

Health Connection

THE MAGAZINE OF HILL REGIONAL HOSPITAL



Stress tests

What you should know

Is it appendicitis?

Exercise your right to protect your joints

Get health
resources
online!

6 ways to
raise a
healthy eater



Hill Regional Hospital

Hillsboro, Texas

www.HillRegionalHospital.com

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The facts about fibroids

You're constantly running to the restroom, your back hurts and your periods are particularly painful. What's going on? You might be dealing with uterine fibroids, noncancerous tumors that grow out of uterine tissue.

Physicians aren't sure why some women develop fibroids, but if you're overweight or African-American or an immediate family member has fibroids, you're at increased risk.

WHAT DO FIBROIDS FEEL LIKE?

In most cases, you won't even know that you have fibroids. But consult your physician if you experience any of these signs:

- heavy or painful periods
- bleeding between periods
- constant pelvic pain
- a feeling of fullness in the lower abdomen
- an increased need to urinate
- pain during sex
- lower back pain
- reproductive problems, including infertility, multiple miscarriages or preterm labor

WHAT'S NEXT?

Your physician will do a pelvic exam to see whether your uterus is enlarged or misshapen. If he or she spots abnormalities, an imaging exam, such as an ultrasound, can confirm the diagnosis.

Treatment depends on your symptoms' severity, the



fibroids' size and location, your age and whether you want children:

- If you don't have symptoms, treatment is usually unnecessary.
- If you're approaching menopause, you may be advised to do nothing, as fibroids tend to stop growing or even shrink when hormone levels drop.
- If you have occasional discomfort, try an over-the-counter pain reliever, such as ibuprofen or acetaminophen.
- If you're bleeding heavily, your physician may recommend hormonal treatments to lighten your flow or an iron supplement to prevent anemia.
- If your fibroids are large, your physician may suggest hormones to temporarily stop menstruation and shrink the growths. These hormones are sometimes prescribed before surgery to make it easier to remove the fibroids.
- If your fibroids are growing quickly or causing excessive blood loss, your physician may present several surgical options. Myomectomy (removing the fibroids while leaving the uterus intact) is the best option for women who wish to have children. Myolysis (freezing or using an electric current to destroy growths) and hysterectomy (removing the uterus) are other possible treatments.

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We need your input! We'd like to know what you think about our publication so we can better serve your needs. Please take a few minutes to complete our online survey. Your responses will be used to improve our services to the community and to enhance our publication.

Filling out the online survey is easy: Simply go to www.healthconnectionmag.com and complete the survey.

By completing our survey, you'll be automatically entered in a random drawing to win one of five gift cards.

All surveys must be completed online by June 1, 2009, to be eligible to win. One entry per person, please. Thank you for your time and assistance.

All responses will be kept strictly confidential. We do not sell, rent or give away your e-mail address.

Gut check

Could it be appendicitis?

What's tiny and useless but can cause a whole lot of pain if it's unhappy? Your appendix, a finger-shaped pouch attached to your lower intestine. And if your appendix ever becomes inflamed and fills with pus, you'll have a raging case of appendicitis, a potentially life-threatening illness.

WHO'S AT RISK?

Though anyone can get appendicitis, it often strikes between ages 10 and 30. It usually happens when the appendix is blocked by fecal matter or a swollen lymph node following a digestive tract infection. A small number of people are diagnosed following traumatic abdominal injury, while others are genetically predisposed. In all, about 280,000 appendectomies are performed each year in the United States, according to the National Center for Health Statistics.

NOT JUST A BELLYACHE

A hundred different ailments can cause stomach pain, but your appendix might be the culprit if you have:

- pain that starts around the belly button and moves to the lower right of the abdomen and gets worse when you move, take deep breaths, sneeze or cough
- abdominal swelling
- loss of appetite
- nausea and vomiting
- constipation or diarrhea
- an inability to pass gas
- a low-grade fever

TIME TO TAKE IT OUT?

