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INFLUENZA

By: Janelle Donovan, MD
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Word is out that antibiotics are often over-prescribed and that viruses “need to run their course.” Over and over, we hear that we should wait to go to the doctor with our cough, stuffy nose and mild sore throat. Most likely, we need a little rest, fluids and time. Nothing can be done to treat a virus anyway, right? Not necessarily. An exception to this is “the flu.” Not the 24-hour stomach bug with vomiting and diarrhea, but the true flu, Influenza.

Influenza is an acute, highly contagious respiratory illness caused by the Influenza virus, either type A or type B. Outbreaks peak in January or February, yet are seen anytime between November and May. Annually, approximately 36,000 people die each year from Influenza. Symptoms can vary, but in general, begin with the sudden onset of cough, fever, headache, body aches and fatigue. People often say that they feel as if they have been hit by a truck and they can tell exactly what time it happened. Some people are ill for less than a week, but high fevers can last a week or more, and fatigue and weakness often persist for two or more weeks. For many, the burden is due to the days missed from school or work, often one or two weeks.

Health care providers recommend the flu vaccine to try to decrease the serious illness that can result from Influenza and to prevent the spread of the flu. As with viruses which cause the common cold, there is no one medicine that will completely eliminate the Influenza virus and/or the symptoms of the flu once it’s present. However, there are antiviral medications that can be helpful. The important thing to know is that they should be started within 48 hours of the onset of symptoms to be effective. Ideally, the medicine would be

started within 24 hours. These medications shorten the course of the flu by a couple of days. Perhaps more significantly, the antiviral drugs decrease the severity of the symptoms so that people are back to school and/or work sooner.

Currently, the recommendation is to use one of two medications: zanamivir (Relenza) or oseltamivir (Tamiflu), which treat both Influenza types A and B. They can also be prescribed to help prevent influenza (called prophylaxis) if there has been an exposure to the flu, especially if the risk of complications is high. Older medications, such as amantadine, are not recommended because of increased influenza resistance to them. Antibiotics are not useful overall and are only used when there is a bacterial infection in addition to the influenza infection. Like all medications, the antivirals can have side effects but they are usually mild if present.

A bigger obstacle for many is the price of the medication. Without insurance, a course of treatment ranges from \$65 to \$100. Not every patient needs the antiviral medicine. People with some chronic medical conditions, young children and the elderly are at more risk for becoming very ill and may want to seriously consider treatment if they do get the flu. If influenza symptoms are mild and a patient is healthy with a low risk of complications from the virus, he or she could opt not to take the medication at all. For most, it is worthwhile to be seen within the first 48 hours of symptoms. A rapid test can be performed to tell if Influenza is present in 10-15 minutes. Beyond the “window of treatment,” medications can be given to help the symptoms, but, like the common cold, the virus will have to run its course. Best bet: get vaccinated unless there is a clear contraindication for doing so and seek medical attention right away if Influenza is suspected so that treatment options can be discussed with a health care provider.



ENJOY WORRY-FREE HOLIDAY FUN

By: Carla Cox, PhD, RD, CDE and
Tracey Murrish, PharmD candidate

Holidays have you worried? Feeling like you might look like Santa when the parties and festivities are done? Be proactive! Here are some holiday tips to promote health and prevent unhealthy weight gain throughout the holiday season.

EXERCISE:

Continue (or start) your regular exercise program. 45-60 minutes of activity 5-6 days per week is recommended. Exercise can be broken down into 10-15 minute bouts of activity if that is easier for you.

- Walk the stairs for 10 minutes during lunch.
- Close the door to your office and do 10 minutes of stretching or sit ups.
- Park at the back of the parking lot and walk to the store.
- Use walking sticks or ski poles if it is icy and you enjoy walking.
- Try snowshoeing even with a headlamp after dark!
- Plan exercise into all your family holiday gatherings: skating, walks, touch football.

FOOD:

- Grab a fresh vegetable tray at the grocery store as you head to a potluck. Healthy, easy, and enjoyed by all.
- Enjoy a moderate amount of alcohol and then sip on a favorite mineral water you brought to share with others.
- Choose one medium plate full of your favorite items, and then step away from the table and leave the rest of the food to others.

- Try a new healthy recipe from the American Diabetes Association web-site like the one listed below:

Holiday Nog

- 1 cup plain soy milk
- 1 cup orange juice
- 1 medium banana
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 8 ice cubes
- ½ teaspoon allspice



In a blender combine all ingredients but allspice, and blend until smooth. Pour into festive glasses and sprinkle with allspice.

4 servings

Serving size: 6 oz (3/4 cup)

Carbohydrates: 17 grams

Protein: 2 grams

Saturated fat: 0 grams

Calories: 78

Source: American Diabetes Association website.
For more recipe ideas <http://tracker.diabetes.org/myfoodadvisor.html>





INTRODUCTION TO AUDIOLOGY

By: Lynn Harris, AuD, CCC, SP/A
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Audiology is the study, evaluation, prevention and treatment of hearing and balance problems. For the patients of Western Montana Clinic, this means that there are many services available to assist persons with hearing or balance problems. Hearing tests can be done for everyone from newborns to older adults. Tests can be done to determine what type of hearing loss is present and what may be the cause. Sometimes it is as simple as ear wax or an ear infection. Sometimes it is from noise exposure or just a part of the aging process. In rare cases, audiologists can assist in determining if a hearing loss or certain dizzy problems are related to some type of tumor. Audiologists work with people who have tinnitus. Tinnitus is the ringing, buzzing, chirping or other sounds sometimes heard in the head or ears.



In addition to evaluation, audiologists fit hearing aids. Modern hearing aids come in a variety of shapes and sizes with a technology to suit almost any hearing loss. Hearing aids are often recommended to help with managing tinnitus in people who also have hearing loss.

Prevention is an important part of Audiology. A variety of types of hearing protection including custom made and “off the shelf” are available at Western Montana Clinic. Employee monitoring for hearing loss is also available.

If you or someone you love seems to have a hearing loss, please feel free to call and schedule an appointment in the Audiology Department of Western Montana Clinic at

406.721.5600

FLU SHOTS STILL AVAILABLE

It’s not too late to get your flu shot.

- \$28 AT TIME OF SERVICE
- 9 years and older
- No insurance billing
- Medicare will cover & will be billed

CONTACT US AT 721-5600 FOR MORE INFORMATION

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