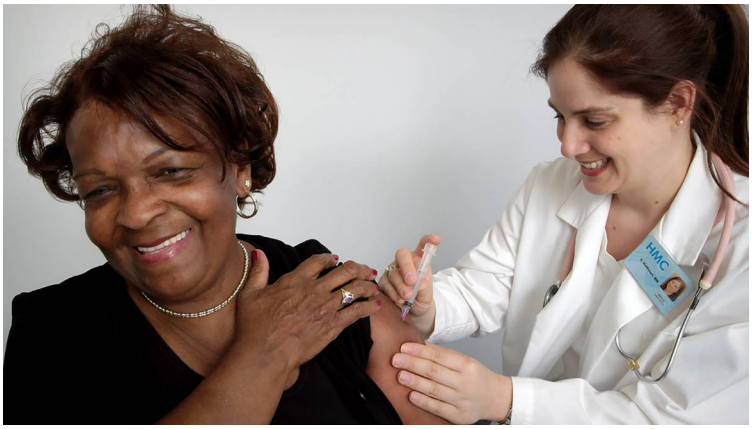
THE HEALTH CONNECTION

TOGETHER.
BETTER HEALTH.

Summer 2020 Volume 21 No.3

Can a flu shot increase the risk of COVID-19?

Health officials warn that a second wave of the novel coronavirus could hit this fall. Fighting both COVID-19 and the flu at the same time would present serious challenges to the nation's population and health care system. Claims on social media suggest that getting a flu shot may raise the risk of becoming infected with COVID-19. But these allegations are unproven. No studies connect the seasonal flu vaccine with an increased risk of getting COVID-19.



One study examined the theory that after getting a flu shot, in the time it takes your body to build immunity to seasonal influenza, you may be more likely to get coronavirus. Here, the term "coronavirus" is misleading because there are many types of coronavirus. For example, coronaviruses cause the common cold. It's important not to confuse these coronaviruses with the novel coronavirus—SARS-CoV-2—that causes COVID-19. This particular study looked at coronaviruses that cause the common cold, not the novel coronavirus.

COVID-19 can be a serious disease, especially in adults. No studies have shown that adults who get a flu vaccine are more likely to get a respiratory infection or common cold.

Flu is dangerous for some people.
Each year, thousands in the U.S. die from the flu. It can cause serious complications in infants and young children, older adults, and pregnant women. Medical conditions such as heart disease can make the flu worse. Influenza can also trigger asthma attacks.

The flu shot is the best way to prevent the flu and its complications. Although not 100 percent effective, a flu vaccine can keep you from getting infected, make the flu less severe if you get it, and prevent you from spreading it to others.

Who needs an annual flu vaccine?
The CDC recommends that everyone six months of age and older should get a flu vaccine every year. The vaccine is given as a shot or as a nasal spray.

Flu viruses evolve quickly. Manufacturers release new flu vaccines every year to protect against the viruses researchers expect to circulate during the upcoming season. It's impossible to predict influenza viruses with total certainty, so the effectiveness of the flu vaccine varies from year to year.

Flu vaccines are safe.
According to the CDC, there is no evidence that the seasonal flu vaccine increases the risk of getting COVID-19. Moreover, flu shots don't contain the novel coronavirus, as some have suggested. If we experience a second wave of COVID-19 this fall, it will be important to do everything possible to reduce illnesses and preserve scarce health care resources.

Fact Check: "No Evidence That Flu Shot Increases Risk of COVID-19."
Link: https://www.factcheck.org/2020/04/no-evidence-that-flu-shot-increases-risk-of-covid-19/

Reuters: "False claim: The flu shot contains COVID-19."
Link: https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-factcheck-flu-shot-contains-covid19/false-claim-the-flu-shot-contains-covid-19-idUSKBN22V29N



Using telehealth for well-child care

The COVID-19 pandemic has seen a large drop in well-child visits and a delay in key childhood vaccinations. In some cases, these delays could result in outbreaks of preventable illnesses. Also, doctors have been unable to perform recommended screenings and provide support to help kids stay healthy.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), all newborns, infants, children, and adolescents should continue to receive well-child care during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Primary care pediatricians are committed to making sure each child receives a complete physical and lab exam and is up to date on all screenings and vaccines. Many doctors can provide some parts of a well-child exam through a telehealth or virtual visit. But other elements require an office visit.

