

SeniorCircle plus

NEWS AND HEALTH INFORMATION FOR SENIORS

SUMMER 2005

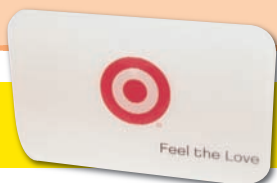
THE CLEVELAND CLINIC
FOUNDATION 

Older Adults Hit Hardest by Shingles

Nearly 1 million Americans develop shingles, a painful skin infection, each year. Older adults are most susceptible to its painful aftermath, called postherpetic neuralgia, or PHN. However, early intervention and aggressive treatment can reduce the pain associated with shingles and the chance of developing PHN.

Anyone who has had chickenpox can develop shingles, which is caused by the same virus. Lying dormant in nerve roots near the spine, the virus is triggered by aging, stress or a weakened immune system. Symptoms include initial tingling and then sharp, burning pain, followed by a red rash, bumps and a cluster of blisters, typically on one side of the trunk.

If you think you might have shingles, seek medical attention right away. For an appointment with a Cleveland Clinic physician, call 216/444-2273 or 800/223-2273.



Is It More Than Aging?

A rare condition mimics Alzheimer's and dementia

Linda Craig, a 64-year-old Kansas City resident, had been on medication for Parkinson's disease for about eight months when her symptoms rapidly worsened. She experienced increased difficulty walking and talking, a harder time controlling her bladder and trouble performing multiple tasks.

Her physician recommended increasing her medication. Then, by chance, she learned of a little-known condition called normal pressure hydrocephalus, or NPH, which causes a buildup of fluid in the brain and the same symptoms Craig was experiencing. Desperate for a second opinion, she contacted The Cleveland Clinic.

What to Watch For

"The three hallmark symptoms of NPH—gait imbalance, mental slowing and urinary incontinence—resemble those of other age-related diseases, so patients often are misdiagnosed," says Cleveland Clinic neurosurgeon and co-director of the Aging Brain Clinic Mark Luciano, M.D., Ph.D. "A CT or MRI scan is vital to making an accurate diagnosis."

It's unknown exactly how many individuals have NPH, but some estimates suggest about 375,000 people.



Make NPH a Distant Memory

Unlike the effects of strokes or Alzheimer's disease, the symptoms of NPH can be reversed. Treatment involves surgically implanting a shunt, which diverts the excess fluid to another part of the body, where it is easily and safely absorbed.

Imaging tests revealed that Craig had NPH. She underwent treatment at The Cleveland Clinic and was back home within a few days. Less than two weeks later, her symptoms were already fading.

To learn more about age-related diseases of the brain, or for a free brochure on the Aging Brain Clinic, call 216/444-8919 or 800/545-7718. ●

Win a \$100 Target gift card! See inside for details.

Bon Voyage!



Planning to travel to an exotic destination this year? Whether you're taking a cruise or long flight, here's how to have a healthy and enjoyable vacation.

- **Pack smart.** Remember to pack all your medications in your carry-on bag, and don't forget over-the-counter antidiarrheal medicine and an antibacterial hand sanitizer. Know what your insurance will cover overseas, too.
- **Get vaccinated.** Find out what vaccinations you might need for your destination by visiting the U.S. Centers for Disease Control

and Prevention's (CDC) Web site, www.cdc.gov, and clicking on "Travelers' Health."

- **Stretch regularly.** Deep-vein thrombosis is a life-threatening condition that can occur when a blood clot forms in the leg or hip, then breaks free and travels to your heart or lungs. If you'll be sitting for extended periods of time, exercise your lower leg muscles and avoid sitting with your legs crossed.
- **Boil it, cook it, peel it or forget it.** The CDC recommends that you only eat thoroughly cooked food or fruits and vegetables you have

Familiarize yourself with travel health warnings before you travel. Visit the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention online at www.cdc.gov/travel/destinat.htm.

peeled yourself, and only drink water or carbonated drinks in bottles or cans. Avoid ice cubes. ●

Helping Others, Helping Yourself

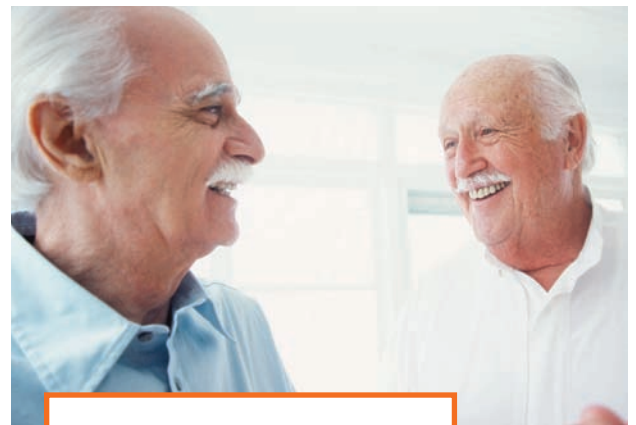
Helping others can be as beneficial for the volunteer as for the recipient. While volunteering boosts feelings of self-worth and accomplishment, studies have shown that it might also increase longevity.

According to the U.S. Administration on Aging, 15 million people—that's about one-third of Americans who volunteer—are older adults. Seniors make ideal volunteers since they have the experience, wisdom and time to help with many activities. So rather than stay home, keep active by helping those in need. Ask

yourself how much time you can realistically donate, which causes are important to you and what skills you can offer.

