

Health Connection

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

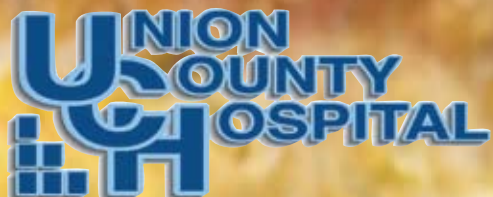


Say goodbye
to gallstones

Cold or flu?
Here's how to tell

Protect your
heart this
holiday season

In case of emergency
Know when to go to the ER



CHRONIC PELVIC PAIN

Causes and cures

Women who suffer from chronic pelvic pain may feel that the discomfort is something they just have to live with—a “side effect” of being female. But they don’t have to suffer. Chronic pelvic pain, or CPP, is a real medical condition. And that means it can be treated.

WHAT CAUSES PELVIC PAIN?

You may be suffering from CPP if you’ve had recurring pain in your lower abdomen and pelvic area for at least six months. The symptoms can vary. You may feel pain all the time or it may come and go. You may have a mild, dull ache or sharp, stabbing pain. In addition, you may have abnormally painful menstrual periods (*dysmenorrhea*), low backache, pain during intercourse, pain when going to the bathroom or rectal itching and burning.

The most common causes are gynecological:

- **Endometriosis.** In this condition, tissue from the uterine lining grows on other pelvic organs. When you have your period, this tissue swells and bleeds, causing pain and scarring.
- **Pelvic inflammatory disease.** This is an infection in the uterus, fallopian tubes and ovaries.
- **Fibroids.** These are benign (noncancerous) growths in the uterine wall.

TESTING AND TREATMENT

Your physician will evaluate your pain by taking a detailed health history and performing a physical exam. He or she may also order some diagnostic tests, such as blood tests, urologic tests, X-rays or laparoscopy (a minimally invasive procedure in which the surgeon inserts a thin lighted tube through an incision in the abdomen to view your pelvic organs).

Treatment depends on the cause of your pain and includes the following options:

- stopping ovulation with birth control pills or injections
- using pain relievers such as ibuprofen or naproxen
- performing relaxation exercises, biofeedback and physical therapy
- taking antibiotics
- getting psychological counseling
- having surgery

Stress incontinence: Help is available

It may be embarrassing, but stress urinary incontinence is a common problem among women. It’s also highly treatable. In fact, eight in 10 women who seek treatment see an improvement or are cured.

Stress incontinence occurs when any kind of pressure is put on the bladder, such as when you sneeze, laugh, lift, cough, exercise or even rise from a chair. Childbirth and weight gain are two common causes of incontinence because these conditions stretch the pelvic floor muscles. Hormone changes during menopause, some medications and other factors can also cause incontinence.

Your physician has many treatment options, including medication, strength exercises, biofeedback and, in extreme cases, surgery. So don’t let embarrassment keep you from asking for help.



Put out the fire

Heartburn can raise your risk for cancer

Nearly everyone has had an occasional bout of heartburn, or acid indigestion, after a spicy meal. But if you have chronic heartburn that occurs more than twice a week, you may be suffering from a more serious condition called gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD). If you think you may be suffering from GERD, don't ignore it—without treatment it may eventually lead to more serious health problems, including cancer.

WHAT IS GERD?

Though it's commonly called heartburn, GERD is a digestive condition that has nothing to do with your heart. Food is carried from your mouth to your stomach through your esophagus tube, which is connected to the stomach by the sphincter muscle. The sphincter usually closes once food passes into the stomach, but if it doesn't close properly, digestive juices rise back up into your chest and throat. They cause the burning feeling near your heart—hence the name heartburn.

GERD can also cause a dry cough and swallowing difficulties, make asthma worse and disrupt sleep. Left untreated, it can damage the esophagus' lining and cause bleeding or ulcers.

A MORE SERIOUS DEVELOPMENT

GERD can also result in a condition called Barrett's esophagus, in which stomach acids actually cause changes to cells in the esophagus. These damaged cells can lead to esophageal cancer.

Barrett's esophagus is diagnosed with an upper gastrointestinal endoscopy. In this outpatient procedure, the physician passes an endoscope—a small, lighted tube with a tiny camera at the end—into the throat. This lets the physician look for tissue abnormalities and take a tissue sample through the endoscope if needed.

GETTING RELIEF

If you suffer from heartburn more than twice a week, see your physician. He or she may recommend lifestyle changes (*see "Don't go for the burn," below*) as well as over-the-counter or prescription drugs such as:

- antacids (brand names include Mylanta, Maalox, Alka-Seltzer, Rolaids)
- H2 blockers (Tagamet, Pepcid, Zantac)
- proton pump inhibitors (Nexium, Prilosec, Prevacid)

Some of these drugs can also help improve Barrett's esophagus. In rare circumstances, your physician may recommend surgery to repair the sphincter.

Don't go for the burn

One key to soothing heartburn is to avoid the triggers that can lead to discomfort.

