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Living with Diabetes

The first of a four-part series dedicated to diabetes education. All PERS members will greatly benefit from the articles, recipes and resource lists we'll be providing. Watch for it!

HAS YOUR ADDRESS CHANGED?

Be sure to let the PERS Health Insurance Office know right away.

Health Wise Editor
Tiffany Meyer

Diabetes 101

The symptoms and conditions associated with diabetes are determined by the type of diabetes you have. Individuals who develop diabetes over age 65 usually contract either type 1 or type 2 diabetes.

What is Type 1 Diabetes?

Type 1, or immune-mediated diabetes (also known as insulin-dependent diabetes) is a disease that affects the way your body uses food.

In type 1 diabetes, your body destroys the cells in the pancreas that produce insulin. This usually leads to a total failure to produce insulin. It typically starts in children or young adults who are slim, but can start at any age.

Without insulin, your body cannot control blood levels of sugar. And without insulin, you would die. People with type 1 diabetes give themselves at least one shot of insulin every day.

An estimated 500,000 to 1 million Americans currently have this type of diabetes.

What is Type 2 Diabetes?

Type 2 diabetes used to be called non-insulin-dependent diabetes. The most common type of diabetes, it affects about 15 million Americans. Nine out of ten cases of diabetes are type 2. It usually occurs in people over 45 who are overweight, among other factors.

When you have type 2 diabetes, your body does not make enough insulin. Or, your body still makes insulin but can't properly use it. Without enough insulin, your body cannot move blood sugar into the cells. Sugar builds up in the bloodstream. High blood levels of sugar can cause problems.

Medical experts do not know the exact cause of type 2 diabetes. They do know type 2 diabetes runs in families. A person can inherit a tendency to get type 2 diabetes, but it usually takes another factor such as obesity to bring on the disease.



PHARMACY Corner

Robin Richardson, *Director of Pharmaceutical Programs, ODS Health Plans*

It's cold season again

What causes colds?

Colds are caused by over 200 different highly contagious viruses spread easily from coughing, sneezing or hand contact with contaminated objects. Immunity to cold viruses develops over time, after the illness has infected the body.

A weakened immune system caused by age, stress, fatigue, or other factors could make the body more susceptible to infection and complications from a cold virus.

How do I know it's a cold?

Typically, cold symptoms begin one to three days after infection when the spread of the virus in the body has peaked. A sore throat may be followed by sneezing, coughing, runny nose, yellow and green phlegm and feeling generally ill. Sometimes a slight fever may develop.

Can I prevent a cold?

With over 200 ever-changing cold viruses, a cure for the common cold remains elusive. The best prevention tips are commonplace: wash hands frequently to reduce the spread of the virus; avoid individuals

in the early stages of a cold; maintain a strong immune system through proper nutrition, regular exercise, rest and stress management.

What works best to treat the cold? Stay warm, drink plenty of fluids and let your immune system do the work.

Viruses thrive when the respiratory tract is dehydrated. By drinking plenty of fluids, you prevent dehydration, help the white blood cells and keep mucus thin and loose.

Research shows that sugar greatly reduces the white blood cells' ability to fight and kill bacteria. Accordingly, the high levels of sugar in fruit juices like orange juice can actually counteract the benefits of vitamin C in the juice. Drinking your OJ when you're sick may not be the best answer.

Hot liquids are better for treating a cold, as they soothe the throat, thin mucus and clear congestion. The traditional method of chicken soup or broth, is actually very beneficial.

Some over-the-counter cold products are not appropriate for those with heart disease, hyper-

tension or diabetes, and those taking any prescription medications. Before using any over-the-counter remedy to treat a cold, ask your doctor and pharmacist.

Echinacea, vitamin C and non-flavored zinc gluconate are some non-traditional over-the-counter products that are becoming more common for treating cold symptoms.

If you ever experience complications from a cold such as bacterial infections, difficult or painful breathing, persistent fever and chills, ear ache, severe headache and enlarged, tender neck lymphnodes, seek direct attention from a physician.

