

LET'S Talk

SPRING 2005

HEALTHY BODIES • SOUND MINDS • A SAFE PLACE TO WORK

It Happens Every Year

DRINKING DRIVERS UNDER THE AGE OF 21 CAUSE NEARLY 1,100 DEATHS ANNUALLY. Unfortunately, teen drinking, driving and death are linked together in many communities throughout the United States, and these tragedies strike every year.

The greatest single mortality risk posed by underage drinking is traffic crashes, which are the leading cause of death for people between the ages of 4 and 34 in the United States.

This year, you can help change the statistics. As spring break, prom season and graduation approach, brush up on these helpful tips to keep the teens you care about out of harm's way:

- Encourage teens to never drive or ride with someone who has been drinking.
- Let teens know how to get home safely from a party if they have been drinking.
- Ask teens to let you know where they are, particularly during late night hours.

Stop, Thief!

But he that filches from me my good name.

Robs me of that which not enriches him,

And makes me poor indeed.

Shakespeare, Othello, act iii, Sc. 3



WHAT IS IDENTITY THEFT?

The short answer is that identity theft is a crime. *Identity theft* and *identity fraud* refer to all types of crime in which someone wrongfully obtains and uses another person's personal data in some way that involves fraud or deception, typically for economic gain.

Unlike your fingerprints, which are unique to you and cannot be used by someone else, your personal data — especially your Social Security number, bank account or credit card number, driver's license and other valuable identifying data — can be used, if they fall into the wrong hands, to personally profit at your expense.

Many victims have reported that unauthorized people have withdrawn funds from their banks or financial accounts or taken over their identities altogether, running up vast debts and committing crimes while using the victims' names.

Responding to identity theft is expensive, time consuming and emotionally draining. On average, victims spend more than 175 hours and \$1,000 in out-of-pocket expenses to clear their names, restore their reputations in the community, correct erroneous information and reestablish good credit. The cost to employers

also is significant, due to victim stress, absenteeism and lost productivity.

To protect yourself from identity theft, remember the word **SCAM**:

- Be **stingy** about giving your personal information to others.
- **Check** your financial information.
- **Ask** for a copy of your credit report.
- **Maintain** careful financial records.

For more information on identity theft, see **VOD119**.

what's new

Late-Breaking Health News

MORE THAN 68,000 AMERICAN WOMEN DIE OF LUNG CANCER EACH YEAR.

That's more than breast cancer and all gynecologic cancers combined, according to a report in the *Mayo Clinic Women's HealthSource*. Smoking accounts for nearly 90 percent of all cases of lung cancer. For nonsmokers, daily exposure to secondhand smoke may increase the chance for lung cancer by as much as 30 percent.

Research shows annual chest X-rays don't reduce cancer deaths among smokers. A recent study by Mayo researchers found that a special type of imaging test — the spiral computerized tomography (CT) scan — may detect lung cancer at a much earlier stage in people with a high risk for the disease.

The best way to prevent lung cancer is to not smoke and to avoid second-hand smoke. If you already smoke, quitting now can reduce your risk, even if you have smoked for years.

For information on how to quit smoking, see **VODI 20**.

OLDER AMERICANS ARE OFTEN PRESCRIBED DANGEROUS MEDICATIONS, according to an article in the *Archives of Internal Medicine*.

Researchers studied a database of 765,423 people ages 65 and older who filled prescriptions during 1999. They found 21 percent had a prescription for one or more drugs that should be avoided by elderly people.

Amitriptyline and doxepin — drugs used to treat depression — accounted for 23 percent of the drugs that shouldn't have been prescribed. More than 15 percent of the people filled prescriptions for two drugs they should have avoided, and 4 percent filled prescriptions for three or more drugs that could be dangerous for them to take.



EXPOSURE TO SOLVENT AND CLEANING PRODUCT FUMES MAY INCREASE THE RISK FOR CHILDHOOD ASTHMA, according to a study published in the journal *Thorax*.

A study of 192 toddlers at hospital emergency rooms found more than three-quarters of the children with asthma were allergic to volatile organic compounds (VOCs) found in solvents, paints, floor adhesives, cleaning products, polishes, room fresheners, wall-to-wall carpets and cigarette smoke, compared with only half the children without asthma.

The researchers also found the levels of indoor VOCs were significantly higher in the homes of the children with asthma.

The authors concluded that although their study was small, it supports the theory that exposure to indoor pollutants during early childhood could lead to the development of asthma.

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SPECIAL REPORT

- 119** Identity Theft
- 120** How to Quit Smoking
- 541** Sensible Weight Loss
- 542** Lowering Your Cholesterol
- 543** Reducing Your Stress
- 544** Walking for Fitness
- 545** Workstation Comfort
- 546** Fixing an Aching Back
- 547** Start An Exercise Program
- 548** Controlling Allergies
- 549** Lowering Health-Care Costs
- 550** Living With Arthritis
- 551** Dealing With Headaches
- 552** High Blood Pressure

Keeping Personal Problems Off the Job

YOUR PERSONAL LIFE MAY BE IN TURMOIL. But allowing your personal problems to affect your productivity at work will add to your stress. Here's what you can do about it.

Get involved.

One of the best ways to avoid taking your personal problems to work is to be involved in some community work or a support group.

Be an optimist.

Look at what's good about your personal life. Optimists know there's a problem and try to solve it.

Change what you can.

Determine which changes you can make in your personal life. Where can you add more predictability and structure? Can you either divide up the household chores or hire someone to help?

Do something for yourself every day.