In general, the following lifestyle changes can help most people put out the fire:

- If you smoke, stop.
- Avoid foods and beverages that worsen symptoms, such as citrus fruits, chocolate, fried foods, tomato-based foods, spicy foods and drinks with caffeine or alcohol.
- Lose excess weight.
- Eat small, frequent meals.
- Wear loose-fitting clothes.
- Avoid lying down for three hours after a meal.



Targeting gallstones



**By Job Pontillas, M.D., FACS
Board-Certified General Surgeon**

The gallbladder—a small pear-shaped organ just below the liver—plays an important role in food digestion by storing bile produced by the liver and passing it to the small intestine, where it breaks down fat. The gallbladder usually goes unnoticed—that is, unless you experience symptoms of a disorder like gallstones.

Gallstones are like grains of sand or small rocks that develop in the gallbladder as a result of chemically unbalanced bile. Only about 60 percent of people who have gallstones experience symptoms, as stones can develop and pass through the gallbladder and intestines without causing signs. However, large gallstones can get caught in the passageways or ducts of the gallbladder, pancreas or liver, causing extreme pain.

GALLSTONE CAUSES

Depending on the cause, gallstones generally fall into two categories—pigment and cholesterol gallstones. Pigment gallstones develop when bile contains too much bilirubin, a naturally occurring chemical usually removed by the liver. It generally develops in individuals who have sickle cell anemia or liver conditions such as cirrhosis.

Cholesterol gallstones comprise 80 percent of all gallstones and consist mostly of undissolved cholesterol. Because most gallstones result from high cholesterol levels, diet plays an important role in prevention.

In addition to diet, other gallstone risk factors include gender, body weight, age and ethnicity. Women are more likely to develop gallstones because estrogen causes more cholesterol to be excreted in bile. Women who have high estrogen levels in their bodies, such as those who are pregnant, taking birth

If gallstones develop and cause symptoms, seek medical intervention to avoid serious health problems like permanent organ damage.

control pills or on hormone therapy, are especially at risk. People who are overweight, older than age 60 and those of Native-American and Mexican-American descent are also at risk.

WHEN TO SEEK HELP

If gallstones develop and cause symptoms, medical intervention is needed to avoid permanent organ damage. Gallstone symptoms often include abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea (known as “gallbladder attack”), commonly after a high-fat or spicy meal. Seek medical attention immediately if you experience these symptoms, especially if they’re accompanied by dark urine, fever, chills and/or yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes, as this may indicate an obstructed bile duct, which can result in potentially fatal gallbladder rupture.

Gallstones are usually diagnosed with a computed tomography scan or ultrasound. The most common treatment for gallstones is surgical removal of the



A MESSAGE FROM OUR CEO

Your place for caring

Dear friends,

More than a year ago, we began a process to change the way we care for our patients, visitors and staff. The changes we incorporate are designed to enhance each patient's experience with us.



Jim Farris
Chief Executive Officer

FOCUSED ON CARE

Based on Quint Studer's book "Hardwiring Excellence," our new processes will ensure all patients will be cared for in a professional but caring way. Our care will be even more patient focused and provide better communication and a quicker response to the needs of patients and their families. By adopting and applying these principles, we'll also create a better environment for physicians to practice and employees to work.

Our journey to fully implement these changes will continue for another year. Having provided healthcare to this community for the past 55 years, we plan on providing advanced patient care for many years to come.

Regards,

JIM FARRIS
Chief Executive Officer
Union County Hospital

gallbladder. This procedure is usually performed on an outpatient basis using laparoscopic (minimally invasive) techniques, allowing most patients to return to normal activities within days. Although a person with a healthy liver can function normally without a gallbladder, lifestyle changes like limiting fat intake and increasing dietary fiber may be needed for normal digestive function.

! Don't wait to seek help

It's important to seek medical care at the first sign of gallbladder pain to avoid complications like infections, duct obstructions or a gallbladder rupture. To help prevent gallstones or gallbladder disease, call your physician or the Union County General Surgery Clinic at (618) 833-2872.

HEALTHWISE QUIZ

How much do you know about stroke?

Take this quiz to find out.

1 A stroke occurs when blood flow is interrupted to your:

- a. heart
- b. lungs
- c. brain
- d. kidneys

2 Someone in the United States has a stroke:

- a. every 45 seconds
- b. every 4 minutes
- c. every 45 minutes
- d. every 4 hours

3 Which of the following are major risk factors for stroke?

- a. smoking
- b. high blood pressure
- c. high cholesterol
- d. all of the above

4 Which of the following is usually not a symptom of stroke?

- a. sudden numbness, weakness or paralysis of your face, arm or leg—usually on one side of your body
- b. sudden difficulty speaking or understanding speech
- c. sudden blurred, double or decreased vision
- d. sudden shortness of breath

5 How quickly must clot-busting drugs be given after the onset of a stroke to be effective?

- a. within 1 hour
- b. within 2 hours
- c. within 3 hours
- d. within 4 hours

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



Holiday health alert PROTECT YOUR HEART

The holidays are supposed to be a happy time of year. But for many people, they can end up being a particularly *unhealthy* time of year. Heavy meals, excessive alcohol, smoking, stress—they all can take a toll. Your heart is especially vulnerable. But knowing which dangers lurk can help you take control of your heart health this season.

