

Health Connection

CARING FOR OUR COMMUNITY ONE FRIEND
AT A TIME AT UNION COUNTY HOSPITAL

When your body
turns against you
Understanding
autoimmune diseases

Uncovering
meningitis

A faster,
gentler surgery

How sleep
savvy are you?
Find out inside!



Minimally invasive surgery

Less pain, faster recovery

Minimally invasive surgery (MIS) is the buzzword in healthcare right now. And with good reason.

With advancing technology and surgical techniques, patients now have the benefit of undergoing procedures that require just a few small incisions. In years past, those same procedures would have required large cuts and left equally large scars.

HOW IT WORKS

MIS—sometimes referred to as laparoscopic surgery—mirrors the techniques of traditional surgery but decreases the patient's surgical trauma. Because surgeons using MIS lose some visibility with smaller incisions, they have to create a larger workspace. They do this by making a small cut in the skin, then gently expanding the body cavity with a gas (such as carbon dioxide). A small camera (laparoscope) is then inserted through the incision and into the newly expanded space to help surgeons see where to operate.

While MIS isn't suited for all types of surgery, it has been used for such procedures as appendectomies, hernia repair, gallbladder surgery, hysterectomies, brain tumors, herniated spinal discs, knee and hip replacements, sinus surgery and certain types of heart procedures.

MINIMAL TRAUMA, MAXIMUM BENEFITS

The goal of MIS is to treat patients with the least amount of trauma. In addition to minimized scarring, this type of surgery also:

- **Minimizes bleeding.** Decreased blood loss means a decreased chance of blood transfusion.



- **Lessens pain.** Small incisions reduce trauma to the skin and underlying muscles, meaning less postoperative pain.
- **Reduces infections.** Unlike a traditional operation, where the body is wide open, tissue isn't exposed to the air for extended periods during MIS.
- **Shortens hospital stays.** Reducing bleeding, pain and the chance for infection means you'll get to walk out of the hospital sooner.
- **Hastens recovery.** MIS can dramatically reduce recuperation time—in some cases, by half.

Other minimally invasive procedures

Endoscopic surgery is similar to laparoscopic surgery because it also requires a small camera. However, the equipment (endoscope) passes through an existing opening such as the mouth, anus or urethra.

Robotic laparoscopic surgery uses techniques identical to laparoscopic surgery but allows surgeons to use robotic arms to perform the procedure.

Ablation targets and destroys diseases, such as kidney and prostate cancer, with high-frequency energy, leaving normal tissue nearby intact. It's also been used to correct benign heart arrhythmias.

WAITING TO INHALE

Breathing problems you shouldn't ignore

Take a deep breath." The command sounds easy, but for some people it's not so simple.

Being unable to breathe deeply or feeling short of breath may be a sign of a serious condition.

If you have any of the following symptoms, get them checked out by a physician:

- inability to take a deep breath
- shortness of breath without exertion
- shortness of breath after mild exertion, such as climbing a short flight of stairs
- wheezing
- tightness in the chest
- pain or discomfort when inhaling and exhaling
- a chronic cough or clearing of the throat
- difficulty breathing when you lie down
- a lack of energy
- coughing up blood or mucus

Difficulty breathing shouldn't be taken lightly. Lung disease is the number three killer in the United States.

It takes on many forms, including:

- Asthma, a chronic disease in which the passages that

carry air in and out of your lungs become sore and swollen. Asthma is characterized by wheezing, coughing, chest tightness and trouble speaking.

- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), which includes emphysema and chronic bronchitis. In COPD, your airways and air sacs lose their shape and become floppy, like a stretched-out rubber band. Coughing up mucus is often a first sign of this disease. COPD is typically caused by cigarette smoking.
- Pneumonia, an inflammation of the lungs, usually caused by an infection. It's normally accompanied by shortness of breath and a cough or a fever.
- Lung cancer, which can take years to develop. If it's diagnosed early, before it spreads, the survival rate is almost 50 percent.

Breathing difficulties can also be a sign of heart disease or a heart disorder, such as congestive heart failure, heart arrhythmia or pulmonary hypertension.

In these or any other case of breathing distress, your physician can help you find the source of the problem with a thorough physical exam.