How virtual visits work
During a telehealth visit, families can use a smartphone, tablet, or computer—any device with a camera and internet or Wi-Fi connection—to connect with their pediatrician. During the visit, families can talk to their doctor about a child's health and development just like in an office visit.

Pediatric well-child care guidelines
The AAP recommends that well-child care should occur in an office setting when possible. Clinics that offer telehealth services can provide some elements of a well-child exam through a virtual visit.

If a newborn, infant, child, or adolescent has missed a well-child visit or recommended vaccine, families and pediatricians should work together to bring the child up to date as quickly as possible.

Across the country, clinics and medical practices are taking steps to keep all patients safe. These steps may include scheduling well-child visits and sick appointments at different times of the day and physically separating well patients from sick patients.

American Academy of Pediatrics, "Guidance on Providing Pediatric Well-Care During COVID-19"
Link: https://services.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/guidance-on-providing-pediatric-well-care-during-covid-19/

Should you take a statin?

Statins are for patients with a high risk of heart disease. These lifesaving drugs can reduce the risk of heart attack and stroke and are often the most reliable way to treat high cholesterol. But more than half of patients eligible for statins don't receive them.

The American Heart Association's guidelines for treating cholesterol are based on a patient's risk of developing heart disease. Even as guidelines for prescribing statins have changed over the years, statins remain one of the most effective treatments for patients with a high risk of having a cardiovascular event, such as a heart attack or stroke.

When to prescribe a statin
If you suffer from any of these conditions, ask your doctor if statin therapy is right for you:

- Atherosclerosis, or hardening of the arteries
- History of stroke or heart attack
- Peripheral artery disease, or reduced blood flow to the limbs
- Angina, or chest pain
- Very high cholesterol
- Diabetes and are age 40 – 75

Many patients can prevent or treat high cholesterol through diet and lifestyle changes. Statin therapy is not an alternative to healthy eating and physical activity. Rather, it's an added preventive step. Before you start taking statins, discuss the potential side effects with your doctor.



UT Southwestern Medical School, "Why are we still in the middle of a 'statins war'?"
Link: https://utswmed.org/medblog/statins-debate/

Colorectal Cancer: Can it be prevented?



Colorectal cancer is usually slow to develop. When found early, doctors can remove polyps and stop cancer before it starts. That's why routine screenings are so important. While there's no sure way to prevent colorectal cancer, making simple lifestyle changes can help lower your risk factors for the disease.

Lower the risk factors you can control.

1. **Lose weight**. Being overweight or obese increases the risk of colorectal cancer, especially in men. Excess belly fat and a large waistline are also risk factors, so avoid gaining weight around your midsection and try to maintain a healthy weight.

2. **Get moving**. Physical activity lowers your risk of colorectal cancer. Although moderate activities like taking the dog for a walk, vacuuming the house, or mowing the lawn helps, vigorous activity may benefit more. Most adults should aim for about 30 minutes of activity five times a week. Any amount of activity has some health benefits. If you have five minutes, you have time to exercise.

3. **Eat a healthy diet**. Fill your plate with vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and lean proteins. Avoid meats (beef, pork, and lamb) and processed meats (hot dogs, sausage, and lunch meats) that may increase your risk of colorectal cancer.

4. **Limit alcohol**. If you choose to drink, avoid excess alcohol. Consuming too many calories, whether they're from beer, wine, spirits, or even eating too much healthy food, can increase your belly fat and make you gain weight.

