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DO YOU HAVE SUGGESTIONS?

Call the PERS Health
Insurance program at
1-800-768-7377.

Health Wise Editor
Tiffany Meyer

Ergonomics in the Home:

An essential to neck and back health

After careful deliberation, you've finally purchased a home computer. Whether used for work or play, the set-up of your computer workstation should involve an equal amount of thought.

Ergonomics is a relatively new science devoted to the study of how certain "tools" of the work force (like a computer) interact with the human body. Research in this area has determined that prolonged, repeated movements (like typing or using a mouse) can cause painful injuries in the neck, back and hands. By simply fitting your computer station to your specific body type, you can remarkably prevent many common injuries.

Setting up a safe computer doesn't have to be expensive. The following are some helpful ergonomics tips provided

by *Workforce Dynamics*, an ergonomics consultant based in Portland, Oregon.

- Use a good chair (it doesn't have to be expensive!) that supports your back and allows your feet to rest comfortably on the floor.
- If your feet don't touch the floor, use a footrest (book, footstool, box, etc.).
- Put a wrist rest in front of your keyboard and mouse.
- Keep your mouse at the same level as your keyboard and keep it close in to you (hint: if you have to reach, it's too far away).
- Place your monitor where the window or other light source doesn't shine directly on it. Direct light creates glare on your screen, making

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PHARMACY Corner

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

Summer & Sunscreens:

We enjoy one, but don't understand the other

Summer weather provides a great opportunity to get outside and enjoy picnics, barbecues, gardening and many other outdoor activities.

While outside, it's important to protect your skin from the sun's harmful ultraviolet (UV) radiation. However, with their long, unpronounceable words, trying to decipher sunscreen labels can be like reading a foreign dictionary. Without some background on what these ingredients do, all sunscreens may seem alike.

To begin, there are two types of UV radiation: UVB, and UVA. The UVB radiation is primarily absorbed into the outer layer of the skin and is responsible for sunburn and inducing skin cancer.

UVA radiation is absorbed into the deep layers of skin. It is responsible for serious skin damage; for sunlight sensitive reactions that sometimes occur with medications, food and cosmetics; and for enhancing the

cancer-causing activities of UVB radiation.

Environmental factors such as the time of day, altitude, and the part of the world you live in increase the intensity of the radiation received from the sun. Reflection of the sun's light off of water, sand and even snow also have a big impact. In addition, some medications increase your sensitivity to the sun. (Be sure to ask your doctor if the medications you take have such an effect.)

UVB radiation is reported to be strongest between 10am and 2pm, while UVA radiation remains constant throughout the day. In addition, the intensity of UVA radiation increases 4% with every 1,000 foot increase in altitude.

With all of this in mind, what exactly should you look for in a sunscreen?

- Choose a comprehensive sunscreen that contains a combination of ingredients which block both UVA and UVB radia-

tion. Look for ingredients like Oxybenzone, Dioxybenzone and Octocrylene. Ingredients that primarily absorb UVB radiation are Cinoxate, Ethylhexyl p-methoxycinnamate, Octyl methoxycinnamate, ethylhexyl salicylate, homosalaate, Octyl salicylate. Avobenzone (butyl-methoxydibenzoylmethane, Parsol 1789) is UVA absorbing only.

- Choose a sun protection factor (SPF) rating appropriate to your activity, climate, and all other factors effecting the intensity of the sun's rays. SPF ratings range from 2 to 50+. To figure out which rating is best for you, determine how long you can be outside before you get a sunburn. If you get burned after 20 minutes, a SPF-6 would allow you to be outside under NORMAL conditions for 6x20 minutes, or 2 hours before you would get a sunburn.

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Vision Northwest

Empowering those with vision loss

When she answered the phone, Evelyn Maizels did what she'd been trained to do: listen. The gentleman on the other line was frustrated and nervous. After a few minutes of talking, Evelyn discovered how she could help him. "Where can I buy a deck of cards with large print," the gentleman asked. "I'm having some friends over for dinner."

Vision Northwest (VNW), located in downtown Portland, is a not-for-profit community service organization for the visually impaired. This organization, relies heavily on volunteer support, as most of their services are provided at no charge to the visually impaired and their families.

"Losing your sight is often frightening because your independence is threatened. We try to help people regain their independence so they don't feel so lost," said Evelyn Maizels, Executive Director of VNW.

Among the services that VNW provides are:

- **Over 45 peer support groups throughout Oregon and Southwest Washington.**

These groups provide support for individuals who are visually impaired and want to continue to live independently. VNW

also sponsors a group for parents, one for spouses and one for young adults.