If you're having trouble catching your breath, it's time to see your doctor.

When cough drops don't do the trick

A chronic cough—one that lasts more than three weeks—may be your body's way of telling you a problem exists. Your cough could be the result of:

- allergies, particularly postnasal drip, which often triggers coughing
- asthma
- heartburn, where acid from your stomach backs up into your throat
- medicines, including beta-blockers for high blood pressure, migraines and glaucoma and ACE inhibitors

When your body turns against you



By Marcy Emmons, P.A.-C.
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Your immune system is one of the body's most important parts, helping to detect germs and protect the body from harm. But sometimes the immune system

attacks the body's own healthy tissues rather than outside invaders, resulting in what are known as autoimmune diseases. More than 80 varieties of autoimmune diseases can harm the body or leave it vulnerable if untreated.

Autoimmune diseases are detected by testing for the presence of autoantibodies, signs that the immune system has started working against the body. The diseases may have a genetic component and affect women more, particularly those of African-American, Hispanic or Native American descent. Because the different autoimmune diseases often have similar symptoms, diagnosis can be a slow process.

THE CULPRITS

Some of the most common autoimmune diseases are:

- **Lupus**, a disease that can affect various parts of the body and is often characterized by swelling or inflammation.
- **Multiple sclerosis**, a disease affecting the central nervous system and the fatty tissues protecting it, causing inflammation and injury to the nervous system.
- **Hashimoto's thyroiditis**, where the immune system attacks the thyroid, a gland that regulates metabolic functions, preventing it from creating necessary amounts of hormones. It's the most common thyroid disease in the United States.
- **Graves' disease**, a condition in which the thyroid overproduces hormones, making your metabolism too fast.
- **Rheumatoid arthritis**, which causes your joints to be chronically inflamed.
- **Vitiligo**, a condition in which the immune system attacks pigment-producing skin cells, leaving the skin mottled or discolored.

Symptoms of these persistent conditions include fatigue, muscle aches or low fevers. They can be localized to a specific part of the body

(like Graves' disease or Hashimoto's thyroiditis), or they can be systemic, affecting the body in general (like lupus or rheumatoid arthritis). Though not all of the diseases can be cured, the symptoms can be treated, improving quality of life.

Because of the number of these diseases, it's important to inform your healthcare provider if you experience unusual symptoms. By diagnosing autoimmune disease early, you can take control of your condition.

! Take charge of your health!

For more information about autoimmune diseases, call (618) 833-2872.





The unknown dangers of meningitis



By Kathy Schierbaum, F.N.P.
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While many parents are concerned with their children earning good grades and graduating to the next level, they shouldn't overlook their youngsters' health,

including the risk of meningococcal disease, or meningitis.

A fast-progressing, rare and sometimes fatal disease, meningitis can strike anyone, but adolescents and young adults are at increased risk. It can result in devastating complications, including hearing loss, brain damage, limb amputation and even death. Meningitis is often misdiagnosed since it resembles the flu. Symptoms include sudden high fever, headache, stiff neck, nausea, exhaustion and a rash.

Meningitis is spread by exchanging saliva or kissing, coughing, sneezing or even sharing a drink with an infected person. Lifestyle factors linked to this disease include irregular sleep patterns, active or passive smoking and living in crowded situations.

TREATMENT OPTIONS

Early treatment is essential to reduce the risk of death, but full recovery isn't guaranteed. Once meningitis is suspected or diagnosed, antibiotics can treat patients. Antibiotics may also be given to those who have been in close contact with a person diagnosed with the disease.

The best way to protect against meningitis is to get vaccinated. The Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention recommends a single routine vaccination for adolescents ages 11 to 18. A good time to get the vaccination is during your child's checkup at age 11 or 12. The safe vaccine may cause minor reactions like headache, fatigue, vague discomfort or pain and redness at the injection site. While vaccination doesn't cause meningitis, immunization isn't recommended for individuals with compromised immune systems or a history of Guillain-Barré syndrome, a condition where the body's immune system attacks the peripheral nervous system. Most health insurance providers cover the vaccine. You can also contact your local public health department to see if you qualify for a free vaccine through programs such as Vaccines for Children.