5. **Quit smoking**. Giving up tobacco can help lower your risk of colorectal cancer and many other types of cancer.

American Cancer Society, "Can Colorectal Cancer Be Prevented?"
Link: https://www.cancer.org/cancer/colon-rectal-cancer/causes-risks-prevention/prevention.html

Asthma flare-ups: How to avoid the ER

A severe asthma attack can send you to the emergency room, especially if your medicine isn't working properly or you're away from home without your inhaler. Working to get your asthma under control—and making an asthma action plan—can help prevent visits to the ER.

1. Plan ahead. Talk to your doctor about creating a plan for managing your asthma. Your plan should include detailed instructions on what to do when you're having a flare-up.
2. Follow your plan. When you have an asthma action plan, you'll always know what to do in case of a flare-up. Include any daily requirements in your plan (such as taking medicine before you exercise), and work with your doctor to adjust your plan as needed.
3. Avoid triggers. Your doctor can help you identify triggers that may cause asthma flare-ups.
4. Take your medicine. Maintenance medications can help prevent asthma flare-ups—and make them less severe—so be sure to take your medicine as prescribed.
5. Don't leave home without your inhaler. Always carry your quick-relief medicine, whether you're at work, at the grocery store, traveling, or just out for a walk.
6. Learn the signs of a flare-up. Early warning signs of a flare-up may include shortness of breath, sudden fatigue, irregular breathing, or trouble sleeping. Know what to do if you notice signs of a flare-up.

When to go to the ER.
When you have asthma, you may need to go to the emergency room from time to time. However, you should always visit the closest participating Urgent Care facility before going to the ER. The ER should be your last resort if your flare-up doesn't get any better after taking your asthma medicine or visiting an Urgent Care facility or if your symptoms come back quickly.

Experiencing any of the following symptoms may also require emergency care:

- Frequent wheezing
- Persistent cough
- Chest pain
- Lips or fingernails turning blue or gray
- Trouble breathing, talking, or walking

Asthma is a serious condition, but if you take your medication as prescribed and develop a plan for managing it, you may never need to visit the emergency room.

Johns Hopkins All Children's Hospital, "How to Avoid the ER if You Have Asthma"
Link: https://www.hopkinsallchildrens.org/Patients-Families/Health-Library/HealthDocNew/How-to-Avoid-the-ER-if-You-Have-Asthma

Exercising safely with diabetes

Whether you're living with prediabetes or managing diabetes, getting regular physical activity offers a number of health benefits. In addition to lowering your need for insulin and reducing your blood sugar levels, exercise can help you build muscle mass, maintain a healthy weight, and improve your flexibility. It can also boost your energy and relieve stress.

If the idea of starting an exercise program seems overwhelming, remember that small changes can make a big difference. Ask your doctor about what types of exercise may be right for you.



5 ways to start exercising

1. Walking: Walking is an easy way to stay active. All you need are a good pair of walking or running shoes and some comfortable clothes. Walk at your own pace and remember to breathe.

2. Swimming: Swimming lets you stretch and work your muscles without putting pressure on your joints. Before you get into a pool or lake, let the lifeguard know you have diabetes. In case your symptoms flare-up, they're ready to assist if you begin to show signs of low blood-glucose.

3. Yoga: As an ancient practice that promotes your physical and mental well-being, yoga incorporates postures and breathing techniques to help build flexibility, strength, and balance.

4. Tai Chi: This form of exercise uses slow, fluid body movements to relax the mind and body.

5. Dancing: Whether you foxtrot with your spouse or cha-cha on your own, dancing is a fun way to be active. Take an online dance class—memorizing dance steps can help improve your memory. Chair dancing is an option for those with limited physical abilities.

Stay safe when you exercise.

Follow these safety tips:

- Start slowly.
- Warm up before you exercise and cool down afterwards.
- Stay hydrated and have small snacks.
- Monitor your blood sugars.
- Avoid exercising in extremely hot or cold temperatures.
- Stop exercising immediately if you become short of breath or lightheaded.