Good News!

As a reminder,
the PERS Health
Insurance Program
pharmacy benefit has
no changes this year.
All benefits remain
the same.

It's FALL

TIME FOR YOUR FLU SHOT!

Influenza (flu) and pneumonia are the fifth leading cause of death among older adults. Nearly 90% of the 86,000 Americans who died from flu or pneumonia related complications in 1997, were 65 or older.

Update your flu shots yearly. Flu viruses change over time and several types of flu are active during a flu season. Scientists decide which flu viruses are most likely to be active and develop a new vaccine each year, requiring annual vaccinations. The flu vaccine helps protect against several types of flu.

A flu shot can help reduce your risk for hospitalization due to flu-related complications by 30-70%.

Life-long pneumococcal protection. The pneumonia shot protects against 23 pneumococcal bacteria. You can get a pneumococcal shot at the same time you get your flu shot. Most people

need just one pneumococcal vaccination in a lifetime, but some may need another dose. Talk with your health care provider to find out if you need to repeat your shot.

Flu and pneumococcal vaccinations are recommended for people who are:

- older than 65, even if healthy
- have a chronic lung or heart condition
- have diabetes or kidney disease
- have an impaired immune system
- live in a nursing home or other chronic-care facility

These shots are both safe and convenient.

The flu and pneumococcal vaccines protect you without making you sick.

According to the Oregon Health Division, October to mid-November is the best time for Oregon residents to get a flu shot.

Flu shots are covered by Medicare

Flu and pneumonia shots are covered by Medicare Part B with no co-payment. If you have a managed care plan, however, check with your health care provider to find out where to get your flu and pneumonia shots.

This article was submitted by OMPRO, Oregon Medical Professional Review Organization. For more information, call OMPRO's Quality Care Hotline at 1-800-344-4354.

This material was prepared by the OMPRO under a contract with the Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA). The contents do not necessarily reflect HCFA policy.

WHERE DO I GET MY FLU SHOT?

Oregon SAFENET provides information about flu shot locations throughout Oregon. Call SAFENET directly at 1-800-723-3638. They will be happy to assist you in finding the flu shot location nearest you.

We've moved

The PERS Health Insurance Program relocated in July of 1999 to the **ODS Tower** at 601 S.W. Second Avenue, just a few blocks away from our old location. All Post Office Box addresses and toll free phone numbers will remain the same.

COMING NEXT ISSUE:

Living with Diabetes

The first of a four-part series dedicated to diabetes education. All PERS members will greatly benefit from the articles, recipes and resource lists we'll be providing.

Need an audio version of HealthWise?

To add your name to our permanent cassette tape mailing list, please call the PERS Health Insurance Program at 1-800-768-7377 and ask for the HealthWise Editor.

Alzheimer's Disease: New hope for the future?

Article written by,
Kenneth Brummel-Smith, M.D.
*Medical Director,
Brain Center on Aging
Providence Health System*

A few years ago, a community-based Boston study indicated that 50 percent of those over age 85 may develop Alzheimer's disease. Was the promise of increasing longevity being tainted by the threat of losing one's mental capacity? Fortunately, new research is providing hope for the future. Three areas are developing that lead me to think there is always hope: diagnosis, treatment and prevention.

First, Alzheimer's must be recognized to be diagnosed.

If you notice an elder who repeats himself in the same conversation, forgets important dates, or has problems writing checks and paying bills, get him/her evaluated! It may not be dementia and could be something else.

If Alzheimer's is the diagnosis, make contact with the nearest Alzheimer's Association. As a family, openly talk about treatment options while the patient still can take part in the discus-

sion. Studies show that talking is better than holding it all inside.

Second, new treatments are available. One is vitamin E, which has been shown to stall the loss of function experienced by Alzheimer's patients. Another possibility is ginkgo biloba, a food supplement that's been shown to increase mental function. Also, the drugs Aricept (donepezil) and Cognex (tacrine) may help by stabilizing, and sometimes improving, mental function. A physician must prescribe one of these last two.