- **Vision Voice phone line.**

This is a menu-driven telephone line which enables visually impaired persons to access printed TV listings, grocery ads, upcoming community events and important service information. You can reach Vision Voice locally at 243-2305, or toll free at 1-800-422-7787.

"We try to help people regain their independence so they don't feel so lost."

*~ Evelyn Maizels,
Executive Director of VNW ~*

- **Information & Referrals.**

VNW refers calls to several state agencies and other community resources that provide help with services VNW does not offer.

For information & referrals locally, call 221-0705. The toll free information & referral line is 1-800-448-2232.

- **Descriptive Video Library.** Borrow the latest movies with added descriptions. Things like the color of clothing, facial

expressions, costumes, scene changes and character movements are explained without interfering with the dialogue or music of the film. Several titles are currently available for loan from VNW and the Talking Books and Braille Library.

- **Adaptive Technology**

Center. Located in downtown Portland, the Adaptive Technology Center lets you get acquainted with a variety of vision aids like magnifiers, the talking computer and other adaptive aids. The Adaptive Technology Center is located at 621 S.W. Alder, Suite 500, Portland, OR 97205. Office hours are Monday-Friday, 8:00am-4:30pm.

- **Lending Optical Aids**

Network (LOAN). Through LOAN, individuals can borrow low vision adaptive aids to help them remain independent.

When they can no longer use the aids, they are returned so someone else can benefit. If you have low vision aids that you no longer use (such as magnifiers, talking watches, brailers, etc.), consider donating them to the LOAN Program. You can do so by contacting VNW locally at 221-0705, or toll free at 1-800-448-2232.

Reminders

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 the ODS Plaza. All Post Office Box addresses and toll free phone numbers will remain the same. Come visit us at our new location!

Office Closure

PERS Health Insurance will be closed on:

September 6

Labor Day

November 25-26,

Thanksgiving holiday

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.

Those already on the list will be happy to know that we recently purchased a new tape recorder that makes high quality, easy to understand audio recordings.

Sunscreen

Continued from Page 2.

- Choose a waterproof, water resistant or sweat resistant sunscreen based upon humidity levels or the water-based activities you may be taking part in. According to FDA labeling requirements, "waterproof" means that the product will maintain its sunburn protection after being in the water up to 80 minutes. "Water resistant," means that the product will retain its sunburn protection after being in the water up to 40 minutes. "Sweat resistant," means that the product will

maintain its protection up to 30 minutes of continuous, heavy perspiration.

- Ask your pharmacist or physician about your medications, (both prescription and over-the-counter), that may increase your sensitivity to the sun, necessitating a higher SPF rating.

Once you have selected a sunscreen, proper application is important. Most people don't put enough sunscreen on exposed areas. Not applying enough sunscreen can sometimes cut the SPF rating in half. In addition, it's important to reapply sunscreen regularly to achieve maximum results.

Free Book Offer!

Send **HealthWise** your personal accounts of steps you've taken to improve your health. 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. All members sending in stories are not guaranteed to receive the book.



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.**

Ergonomics

Continued from Page 1.

you squint to see your work. Over time, this can cause eye strain and related injuries.

- Take mini-breaks from the computer for a few minutes every hour.
- Look away from your monitor frequently and remember to blink to rest your eyes!
- Lower your monitor a few inches below your eye level if you wear bifocals. Have you asked your doctor about mid-zone bifocals for computer use? If you do not wear bifocals, be sure your monitor is angled just slightly lower than your eye level to prevent neck and back strain.
- Keep your work area clear of clutter and frequently used items close at hand.
- Recognize the symptoms

of arm pain, tingling or numbness and seek medical advice.

- Keep your feet positioned flat on the floor with your knees slightly lower than your hips.

The important thing to remember when assessing your own computer workstation is to make it fit the user. If there is more than one person using the computer, think about purchasing furniture that is easily adjustable. Or, utilize seat cushions and foot rests.

While shopping for a computer, you may notice several “ergonomically correct” options. For example, there are ergonomically correct keyboards, chairs, mouse options, etc. Consider your options carefully, but realize that many of these options are not entirely necessary to prevent injury. Your specific comfort is key.



Ask the doctor

Do you have a general health or nutrition question you'd like to ask our PERS physicians? Each quarter, a physician from a PERS carrier will address your general health questions in the form of a short article. Each question will remain completely anonymous.

Send your questions to:

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

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

Be sure to specify that your question is for the “Ask the Doctor” program.

Mark your calendar!

Every fall, PERS Health Insurance Program members have the opportunity to change their health insurance carriers during the Plan Change Period.