Cleveland Clinic, "5 Best Exercises for People with Diabetes"
Link: https://health.clevelandclinic.org/5-best-exercises-for-people-with-diabetes/

Does high blood pressure have symptoms?

High blood pressure, or hypertension, usually has no symptoms. That's why it's called the "silent killer." You can suffer from the condition for a long time without experiencing symptoms.

Contrary to what you may have heard, excessive sweating, red flushing of the face, nervousness, and trouble sleeping are not signs of hypertension. When left untreated, high blood pressure can cause



health problems, including heart disease, heart attack, and stroke. It's important to have your blood pressure checked regularly starting at age 18. If you have risk factors, your doctor may check your blood pressure every year during your annual exam.

Take steps to prevent high blood pressure.
Eventually, high blood pressure affects almost everyone, but there are steps you can take to protect your health:

1.Know your blood pressure numbers.

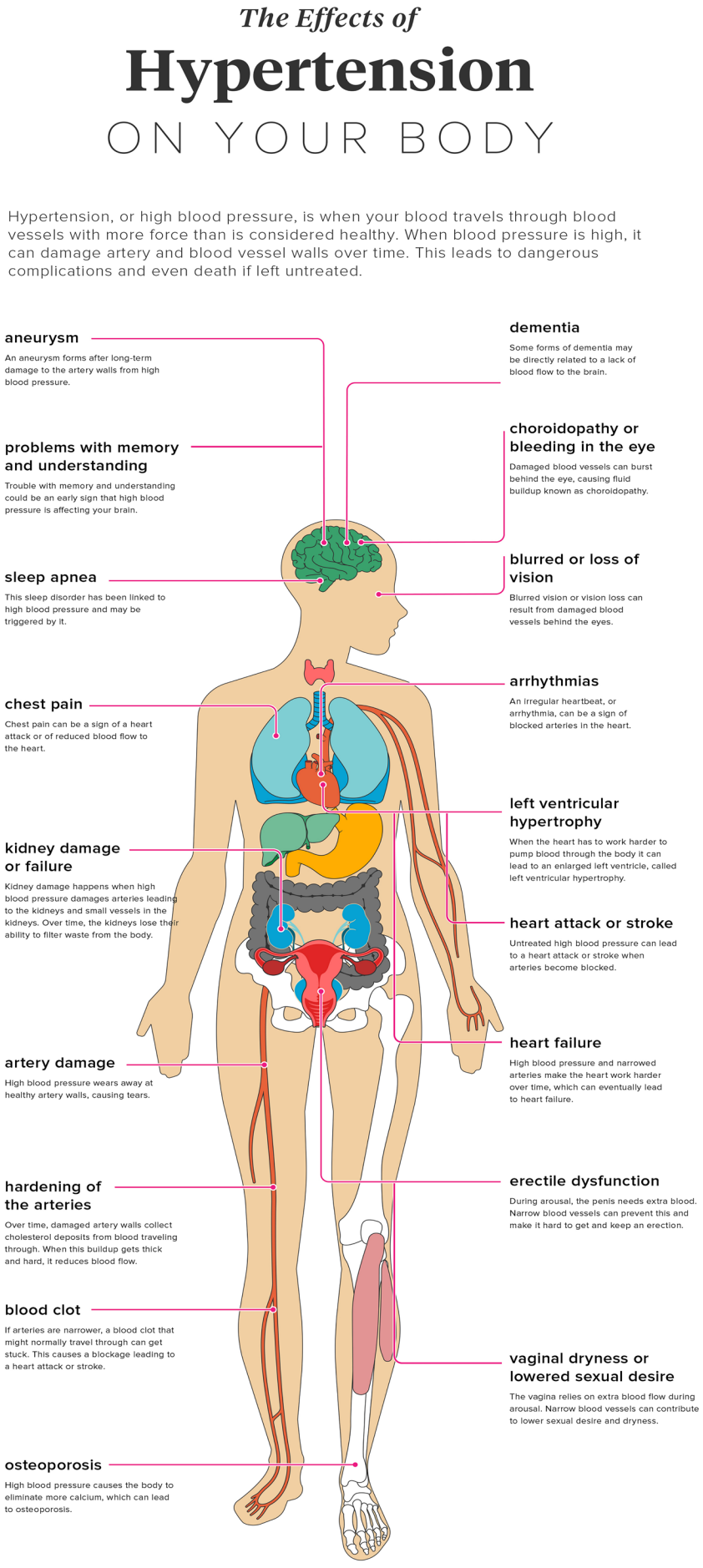
- For adults, normal blood pressure is below 120/80 mm Hg.
- If you have high blood pressure, work with your doctor to control it.(High blood pressure is a systolic pressure of 130 or higher, or a diastolic pressure of 80 or higher, that stays high over time.)