Finally, the possibility of prevention exists. Genes play a role in the expression of Alzheimer's disease, but it is not clear how. Many people carry the gene but never get Alzheimer's. Research is trying to find out why the gene becomes active in some and not in others.

Studies are also under way to see if vitamin E, ginkgo, estrogen, or anti-inflammatory drugs such as ibuprofen may prevent Alzheimer's. There does seem to be some preliminary evidence that they do help.

Ask the DOCTOR



This issue's Ask the Doctor answer comes from **Dr. Bertram W. Berney, MD, MHS**, and medical advisor to ODS Health Plans.

Question:

Please explain a "bundle branch block" on the left side of my heart. What is the cause? Is there a cure? What are the complications?

Answer:

From a functional standpoint, the heart is considered to have two systems which make it operate effectively. One system is the blood flow, which is like the plumbing system. The other system is the conduction system, which is like the electrical system.

In order to assure that the heart gets the proper electrical signal to generate a heartbeat 60-80 times a minute, 60 minutes an hour, 24 hours a day, every day of our lives, there are three branches of the conduction system. As we age, or in our association with heart disease, one or two of these conducting electrical "conduits" may not work. This is seen on

the electrocardiogram (ECG) as a "bundle branch block."

The left branch block is the most common type. The greatest significance from the internist's point of view is that it is not possible to assess whether there is decreased blood flow to the heart from an ECG when someone has a left bundle branch block. Sometimes patients may have a bundle branch block which is related to the rate at which the heart is beating. This is called a rate-related bundle branch block.

One of the complications from a left bundle branch block is that the right bundle may also become "blocked" and you would then have a condition called complete heart block. The heart is smart enough to realize that it still has to beat, so the symptoms of this condition are a very slow heart rate, which would get most people to the doctor promptly. A complete heart block that fails to resolve after medical therapy is often an indication for pacemaker placement.

Ask the doctor

Do you have a general health or nutrition question you'd like to ask our PERS physicians? Send your questions to:

**PERS Health Insurance
Ask the Doctor
Attn: Tiffany Meyer
601 S.W. Second Avenue
Portland, OR 97204**

Or, e-mail us at:
comments@odshp.com

Not all questions submitted to the *Ask the Doctor* program can be answered in the Health Wise newsletter.

NOTICE

The PERS Health Insurance Program Member Information booklets

were recently distributed to all PERS members. On page 13, under the Summary of Benefits without Medicare, the copay for the Office visit/lab, x-ray and diagnostic procedures reads: "Office visits covered with \$100 copay. Lab, x-rays and diagnostic procedures covered in full."

It should say:

"Office visits covered with \$10 copay. Lab, x-ray and diagnostic procedures covered in full."

Notice

The PERS Health Insurance Program Member Information booklets

were recently distributed to all PERS members.

On page 17, the ODS Health Plans dental premium effective dates are listed as:

“Rates are effective January 1, 2000 through December 31, 2001.”

This should read:

“Rates are effective January 1, 2000 through December 31, 2000.”



HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

The PERS Health Insurance office will be closed on:

November 25-26

Thanksgiving holiday

December 24

Christmas holiday

December 31

New Year's Eve

Common types of arthritis

There are over 100 different kinds of arthritis. The following are descriptions of the most common types of arthritis:

Osteoarthritis

Also called degenerative arthritis, osteoarthritis affects over 16 million Americans, mostly aged 45 and older. Osteoarthritis occurs when the cushioning cartilage in a joint breaks down. This type commonly affects the feet, knees, hips and fingers. About 50% of adults age 65 and older have this form of arthritis.

Rheumatoid Arthritis

About 2.1 million Americans are affected by this type of arthritis, three times more women than men. With this type, the immune system attacks the lining, or synovial membrane, of the joints. Over time, joint damage can become severe and deforming. Rheumatoid arthritis affects the entire body. It may also cause fatigue, weight loss, anemia, as well as affecting the lungs, heart and eyes.

