by **James Crow in 2008**. Crow linked MTHFR gene variations to adverse reactions to the smallpox vaccine. Over time, bigger data sets and better statistical tools disproved MTHFR's links to health conditions and vaccine reactions. "Anti-vaxx" doctors and parents however, are using Crow's study to **support vaccination exemptions** for children. Anti-Vaxxers order the genetic test, "23andMe," download the raw data, and use a third-party app to analyze the MTHFR gene for the mutations studied by Crow.

Fitness Programs for Transgender People

Feeling comfortable in mainstream gyms or health clubs isn't easy for people whose bodies aren't trim and perfectly toned. This is especially true for transgender people who may have a big disconnection with their bodies. A trend towards **kinder, more supportive fitness programs** may be underway. Facilities like the **Nonnormative Body Club in Philadelphia** are tailoring their classes to the special needs of transgender people. Among its offerings is an eight-week core strengthening program designed to promote speedier recovery after top surgery.

Homemade Sunscreens - A Recipe for Sunburn

Social media sites are changing how people find and share health information. Parents seeking safer, more natural sun protection products are turning to sites like Pinterest for "**do-it-yourself recipes**." The reasoning is that "all natural" homemade sunscreens are safer than and just as effective as commercial products. When it comes to sun protection however, medical experts advise against using recipes found on social media sites.

A new **study of almost 1000 sunscreen pins** on Pinterest found **95% portrayed** homemade sunscreens as effective, and made claims of sun protection factors as high as 50. The study's authors however, found that most of the recipes were far from safe alternatives to commercial, FDA-approved products. Of the recipes reviewed, **68%** provided insufficient UV radiation protection leaving users at high risk for sunburn.

Consumer Reports rates the effectiveness of sunscreens that use natural or mineral-based ingredients. You can also consult the *Environmental Working Group's* website for safety ratings of sunscreen ingredients.

CVS Launches Program to Test its Vitamins and Supplements

Retail pharmacy chain *CVS is launching a program* requiring manufacturers of vitamins and supplements to undergo third-party testing. The aim of the program is to assure customers that supplements are free of contaminants and that their labels accurately describe what's in the bottle. So far, CVS says seven percent of the supplements tested have "flunked." Those products will be pulled from the shelf or their manufacturers will have to create new labels.

Vitamins and nutritional supplements *are not subject* to the same safety regulations as prescription drugs. Supplement manufacturers are supposed to test their own products for safety and purity. They are not required to list potential adverse effects on their packaging. According to the CDC, supplements cause *23,000 emergency room visits* annually in the U.S. Often the emergency is caused by ingredients in the supplement that interact with a patient's prescription drug. Another source for concern are contaminants in supplements. A *2018 study* found unapproved drug ingredients in supplements marketed for weight loss, body building, and sexual performance.

How Long You Live Depends on What Neighborhood You Live in

According to researchers at NYU School of Medicine, the life expectancy of people living in some large cities *may differ by 20 - 30 years* depending on their neighborhood. These differences were seen even in neighborhoods that were only a few miles apart. Researchers also found a relationship between a neighborhood's degree of segregation and how long it's residents live.

Data for this study came from "*City Health Dashboard*," a website that allows users to compare large cities on many factors affecting health.

Nix the "Twinkies" and "Slim Jims"

Are junk foods your go-to when there's no time for lunch? Are a bowl of chips or cream-filled chocolate cookies your guilty pleasure? It's time to break your junk food habit.

Two new studies have found a positive association between junk foods, also known as "ultra-processed foods" (UPFs), and cardiovascular disease and risk of death.

A [study of almost 20,000 people](#) found eating four or more servings of UPFs a day was associated with a 62% higher rate of death due to all causes. Each added serving of UPFs increased the risk of death by 18%.

A second [study of over 100,000 people](#) found a positive association between eating UPFs and developing cardiovascular disease, including coronary heart disease and stroke.

These studies do not prove that eating junk food will cause you to develop heart disease, stroke, or other debilitating chronic diseases. The research also does not prove eating junk food will you cause you to die earlier than folks who eat raw or less-processed foods.

Most Fast-Tracked Cancer Drugs Have No Clear Benefits for Patients

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) created an "accelerated-approval" pathway so that potentially life-prolonging drugs could get to cancer patients faster. A new study in [JAMA Internal Medicine](#) found that only two out of ten drugs approved by this program actually extended the lives of cancer patients. The majority of these fast tracked cancer drugs were approved based on response rates like tumor shrinkage, rather than on whether the drug allowed patients to live longer or have an improved quality of life.

Critics of the accelerated approval program say it offers false hope to many patients. These drugs often result in patients paying [thousands of dollars in out-of-pocket expenses](#) for drugs with marginal or no proven benefit.

How Would "Medicare for All" Bills Change Health Care?

Over the past year, many bills have been introduced in Congress to make health care more accessible and more affordable. How would "Medicare for All" proposals do this? [Tune in](#) to the *The Dose* podcast or read a [transcript of the episode](#) to learn more about the different options policy makers are considering.

More Health News You Can Use:

- It's tick season. Make sure you know [what's biting you](#)
- Cultivate a [sunnier outlook](#)
- What it's like to have [cataracts](#)? Watch this video
- "[Family dinners](#)" are possible
- Pack a [first aid kit](#) for international travel
- You can [be a rebel](#) at any age
- [Accessibility tools](#) enhance Google Chrome
- [Music seniors love](#) - top songs for every generation
- Find [pet-friendly](#) senior housing

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