2.Make lifestyle changes.

- Eat a healthy, high-fiber diet (focus on fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy, and nuts).
- Consume less sodium (cut back on snacks and processed foods).
- Stay active (get up and get moving).
- Manage stress (try yoga or deep breathing exercises).
- Quit smoking (ask your doctor for help).

American Heart Association, "What are the Symptoms of High Blood Pressure?"
Link: https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/high-blood-pressure/why-high-blood-pressure-is-a-silent-killer/what-are-the-symptoms-of-high-blood-pressure

Mayo Clinic, "High Blood Pressure Symptoms and Causes"
Link: https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/high-blood-pressure/symptoms-causes/syc-20373410



Prenatal care during the COVID-19 pandemic

At a time when health experts recommend we stay physically distant from others, you may wonder if it's safe to leave home to see the doctor. This can be particularly worrisome when you're expecting a baby.

While information about COVID-19 continues to evolve, pregnant people are at greater risk of getting sick from respiratory viruses than those who are not pregnant. With this in mind, if you're pregnant, take extra precautions to avoid contact with anyone who has COVID-19 or is suspected of having it.

In addition, to prevent infections, follow the same steps recommended for everyone: Wash your hands often, practice social distancing, avoid crowds, and work from home, if possible.

Prenatal care is important for a healthy pregnancy.
Prenatal care plays an important role in helping you take care of yourself and your baby during pregnancy. If you're worried about keeping an appointment due to COVID-19, call your health care provider ahead of time to discuss your concerns.

- Do not skip prenatal care appointments, even if you're having a low-risk or uncomplicated pregnancy.
- Ask your health care provider about the steps they're taking to separate healthy patients from those who may be sick.
- Some providers may cancel or postpone some visits. Others may switch certain appointments to telehealth visits you can attend on your smartphone, tablet, or computer.

Do not delay getting emergency care because of COVID-19.
If you have an urgent medical question, call your health care provider. In an emergency, call 911 or go to your local emergency department. Hospitals and clinics should have plans to protect you from getting COVID-19 if you need emergency care.

Our understanding of COVID-19 is constantly changing. For the latest updates on this global pandemic, visit the website of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at cdc.gov.

"Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19): If You Are Pregnant, Breastfeeding, or Caring for Young Children"
Link: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/pregnancy-breastfeeding.html



Relieve low back pain with physical therapy

Before considering surgery or other aggressive treatments for low back pain, ask your doctor if physical therapy may be an option for you. For some who suffer from low back pain, physical therapy can provide relief, improve your quality of life, and prevent new back problems. Of course, only a doctor can diagnose your condition and recommend treatment options.

How physical therapy works
Physical therapists tailor programs for each patient using different tools and techniques, including heating pads and ice packs, electrical stimulation, and exercises and stretching. In some cases, low back pain will get better on its own over time. But exercise can help reduce pain and improve function. The goal of physical therapy is to develop the muscles around the spine. Building strength helps place less stress on the discs and joints of the back.