This isn't a wait-and-see kind of problem. Removal is the only effective treatment for appendicitis, so if you're having symptoms, head to the emergency room, stat. Once there, a physician will check for pain location and ten-



derness, run a blood test for infection and send you for a computed tomography (CT) scan to confirm the diagnosis. He or she will also look to rule out other possibilities for your symptoms, including ectopic pregnancy, ovarian cysts, kidney stones and Crohn's disease. If you *do* have appendicitis, your appendix will be surgically removed before it can rupture. It may be done laparoscopically (the surgeon makes a few small incisions in your abdomen) or with traditional open surgery (the surgeon makes one large incision). Since experts have been unable to pinpoint the appendix's function, it's unlikely that you'll suffer any long-term effects.

Delay treatment and your appendix will likely rupture. If that happens, chances are good that you'll develop an infection of the abdominal cavity called peritonitis and then pain will take over and your entire abdomen will swell. Fever, thirst and low urine output will likely follow. This infection can cause organ failure, infertility and even death if not adequately contained with an abdominal cavity cleaning and intravenous (IV) antibiotics.

Where does it hurt?

After migrating from your navel, pain from appendicitis nearly always settles at a place on your abdomen called **McBurney's Point**, named after the 19th century surgeon Charles McBurney, an authority on appendicitis. **Find it by drawing an imaginary line from your belly button to your right hip bone; you'll feel tenderness about halfway between the two points.**



Jan McClure
Chief Executive Officer

Dear friends,

Welcome to the spring issue of *Health Connection*, Hill Regional Hospital's (HRH) community newsletter.

As we move forward through the year, HRH continues to look for new opportunities to grow and expand to meet your healthcare needs. We're constantly seeking ways to take our hospital "outside the walls" through our outreach programs—Senior Circle, Healthy Woman and Connections—and by lending a helping hand to those in need.

YOUR VOICE MATTERS

Because you're important to us, our primary goal is for you to be very satisfied with your standard of care, and

we ask you to let us know how we're doing. We've learned a lot about our hospital by listening to our patients. We listen to what you have to say and then look at ways to improve our processes.

If you have an idea, suggestion or comment, please know we're always open to your thoughts and suggestions, and we want to hear from you. Call us at **(254) 580-8952** or come by and see us.

We're committed to delivering comprehensive, quality care in a comfortable and pleasant setting. Thank you for making HRH your healthcare provider of choice.

Best regards,

JAN MCCLURE
Chief Executive Officer
Hill Regional Hospital

Get 'hip' to hip protection

Most hip problems (pain and stiffness) are caused by aging, fractures and diseases such as osteoarthritis. Stretching and strengthening the large muscles that surround and support your hips—like those of your thighs, lower back, groin, buttocks and abdomen—can help keep these all-important joints healthy and flexible. The exercises below from the American Physical Therapy Association can protect your hips.

STANDING HIP STRENGTHENER

This exercise strengthens your abductor muscles.

1. Stand behind a chair. Hold on to the chair's back, keeping your back straight and head up.
2. Slowly move your right leg out to the side 12 inches. Hold for 10 seconds then slowly return to standing position.
3. Repeat 10 times with each leg.

SIDEWAYS HIP STRETCH

This exercise stretches your hip and buttocks muscles.

1. Lie on your back, keeping your right leg flat on the floor.
2. Grab your left ankle with your right

hand and your left knee with your left hand. Let your hip rotate.

Gently pull your leg toward your shoulder until you feel your hips and buttocks stretch.

3. Hold for 15 to 30 seconds. Repeat with other leg.

BRIDGING BASICS

This exercise works your abdominal, buttocks and hamstring muscles.

1. Lie on your back with knees bent and feet flat on the floor.
2. Tighten your abdominal and buttocks muscles. Lift your pelvis up until it's in a straight line with your knees.
3. Hold for 15 to 20 seconds. Repeat eight to 12 times.

Cycling also helps maintain strength and mobility without excessive stress on your hip joints. If you already have balance or posture problems or hip-related arthritis or osteoporosis, talk with your healthcare provider about appropriate exercises to keep you in top shape.



! Learn more!

For more information, call Jeff Tabor, HRH director of physical therapy, at **(254) 580-8995**.

Understanding stress tests

In the world of medicine, a stress test is a tally of heart rate, blood pressure and other signs that indicate the heart's ability to deliver blood to hard-working muscles.