Gout

Gout is a metabolic disorder in which uric acid builds up in the

blood, forming crystals in the joints and other places. It causes sudden, severe attacks, usually in the big toe, but any joint can be affected. Gout is commonly controlled by drug treatment and special attention to diet. About 1 million Americans (70-80% men) are affected by gout, the first attack starting between 40 and 50 years of age.

Psoriatic Arthritis

Psoriatic arthritis inflames the bone and other joint tissues, and, like rheumatoid arthritis, it can affect the entire body. About 5% of people with psoriasis, a chronic skin disease, also have psoriatic arthritis. Symptoms are mild in most people. Over 160,000 Americans are affected by psoriatic arthritis.

General Warning Signs of arthritis



If you experience any of these symptoms for more than two weeks, see your doctor immediately.

Keep a record for your protection

It's always a good idea to keep your health records in an easily accessible place at home. In an emergency, these records can be used by others to help save your life. In your file you may want to include the following:

- The names, addresses and phone numbers of all the health care professionals you see regularly. This includes your pharmacist, doctor, dentist, physical therapist, etc.
- A complete description of your medical history. If you've filled out a medical history form at the doctor's office, ask for a copy to keep at home.
- A complete list of all prescription medications, over-the-counter drugs, supplements, vitamins and other medicines that you take.
- Any treatment, therapy or special diet instructions.
- All bills and receipts.
- A copy of your health insurance policies, Medicare and Medicaid documents.
- The name, address and phone number of a person to contact in case of an emergency.

Do you have a question about the new long term care benefit?

Call UNUM directly, at 1-800-227-4165. They will be happy to assist you.



Free Book Offer!

Send *Health Wise* your personal accounts of steps you've taken to improve your health. In return, we will send you the free book described below! Stories may include new exercise programs, dietary changes, changes in medications, etc.

Healthwise for Life: A Medical Self-Care for Healthy Aging, written by Molly Mettler, MSW, and Donal W. Kemper, MPH. This is a user-friendly self-care guide targeting self-care for health problems ranging from back pain to mental health, staying healthy and independent, and self-care resources. Quantities are limited to stock on hand.

All submitted stories become the property of the PERS Health Insurance Program. Stories will be used anonymously as anecdotes for the *HealthWise* newsletter.

Please forward your stories to: PERS Health Insurance Program, Attn: Tiffany Meyer, HealthWise Editor, 601 S.W. Second Avenue, Portland, OR 97204.

Numbers You Should Know



PERS Pension Office

Mailing Address

P.O. Box 23700

Tigard, OR 97281-3700

Street Address

11410 S.W. 68th Parkway

Tigard, OR 97281-3700

(503) 603-7777

1-888-320-7377

PERS Health

Insurance Program

General Correspondence

P.O. Box 40187

Portland, OR 97240-0187

(503) 224-7377

1-800-768-7377

Providence

Health Care - Eugene

1235 N.E. 47th Avenue, #220

Portland, OR 97213

(541) 485-2145 • 1-800-421-0544

Ask-A-Nurse

(541) 686-7000 • 1-800-365-7010

Providence Health Plan - Portland

1235 N.E. 47th Avenue, #220

Portland, OR 97213

(503) 574-8000 • 1-800-603-2340

Claims

P.O. Box 13160

Portland, OR 97213

Providence RN

(503) 230-6520 • 1-800-700-0481

NEW!!

ODS Health Plans

601 S.W. Second Avenue

Portland, OR 97204

Medical

(503) 243-3880

1-800-962-1533 (Oregon)

1-800-852-5195 (National)

Dental

(503) 228-6554

1-800-452-1058 (Oregon)

1-800-852-5195 (National)

Claims

P.O. Box 4030

Portland, OR 97208-4030

Kaiser Permanente

500 N.E. Multnomah, Suite #100

Portland, OR 97232-2099

(503) 813-2000 • 1-800-813-2000

NEW!!

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