Physical therapy to treat low back pain may include a number of exercises:

Stretching helps you maintain a normal range of motion and relieves muscle pain. Proper stretching is slow and gradual. Never bounce as you stretch.

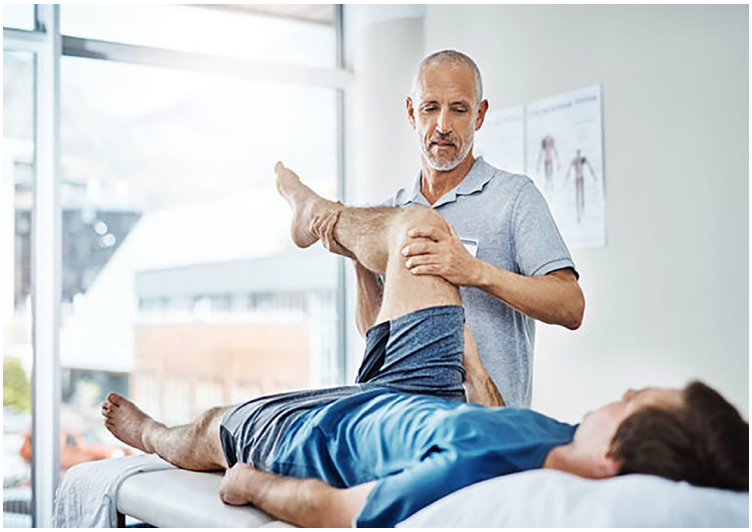
Stabilization exercises often involve the use of an exercise ball. The goal is to strengthen the muscles that support the spine.

Core exercises, including sit-ups, crunches, and leg raises, help strengthen the abdominal muscles and lower back.

Aquatic therapy makes it easier for older patients and those with limited abilities to start an exercise program.

What if physical therapy doesn't work?
If physical therapy fails to relieve your low back pain, talk to your therapist or doctor. Programs that rely only on heating or cooling packs and don't include exercises may not alleviate back pain. Other things to consider:

- Make sure you're doing the exercises correctly.
- Do all of your recommended exercises as prescribed.
- Stick with your program for the long term.



After relieving low back pain with physical therapy, some patients redevelop the same back problems within a year or two. It's important to work with your physical therapist to develop an exercise program you can continue at home. A long-term program can help strengthen and maintain the muscle you developed during your physical therapy program.

Spine Health, "Physical Therapy for Low Back Pain Relief"
Link: https://www.spine-health.com/treatment/physical-therapy/physical-therapy-low-back-pain-relief



THE HEALTH CONNECTION

APWU Health Plan
799 Cromwell Park Drive, Suites K-Z
Glen Burnie, MD 21061
www.apwuhp.com
(800) 222-2798

Presorted
Standard
U.S. Postage
PAID
Southern, MD
Permit No. 139

In This Issue:

- **Can a flu shot increase the risk of COVID-19?**
- **Using telehealth for well-child care**
- **Should you take a statin?**
- **Colorectal cancer: Can it be prevented?**
- **Asthma flare-ups: How to avoid the ER**
- **Exercising safely with diabetes**
- **Does high blood pressure have symptoms?**
- **Prenatal care during the COVID-19 pandemic**
- **Relieve low back pain with physical therapy**
- **See your doctor within 30 days of being discharged from the ER**

See your doctor within 30 days of being discharged from the ER

Leaving the emergency department after receiving mental health or substance abuse treatment can be a vulnerable time. In accordance with the APWU Health Plan, anyone who receives treatment in the emergency department or hospital for mental health or substance abuse must have a follow-up appointment with a primary care doctor within 30 days.

Please see your plan documents for details about your specific coverage.

Need help finding a doctor? The APWU Health Plan is here to help.

1-800-222-2798
1-800-622-2511 (TDD)
8:30 a.m. – 6 p.m. ET
Monday – Friday
apwuhp.com