STRESS INDUCERS

Three main triggers tend to cause holiday stress, says the Mayo Clinic:

- 1. Relationships.** Family tensions often increase during the holidays. What's more, those facing the holidays away from loved ones may feel lonely or sad.
- 2. Finances.** Spending too much on gifts, travel, food and entertainment can increase stress.
- 3. Physical health.** All that shopping, socializing, cooking, eating and drinking can be exhausting, especially for those already suffering from an illness.

STRESS REDUCERS

To avoid holiday stress and health problems:

- Exercise and get enough sleep. Both fight off stress and fatigue.
- Watch what you eat. Go ahead and have your favorite holiday treats, but do so in moderation.
- Find time for yourself—do things *you* like to do.
- Seek help. If the holidays overwhelm you with sadness, anxiety or physical problems, talk with your physician. You may be suffering from depression, which needs to be treated.

Healthy eating

7 winning ways to weight-loss success

The upcoming holidays present considerable challenges to eating healthfully. But with some careful planning and these helpful tips, you can stick with your weight-loss plan and enjoy a healthier lifestyle all year long.

- 1 **Work with your physician.** He or she can help you plan for and meet your goals.
- 2 **Set reasonable expectations.** Don't try to lose weight during the holidays. Simply maintaining your current weight will be a real accomplishment.
- 3 **Eat a variety of foods.** If you know you'll be having high-fat foods at dinner, focus on lots of fruits and vegetables for breakfast and lunch.
- 4 **Stay active.** Find 30 minutes a day to walk. If you're too busy—and who isn't?—break it up into three 10-minute walks.
- 5 **Eat breakfast every day.** Studies show that people who eat breakfast are less likely to overeat the rest of the day.



- 6 **Ask for a doggy bag.** When eating at a restaurant, eat half of your meal and bring the rest home for later.
- 7 **Reduce stress.** Stressful times can cause many to overeat. Find healthier ways to cut stress. Exercise, get plenty of sleep and spend time with people whose company you enjoy.

When the ER should be your only option

How do you know when to treat a medical problem yourself, go to the emergency room (ER) or wait it out? For the following three situations, knowing how to react can mean the difference between life and death.

Chest pain. Chest pain that often comes with certain activities and then goes away easily is called stable angina. More than likely, if you've had this kind of angina for some time, you know how to treat it yourself.

Angina that comes on unpredictably or changes over time is called unstable angina. It may be the first sign of a heart attack. Get emergency treatment.

Asthma attack. Your asthma action plan tells you how to react to an asthma attack. But sometimes, even when you follow your plan, the attack may become severe. Go to the ER if:

- Your asthma medicine doesn't help.



- You feel a little better after taking your medicine, but serious symptoms come back quickly.
 - Your lips and fingernails are bluish or grayish.
 - You have trouble talking or walking.
- Insect bite.** Bug bites usually cause mild reactions—some swelling, minor pain, itching—that go away in a day or two. You can treat them with an icepack for the pain and an antihistamine to reduce swelling.

A severe reaction, however, can be life threatening. If you notice difficulty breathing, swelling of the lips or throat, dizziness, con-

fusion, a rapid heartbeat or nausea, cramps and vomiting, get to the ER.

In an emergency, don't drive yourself to the ER. Have someone drive you or, better yet, call for emergency medical assistance. The equipment and expertise on an ambulance can give you lifesaving first aid on the spot.

Is it a cold or the flu?

By Terri Braddock, F.N.P.
Union County Hospital Family Practice



Don't let a cold or the flu sideline you this fall. Read on to learn about symptoms and common treatments.

KICKING A COLD

The most common symptoms of a cold (a highly contagious upper respiratory system virus) include a stuffy or runny nose, sneezing, coughing or chest discomfort. Treatment includes over-the-counter (OTC) medications, such as:

- **antihistamines**, which can help control symptoms like a runny nose, sneezing and watery eyes
- **decongestants** to relieve nasal and sinus congestion
- **nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medicines**, which reduce pain, fever and inflammation
- **expectorants**, which loosen mucus from the respiratory tract, alleviating chest congestion and discomfort

The best way to treat a cold is to drink plenty of fluids and get enough rest. OTC drugs can also help. See your physician if symptoms last longer than five to seven days, as they may have developed into an ear or sinus infection or bronchitis. No immunizations or antibiotics can prevent or treat a cold, but you can build your defenses by washing your hands frequently, not touching your face and avoiding contact with people who have a cold.



FIGHTING THE FLU

The flu (a viral disease with respiratory symptoms) can affect the entire body. Symptoms include a fever between 100° F and 104° F, headache, body aches, fatigue, exhaustion and nausea. A mild case can be treated with rest, fluids and OTC medication. OTC and prescription treatments include:

- **nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medicines**, to reduce pain and fever
- **prescription antiviral medicines** to shorten the flu's duration, if taken within the first day or two of symptoms

To stay healthy this season, knowing the signs and treatments available is your way to better health.

! Give good health a shot

The best way to avoid getting sick is to get an annual flu shot. Call the Union County Family Practice Clinic at (618) 833-2872 today!

www.unioncountyhospital.com

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