FOH Federal Occupational Health

Wellness-Fitness Program Newsletter

September 2007

National Pain Awareness Month

More than 75 million Americans suffer from persistent, debilitating pain. Pain not only affects individuals and their loved ones, but also costs the country more than $100 billion annually in missed workdays, visits to hospital emergency rooms, and medications.

With some pain conditions, such as arthritis, physicians can clearly see the changes on X-rays and in blood tests. However, in much neuropathic pain, damage to the nerves, spinal cord, and brain that causes persistent pain is real, but the microscopic changes are often undetectable – and attempts to seek treatment can be frustrating. As a result, people in pain try to live normal lives limited by their discomfort.

A study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association, found that 13 percent of U.S. workers lose an average of 4.6 hours per week of productivity as a result of pain. The survey included questions about how aches and pains caused workers to lose concentration, repeat a task, or work more slowly than usual.

The researchers also found that more than half of all employees reported some type of ache or pain every two weeks and nearly one in seven workers experience a drop in their productivity every two weeks due to pain. Another alarming finding was that many workers are not managing their treatable pain conditions. For example, only 41 percent of those who suffer with migraines take prescription drugs for the condition.

These findings are important to create awareness in both workers and employers. Employers can help control pain-related costs by launching workplace awareness campaigns. Much pain can be alleviated with simple steps taken in the workplace, such as education on correct posture and lifting procedures, and properly positioned workstations and computers. Managers can also reduce losses by educating workers on preventive measures to avoid certain health problems and how to seek appropriate care when necessary. This is especially important in the case of pain, because persistent pain sufferers are among the most underserved patients in the United States. In fact, one of the biggest challenges faced by people in pain is access to the right kind of care.

Although pain accounts for the majority of provider visits, few health care providers have formal training or cutting-edge information in pain management. As a result, many pain sufferers are shuffled from one health care provider to another without relief. This is why it is vital for persons in pain to research their conditions and empower themselves by learning as much as possible.

Finding a physician who specializes in pain medicine can be difficult. Physicians specializing in pain medicine are committed to the study of pain, its prevention, evaluation, treatment, and the rehabilitation of persons in pain. The American Academy of Pain Medicine, at www.painmed.org, has established an online, searchable database to help patients find pain physicians in their area.

The National Pain Foundation, available at www.NationalPainFoundation.org, provides in-depth information about various pain conditions and treatments available, a Personal Pain Inventory to record all the details of patients' particular pain history, a Personal Pain Journal to record day-to-day experiences with pain and pain management and an interactive support community where others in pain share their stories and experiences and receive support from one another. Another important resource is the American pain society at www.ampainsoc.org.

Adults Need Immunizations Too

Many adults believe that the vaccines they received as children will protect them for the rest of their lives. This may no longer be true because immunity can fade over time. In these cases, boosters are an effective preventive measure.

Also, some adults may not be protected because many of today's vaccines were not available decades ago. Below are some recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on adult vaccination.

- **Influenza (Flu):** Recommended yearly. Also recommended for those with health problems such as heart and diabetes.
- **Pneumococcal (pneumonia):** A dose is suggested for those over age 65. Also recommended for those with health problems such as heart and diabetes.
- **Tetanus and diphtheria (Td):** A booster is needed every 10 years after the initial series of three shots that it is generally given in childhood.
- **Combined Tetanus, Diphtheria and Pertussis (Tdap):** TdaP provides protection from pertussis (whooping cough) and is recommended for adults 19-64 years of age. TdaP is especially important for those who have close contact with babies less than one year of age.
- **Measles, Mumps, Rubella (German Measles) (MMR):** Recommended for those18 years or over and born after 1956, unless previously vaccinated or have had the diseases.
- **Human Papilloma virus (HPV):** This vaccine prevents the most common types of HPV that cause cervical cancer and genital warts. It is given as a 3-dose vaccine given over 6 months to those up to age 26.
- **Chickenpox (varicella)/ shingles (Herpes Zoster):** Shingles is a painful skin rash often with blisters that is caused by the varicella zoster virus (VZV); the same virus that causes chickenpox. If you've had chickenpox, you can develop shingles because the virus can reoccur after years or decades. The Chickenpox (Varicella) vaccine is recommended up to age 60 for those who have not had chickenpox or shingles. After age 60, the CDC recommends a single dose of the Herpes Zoster vaccine.

For more information about adult vaccination, visit the CDC's Vaccines and Immunizations site at www.cdc.gov/vaccines/

Anger Can Raise Cholesterol Levels

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. If you respond to every anger-inducing situation by blowing your stack or by holding it in, you could be setting yourself up for serious heart problems.

Why? 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 artery-damaging cholesterol.

It's important to turn off the anger as soon as possible to reduce its physiological effects. To avoid long-term physical affects, the best response to anger-provoking situations is to be creative and flexible.