Physicians use stress tests not only to find how well your heart handles its everyday workload, but to detect various forms of heart disease.

TYPES OF STRESS TESTS

Exercise stress test. This noninvasive, painless test is also known as a treadmill test, an exercise stress test, a heart rate stress test, a cardiac stress test or an exercise electrocardiogram (ECG or EKG).

During the test, patients walk on a treadmill or ride a stationary bike while their heart rate, blood pressure, heart's electrical activity and overall physical well-being are monitored. The body requires more oxygen as it works harder, making the heart pump more blood. The test indicates if the blood supply is reduced in the arteries that supply blood to the heart and if the heart's rhythm is normal.

An exercise stress test may be used to:

- diagnose coronary artery disease
- identify possible causes of symptoms including chest pain, shortness of breath or light-headedness
- help determine a patient's physical fitness level and plan appropriate exercise types and duration
- screen patients before major surgery

! Care for your heart!

HRH's nuclear medicine and respiratory therapy departments work together in providing diagnostic services. To learn more, contact your family physician or Julie Belyea, HRH director of respiratory therapy and EKG services, by calling (254) 580-8765.



Julie Belyea
Director of
Respiratory Therapy



Physicians use stress tests to find how well your heart handles its everyday workload.

Stress imaging with medication. A stress test with medication gives more accurate and complete information about how the heart is functioning. During the test, also called a thallium stress test, patients walk on a treadmill or ride a stationary bike. After a short period, medication is administered intravenously and special X-rays are taken that show blood flow to the heart muscles.

Stress imaging with medication is used to:

- detect and diagnose the extent of coronary artery blockage
- diagnose chest pain
- determine the level of exercise a patient can safely perform
- help determine heart attack damage

SPECIAL INFORMATION FOR WOMEN

Because women don't always have the same heart symptoms as men, their responses to tests and procedures can be quite different. Fortunately, many methods are available to detect heart disease in women. Of course, some methods work better than others. Talk with your physician about your risk factors and to learn more about heart health.

HEALTHWISE QUIZ

How much do you know about **allergies**?

Take this quiz to find out.

1 Approximately how many people suffer from allergies?

- a. 50 million
- b. 35 million
- c. 27 million
- d. 18 million

2 You're more likely to develop allergies if you:

- a. eat shellfish
- b. have a family member who has allergies
- c. had pets as a child
- d. regularly garden

3 Which does *not* aggravate allergies?

- a. cigarette smoke
- b. cockroach droppings
- c. pet saliva
- d. they all can trigger allergies

4 Where does pollen first appear in the spring?

- a. weeds
- b. trees
- c. grass
- d. mold

5 What reduces pollen allergies in the spring?

- a. not drying laundry outside on a clothesline
- b. removing your shoes before coming indoors
- c. not going outside before 10 a.m.
- d. all of the above

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

Get your blood pressure under control

High blood pressure truly is sinister: You can have it but not know it until you suffer a heart attack, stroke or another serious health complication.

Hence, its nickname: the silent killer. Seeing your physician regularly is the best way to determine whether you have high blood pressure—or hypertension. He or she will measure the force of blood in your arteries by looking at your systolic (the higher number) and diastolic (lower number) pressure. Elevated levels (140/90 mm Hg or more) indicate hypertension,



while numbers ranging from 120/80 to 139/89 point to prehypertension, a condition that puts you at risk for high blood pressure in the future. Normal blood pressure is under 120/80. Although hypertension has no cure, you can take steps to control it and protect your health:

- **Eat a healthy diet.**

High-fat and sugary foods contribute to high blood pressure,

so reach for foods from the DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) diet. They include whole grains, fish and poultry, nuts, fruits and vegetables and low-fat and low-sodium foods.

- **Get moving.** Aim for 30 minutes of cardiovascular activity most days of the week. If you're short on time, break up your workout into three 10-minute segments over the course of the day. Take a walk around the block, dance to your favorite CD or work out to an exercise DVD.

- **Take your meds.** Sometimes medication is the only way to lower your blood pressure. Because hypertension drugs work only when they're regularly in your system, you should never miss a dose or stop taking them.



HOW DOES WATER GET CONTAMINATED?