Representatives from the PERS Health Insurance Program and the insurance carriers hold meetings throughout Oregon to assist you with any questions about your health insurance benefits and the Plan Change process.

Schedules and Benefit Booklets will be available to members in early fall.

Bone density testing now covered by Medicare

Increasingly common among individuals over age 60 and post-menopausal women, osteoporosis is a degenerative disease that causes weakened, porous, brittle bones.

The risks of bone-breaking falls associated with osteoporosis can trigger fear, rob independence, and keep sufferers comparatively inactive. Each year, more than 1.5 million osteoporosis-related fractures occur in the United States, mostly among women.

"Osteoporosis can have devastating effects. Breaking a hip often takes away one's confidence about living actively and independently," said says Ruth Medak, MD, clinical coordinator for OMPRO's Health Care

Quality Improvement Department.

Early treatment and detection of bone strength is key to reducing the effects of this disease.

"For people who are treated early for osteoporosis, the risk of broken bones resulting from the disease is greatly reduced," said Medak.

The best way to determine if you have or are at risk of developing osteoporosis is by having the density of your bones measured. Ask your doctor about your eligibility to have a bone density test.

Those eligible for bone strength measurement tests under Medicare include:

- Women who have low levels of the estrogen hormone (due to menopause).
- Persons with spinal fractures as indicated by x-ray.
- Persons receiving, or planning to receive, long-term steroid therapy.
- Persons who have overactive parathyroid glands.
- Persons who are being monitored to assess the effect of a FDA-approved osteoporosis drug therapy.

sis drug therapy.

If your doctor determines that you have osteoporosis or are at risk of developing it, treatment must be maintained on a long-term basis to be effective. Menopausal women should take special precaution, including a daily intake of 1,200 to 1,500 milligrams of calcium per day. Your doctor may also recommend hormone replacement or other drug treatment.

Both men and women can take other preventive measures to avoid osteoporosis.

"Everyone needs to engage in weight-bearing exercise like walking," says Medak. Weight-bearing exercise helps reduce the bone mineral loss that leads to osteoporosis. It also maintains good muscle tone and heart function. Ask your healthcare provider for consultation before beginning any exercise program.

For more information about osteoporosis and Medicare coverage of the disease, check the Medicare web page at www.medicare.gov.

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



Preventing Falls

Easy tips to make your home & body more fall-proof

About 40% of individuals over age 65 fall each year. In older adults, falls often cause broken bones or other injuries that can lead to declining health, isolation, and the possible loss of the ability to live independently.

To help prevent a serious fall, many find themselves limiting their activity level. This is actually the last thing you should consider. Regular exercise can help strengthen brittle bones, enhance muscle tone, increase flexibility, and even improve your sense of balance.

In addition, there are several simple precautions you can take in the home to make your living area more fall-proof.

Living Room

- Keep electrical and telephone cords tucked out of the way.
- Position furniture so it doesn't easily move around.
- Try to avoid having throw rugs, and make sure all carpeting is secured to the floor.

- Purchase furniture that is easy to get out of.

Kitchen

- Avoid having throw rugs.
- Use a step-stool to reach for things off a high shelf, or simply move common items to a lower shelf.



- Be sure electrical and phone cords are tucked out of the way.

Bathroom

- Install grab bars on the walls surrounding the tub and next to the toilet.
- Use nonskid bath mats, adhesive strips or carpet on surfaces that may get wet.
- If you have trouble getting in

and out of the tub, install a padded shower seat and a portable, hand-held shower head to let you sit while bathing.

Bedroom

- Position lamps and light switches within arms reach of the bed.
- Install a hall night light between the bedroom and bathroom.
- If you have to get up from bed in the night, do so slowly to avoid dizziness.
- Wear night clothes that are short enough to avoid tripping over.

Stairways, hallways & pathways

- Clean up clutter.
- Be sure all hallways, stairways and pathways are well lit.
- Avoid having throw rugs.
- Make sure all carpet is secured to the floor.
- Install handrails on both sides of the stairway.

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
(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 Plan *NEW!!*
3601 S.W. Murray Blvd. #10
Beaverton, OR 97005
(503) 574-8000 • 1-800-603-2340

Mailing Address
P.O. Box 4327
Portland, OR 97208-4327

Ask A Nurse
1-800-365-7010

Claims
P.O. Box 3125
Portland, OR 97208-3125

Providence RN
(503) 230-6520 • 1-800-700-0481

ODS Health Plans *NEW!!*
601 S.W. Second Avenue
Portland, OR 97204-3156

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

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