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

On the other hand, those who responded flexibly in anger-provoking situations, but who hid their anger slightly more often than showing it, had the lowest levels of "bad" and total cholesterol.

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

In some situations, the healthiest response is to insist quietly on your rights, which will soon defuse the anger while allowing you to remain under control and without becoming 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 a good workout.

The Squat

The squat is an excellent exercise for leg strength, stability, and development. Squatting improves balance, flexibility, and cardiovascular capacity. It also strengthens the muscles responsible for knee and hip extension, as well as the torso musculature.

As with any exercise, the squat must be performed correctly in order to benefit. The staff at your wellness/fitness center is a good resource for tips on performing the squat, safely and effectively. And as always, consult with your physician before starting a new exercise program.

Different people will progress more quickly through, but it's wise to always start with no weight at all, using only bodyweight for resistance. Start with a few sets of about 20 un-weighted squats before attempting to add any weight. This is important in order to be sure that you slowly and safely build the necessary balance, flexibility, and technique to perform squats. For many, it takes some time to build the necessary ankle and hip flexibility needed to perform the movement without losing balance.

Eventually, to add difficulty, you can hold a pair of dumbbells, and work your way up to performing squats with a barbell on your back. You can also perform squats in a power cage which – for added safety – has pins hold the bar, and safety bars to stop the bar below a certain point.

How to perform the squat

Starting Position: Stand erect with a neutral spine and feet shoulder-width apart. Place your feet about shoulder width apart, keeping your toes pointed forward, and remember to keep your abs tight at all times to help support the lower back throughout each set while keeping your back arched. If you are using a bar, grip the barbell slightly beyond shoulder width and set the barbell behind your neck, resting across your shoulders and traps.

Action: Slowly lower the body, with the hips moving back as if sitting in a chair. Maintain the weight directly over the heels or mid-foot. Lower to approximately 90 degrees of knee flexion. Pause, and then slowly return to the starting position. If lumbar curvature cannot be maintained, lower less than 90 degrees.

Errors to avoid: If your heels come up from the floor and you lean too far forward when doing squats, it may be due to ankle inflexibility or low range of motion in foot extension, which can be caused by shortness of calf muscles.

You also could have low range of motion in hip flexion, which can be caused by shortness of your hamstrings (hip extensors). To increase range of motion, only perform squats with weights at a depth that permits correct form. Patience is key. Range of motion will improve with time, practice and a good stretching regimen.

Don't rush this conditioning process. Tissues such as joint cartilage, bones, and ligaments are slower to adapt than muscles. And though your muscles may be able to handle the stress, rushing the conditioning process may weaken joints and lead to injury. This is especially true with squats. If you increase resistance to quickly, joints can become inflamed and overworked.

Remember to consult with your FOH wellness/fitness staff for more tips and suggestions.

"Only those who risk going to far can possibly find out how far one can go."
- T.S. Eliot

Five Fun Fruits

You Should Try

Fruit is one of nature's perfect foods. Packed with vitamins, minerals, and fiber, fruit is filling, delicious, and most are naturally low in calories. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the American Cancer Society, the National Academy of Sciences, and the National Cancer Institute recommend that 5 to 9 servings of fruits (and vegetables) be consumed every day depending on a person's energy intake, to maintain good health and reduce the risk of cancer.

So go bite into an apple, a banana, or a...carambola fruit. Haven't heard of that one? Don't worry. As Americans are adopting healthier diets and becoming more adventurous, exotic fruits like the carambola are showing up in markets.

Here's a guide to five you should try.

- **Carambola (Star Fruit) -** This is a fruit that's a winner in all categories. It tastes great, and it's attractive, as well. Nutritionally, it's low in calories and has 27 mg vitamin C, beta-carotene and potassium. It can be substituted for fresh lemon and lime slices, or eaten fresh.
- **Guava -** Even if you've never had a guava, you may be familiar with its taste. Guavas give a tropical flavor to fruit drinks. Low in calories, high in vitamin C and potassium, they can be eaten plain. They're also widely used in jellies, jams and sherbets.
- **Kiwi -** The kiwi, like its namesake bird, is small and cute. It's high in pectin, a key fiber. Eat them plain, or carve them into a succulent garnish.
- **Papaya -**This is one of the best sources of beta-carotene. You'll also find lots of vitamin C, potassium and some calcium, and a taste that many people say is addictive. Naturally low in calories, just cut it in half, scoop out the seeds and dig in.
- **Mango -** So lush and tropical that they're almost decadent, mangos are actually one of the healthiest food you'll ever eat. They are high in vitamin A and potassium, and even have vitamin C. Each mango gives you about a tenth of your daily fiber requirement. Peel and eat, but not while you're wearing a suit; mangos are messy.

Sampling different kinds of fruit will not only expand your palate, it's also a great way to get a wide variety of nutrients. And don't limit yourself. Try these fruit in different dishes, like a mango salsa, a guava jelly, or a refreshing papaya milkshake.