In addition to hospitals, libraries, museums and local parks, consider the following volunteer opportunities:

- adult homes and nursing facilities
- Big Brothers/Big Sisters



To volunteer at a Cleveland Clinic Health System hospital, call the CCHS hospital near you or log on to www.cchs.net.

- Meals on Wheels
 - neighborhood watch programs
- You can

also check out senior organizations, such as the National Retiree Volunteer Coalition, AARP and Senior Corps, for additional opportunities. ●



Make the Most of These Years

Join your Senior Circle Plus (SCP) friends on day trips and other social events. To learn more about your benefits as an SCP member, call **866/YES-CCHS (937-2247)**, or view individual hospital calendars on the Web at **www.cchs.net/seniorcircle/privileges**.

Me, Myself and I

Rediscover yourself and make these years golden

Adjusting after a spouse has passed away or children have moved is a challenge that many seniors never thought they would face. But living alone doesn't have to mean being lonely. There are many positive steps you can take to live a happy and fulfilling life on your own.

Make friends. Stay in touch with your friends and family, join a religious organization or visit your local senior center regularly. By keeping a busy social calendar, you will always have something to look forward to—and someone else looking out for you.

Keep healthy. Make sure not only to eat balanced meals, but also to make them meaningful. Invite a friend over for dinner, go to your favorite restaurant or take in the sunset while dining on your patio.

Be sure to visit your doctor regularly and exercise daily, too. According to the National Institutes of Health, regular exercise—even something as simple as taking a walk—helps people with osteoarthritis improve their joint health and reduce pain and disability. Exercise will also help reduce your risk for heart disease and other conditions. Talk with your doctor about an exercise routine that's right for you.

Stay safe. Examine the design of your home with injury prevention in mind. Does the bathroom shower have grab bars? Are there electrical cords or clutter in walkways that might cause you to fall? Visit the AARP online at **www.aarp.org/life/homedesign** for home design checklists. And if you're worried

about being injured at home when you're alone, consider installing a personal alarm system in your home that includes a call button you can wear.

Motivate yourself. Rediscover your youthful ambition and go for it. Start painting a masterpiece, write the story of your life to pass down to your children and grandchildren, or become a volunteer or foster grandparent. And keep your mind sharp by continuing to learn new things. Here are some options to consider:

- take an evening class
- learn a new language
- join a book club
- visit local museums
- attend concerts
- travel to new places

You'll find that it is possible to celebrate your senior years and live a fulfilling life. ●

Complete our survey
and enter to win
a **\$100 Target**
gift card!



Do You Know Your CRP?

Another tool to fight heart disease

A cholesterol screening can tell your doctor if you are at risk for a heart attack or stroke. Now there's a new and possibly even better marker to assist doctors, called C-reactive protein, or CRP.

The presence of CRP is associated with inflammation, which is believed to be a major factor in cardiovascular disease. CRP also is associated with an increased risk of stroke and heart attack in individuals with normal cholesterol levels, no symptoms of heart disease and none of the usual risk factors, such as obesity or smoking.

Add It to Your Annual Checkup

CRP is detected through a simple blood test that can be done at the same time as a cholesterol screening. Many physicians believe it should be a routine part of a patient's physical examination.

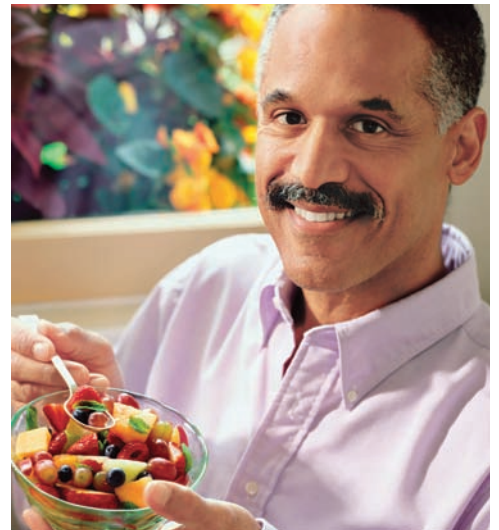
"Using CRP testing is a valuable way to gauge risk," says Cleveland Clinic Heart Center cardiologist

Deepak L. Bhatt, M.D. "A high CRP level is a marker of arterial inflammation, and arterial inflammation correlates with atherosclerosis, including unstable plaque, which can precipitate heart attacks and strokes."

What Studies Have Revealed

Studies show that CRP seems to be at least as predictive of cardiac risk as cholesterol levels. Data from the Physicians' Health Study found that elevated levels of CRP were associated with a threefold increased risk for heart attack.

In the Harvard Women's Health Study, results of the CRP test were more accurate than cholesterol levels in predicting coronary problems. Women in the group with the highest CRP levels were more than four times as likely to die from coronary disease or suffer a nonfatal heart attack or stroke. This group also was more likely to require a cardiac procedure,



such as angioplasty or bypass surgery, than women in the group with the lowest levels.

Know Your Risk

For patients who have been diagnosed with heart disease, Bhatt tests for CRP along with cholesterol, and he believes that it may be useful in the general population as well.

Eric Topol, M.D., co-chairman of the Cleveland Clinic Heart Center, told the *Washington Post*, "If I was allowed only one test, I would use CRP."

Make time to care for your heart. To schedule an appointment for cholesterol and CRP screenings at the Cleveland Clinic Heart Center, call **216/444-6697**. ●