Make sure you're eating properly, exercising, getting enough sleep and relaxing some every day. Each week, do at least one activity you enjoy. At work, use part of your lunch hour to go for a walk or read an inspirational book.



Make friends at work.

Invite a different coworker to lunch every day. Choose happy people with a positive attitude because they'll give you energy.



Dodging Love's Web

If you saw the movie *You've Got Mail*, you may have wondered if an electronic romance can blossom into true love. Unfortunately, *You've Got Mail* was more Hollywood fantasy than

reality, say mental health experts, who warn that romance seekers could take some decidedly unromantic risks if they get swept away by an electronic fling.

First, there is the small but real chance that the surfer might encounter an electronic predator, intent on using the Internet to find his or her next victim.

Less dangerous, but more widespread, is the risk of substituting a fantasy-based electronic relationship for true intimacy.

Getting involved in an intense e-mail relationship frequently encourages an Internet user to fantasize about the person on the other end of the line — and also to project his or her inner wishes onto them.

Here are a few tips to reduce the risks that come with an online relationship:

- **NEVER OFFER PERSONAL INFORMATION TO STRANGERS ON THE NET.** Be careful not to divulge such items as your address, phone number or workplace.
- **BUILD YOUR E-MAIL RELATIONSHIP CAREFULLY.** Once you're comfortable interacting on the Net, set up a phone conversation, but be sure to block your phone number so your address can't be traced.
- **IF THE PHONE CONVERSATION GOES WELL, YOU CAN MEET IN PERSON AT A PUBLIC PLACE.** Only then should you share personal information.
- **TO AVOID DISILLUSIONMENT,** remind yourself that you're only seeing your new friend's good side on the computer.



Taking Anger to Heart

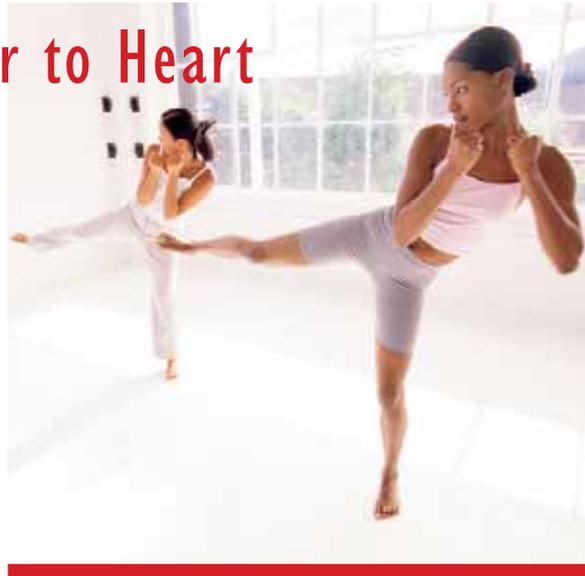
When someone cuts you off on a busy highway, do you pound the steering wheel in fury and shout at the driver? Or do you swallow your anger and dwell on it later?

Either way, you're not being kind to your heart, researchers say. If you respond to every anger-inducing situation by blowing your stack or holding it in, you could be setting yourself up for serious heart problems. According to Ohio State University researchers, there's evidence that people who respond rigidly to anger-provoking events are likely to wind up with significantly elevated levels of heart-damaging cholesterol.

Experts suggest that the best response to anger-provoking situations is to be creative and flexible. It's important to turn off the anger as soon as possible to reduce its physiological effects.

In subjects who always reacted to an anger-provoking situation in the same negative way, researchers found levels of "bad" or LDL cholesterol ranked higher, regardless of whether they expressed the anger or held it inside.

Researchers also found that those who were flexible, but who hid their anger



slightly more often than showing it, had the lowest levels of bad and total cholesterol.

Why does intense anger trigger the release of lipids (fats) from the tissues into the bloodstream? The body releases the fatty substances for energy as part of its "fight or flight" survival response to perceived danger.

In some situations, the healthiest response is to quietly insist on your rights, which will soon defuse the anger. Still, remain under control and don't become aggressive.

Other survival-threatening situations (such as being chewed out by the boss) must be endured in silence until you can slip away to burn off the negative energy, perhaps through a brisk walk or some vigorous kickboxing.

Food calorie facts: Different foods have various calorie levels, depending on the amounts of fat, carbohydrates and protein they contain. Fats have the most calories, 9 per gram; carbohydrates and proteins, 4 calories per gram.

VO412

IDEA, Health & Fitness Association, San Diego, CA.

People who ate about five pieces of fruit a day had a 38 percent lower risk for stroke than those who ate the least fruit, one study found.

American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, 9650 Rockville Pike, Bethesda, MD 20814.

Always contract your abdominal muscles when working your midsection. This stabilizes your spine, which helps reduce your injury risk.

Men's Fitness, 21100 Erwin St., Woodland Hills, CA 91367.

When you're stressed and need to calm down, imagine you're surrounded by bright pink light. Studies have shown the hue helps lower blood pressure and regulate heartbeat, both of which help reduce tension.

Tamara Lee Dorris, author of Get Well Now!, Empowered Press, 2003.

To ensure an accurate reading on a mammogram, go to a facility that uses computer-aided detection (CAD). With this technology, a computer flags suspicious spots for radiologists, increasing the accuracy of readings by 5 to 20 percent.

Health, 2100 Lakeshore Blvd., Birmingham, AL 35209.

Before buying a walking shoe, hold it in your hands and bend it. The shoe should flex easily through the ball of the foot, but not at the arch.

Cooking Light, 2100 Lakeshore Drive, Birmingham, AL 35209.

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