Avoiding the disease

Good hygiene can help prevent the spread of meningitis:

- Don't share utensils or drinking glasses.
- Avoid intimate contact with anyone diagnosed with the disease or showing symptoms.
- Wash hands often with soap and water or an alcohol-based antibacterial rub.

! Learn more!

For more information about meningitis vaccines, consult your child's physician, call (618) 833-2295 or visit the National Meningitis Association at www.nmaus.org.

HEALTHWISE QUIZ

How much do you know about **sleep disorders**?

Take this quiz to find out.

1

Lack of sleep may put you at a higher risk for:

- a. type 2 diabetes
- b. low blood pressure
- c. asthma
- d. gastric ulcers

2

Which of the following changes in your sleep routine may be a result of an underlying heart problem?

- a. waking up during the night to urinate
- b. waking up during the night due to shortness of breath
- c. not being able to fall asleep
- d. both a and b

3

Restoring your body with sleep has been shown to:

- a. improve skin tone
- b. improve red blood-cell count
- c. reduce eye strain
- d. improve reaction time and attention span

4

Women diagnosed with obstructive sleep apnea often experience these symptoms:

- a. snoring loudly with periods of gasping or snorting
- b. waking up with a sore throat
- c. waking up with a headache
- d. all of the above

5

The most common treatment for sleep apnea is:

- a. antihistamine medication
- b. surgery
- c. a continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) mask worn at night
- d. analgesic medication

ANSWERS: 1. A; 2. D; 3. D; 4. D; 5. C



WOMEN: Is a heart attack in your future?

A heart attack may seem to come out of the blue. Yet your personal risk factors and lifestyle habits may hold clues to your heart's health and what your odds are of suffering from a heart attack.

LOOK FOR THE SIGNS

High blood pressure (140/90 mm Hg and above) and high blood cholesterol (240 mg/dL and above) are significant clues that you may be developing heart blockages in the form of plaque. Being postmenopausal and having diabetes or rheumatoid arthritis can also increase heart attack risk.

Talk with your healthcare provider about what risk factors are significant for you. He or she can help you control your blood pressure and cholesterol levels and may also recommend testing for metabolic syndrome. Recent research shows this condition may be useful for detecting signs of heart disease in women who might appear healthy. The signs of metabolic syndrome include a waist size greater than 35 inches, higher-than-normal levels of triglycerides and glucose, and insufficient levels of HDL, or good cholesterol.

Also, be aware of what a heart attack might feel like for a woman, as some symptoms can differ from those of men. Chest pain or pressure; nausea; vomiting; indigestion; cold sweat; shortness of breath; light-headedness; fatigue; or discomfort in the arms, back, neck, jaw or stomach are all possible signs.

GO HEART SMART

- Aim for a normal weight.
- Exercise for 30 minutes every day.
- Quit smoking and avoid secondhand smoke.
- Avoid foods high in saturated or trans fat and curb refined carbohydrates—cookies, white bread, sweet drinks—sometimes referred to as “high-glycemic-index” foods.

The smoking gun

Cigarettes increase stroke and heart attack risk

Smoking harms nearly every organ of the body and takes a hard toll on the heart and the brain, causing coronary heart disease and stroke, the first and third leading causes of death in the United States.

When you smoke, the toxic ingredients in cigarettes mutate genes, weaken blood vessels, alter blood consistency and diminish cell function. Smoking also deteriorates artery linings and promotes fat and plaque deposits. As a result, smoking causes:

- decreased blood flow
- diminished oxygen to the heart
- higher blood pressure
- faster heart rate
- increased blood clotting
- decreased HDL (good) cholesterol

THE HEART TRUTH

Smoking is a major risk factor for heart disease, and also causes atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries), congestive heart failure and peripheral vascular disease. Smoking also increases your diabetes risk and diminishes your exercise tolerance. Smokers are twice as likely



as nonsmokers to suffer a stroke and two to four times more likely to develop coronary heart disease. Women who smoke and use certain types of hormone therapy increase their risk even more. Nonsmokers regularly exposed to secondhand smoke nearly double their risk for a heart attack.

! Breathe easy!

It's never too late to stop smoking. Talk to your healthcare provider today about finding a smoking-cessation program for you.

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