When it comes to swimming pools, water parks and play fountains, most disease comes from fecal matter on the bodies of sick splashers. If chlorine and pH levels aren't carefully calibrated, other swimmers could swallow live bacteria. In hot tubs, naturally occurring germs can cause rashes and respiratory problems, ranging from the common cold to pneumonia. Large bodies of water—from rivers to the ocean—can be contaminated by sewage, animal waste, swimmers' feces and even parasites.

HOW CAN I AVOID CONTRACTING RWI?

Take these precautions to stay healthy when you swim, dive or just splash around:

- Avoid pools with murky or chemical-smelling water (properly chlorinated pools don't have an odor).
- Don't share towels, kickboards or toys.
- Keep water out of your mouth and never swallow it.
- Stay on dry land if you have open sores.
- Skip bodies of freshwater on very hot days, since bacteria flourish in warm water.
- Plug your nose when swimming in freshwater to keep parasites out.
- Shower before and after swimming and wash your hands after using the toilet or changing diapers.
- Take children on frequent bathroom breaks and change diapers in the bathroom, not poolside.

Warding off water illness

As the weather warms up, we all look forward to swimming laps in the pool; splashing in the ocean, stream or river; or lounging in a hot tub. But those waters may mask something ominous: Contaminated water can lead to recreational water illness (RWI). Touching or swallowing water in pools, lakes, spas, rivers and oceans can lead to gastrointestinal, outer ear, eye, skin, respiratory and neurologic infections—and children, pregnant women and people with compromised immune systems are at greatest risk.

Be a fruit-and-veggie role model

Whether you're driving the car or stepping into high heels, your little ones want to be just like you. So why not use your power for good?

Follow these tips, and the eating habits your children copy will positively influence their health—and yours—for years to come:

1 Restock the pantry. Keep healthy snacks around. Say goodbye to cookies loaded with high-fructose corn syrup and bright orange cheese puffs and hello to baked veggie chips and sugar-free applesauce.

2 Drink right. Switch out your super-acidic, high-sugar soda for water and 100 percent juice—little teeth and waistlines will thank you.

3 Start the day right. No time to sit down to breakfast? Send your kids off with a banana and a baggie filled with dry whole-grain cereal. Studies show that breakfast eaters boast improved math grades, less incidence of hyperactivity and better school attendance. And teen-

agers who eat first thing tend to weigh less, exercise more and generally have a healthier diet than their breakfast-skipping pals.

4 Turn off the tube. People who eat in front of the television are more likely to eat unhealthy foods.

5 Eat together. Children who dine with their parents tend to consume more fruits and veggies and fewer unhealthy snacks.

6 Pack a lunch for everyone. You'll save cash while making sure the whole family is eating well. Be sure to include a lean protein, low-fat dairy, grains, a vegetable and a piece of fruit (try sliced turkey and low-fat cheese on whole-wheat bread with carrot sticks and an apple).





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Discover health resources!

An estimated 80 percent of Internet users in the United States—nearly 113 million people—go online for health information each year, according to the Pew Internet & American Life Project. If you have Internet access, join the men and women who've already discovered health resources on Hill Regional Hospital's (HRH) Web site, www.HillRegionalHospital.com.

DESIGNED FOR YOU

The health resources on HRH's Web site help families manage their health. The user-friendly site provides a variety of health information at the click of a mouse, all in easy-to-understand terms.

Articles detail diseases and conditions, their symptoms and common treatments. Patients having a procedure or test at HRH can read up to understand the "whats" and "whys" of the test, know what to expect and even learn some medical terms.

IN-DEPTH KNOWLEDGE

The site also features an educational tool called Anatomy Explorer. Users take a virtual tour through the body and gain a clearer understanding of the body's mechanics.

Articles are constantly updated to keep families



up to date on recent health news. When you visit the site, be sure to sign up to have HRH's monthly eNewsletter e-mailed directly to you.

EVEN MORE ONLINE

HRH's Web site also offers convenient access to information about physician services and outreach programs such as Senior Circle, Healthy Woman and *The Health eCooking Show*. Program events and membership information for Senior Circle and Healthy Woman are listed on the site.

! Get connected!

Better health is just a click away! Visit HRH's Web site at www.HillRegionalHospital.com.