January 2009

Happy New Year EPCC Family!

A new year is always exciting, it is a time for a fresh start and new goals. What a better way to start than with the latest information on health, diet, and exercise. In this newsletter we will cover Thyroid, Glaucoma, being a blood donor, and updates on birth defects research. We hope the information will bring inspiration to you in becoming an active health literacy advocate in your community.

Thyroid Diseases

There are many types of Thyroid diseases; two of the most diagnosed are Hyperthyroidism and Hypothyroidism.

Hyperthyroidism: This is the disease of an overactive thyroid gland which is releasing too much thyroid hormone. This hormone controls your metabolism. This causes increased nervousness, increased perspiration, rapid heartbeat, hand tremors, difficulty sleeping and weight loss.

Cause: this disease is usually caused by an autoimmune disease called Graves Disease. In this disease the immune systems antibodies stimulate the immune system to secrete antibodies that stimulate the thyroid to release hormones.

Hypothyroidism: This is the disease of an underactive thyroid gland. Not having enough thyroid hormone makes you feel cold, tired, and makes your skin dry and you will also get constipated.

Cause: the most common cause of hypothyroidism, like in hyperthyroidism, is an autoimmune disease called Hashimotos Thyroiditis Andatrophic Thyroiditis.

Source: kidshealth.com

Quote Of The Month

“Within each of us lies the power of our consent to health and sickness, to riches and poverty, to freedom and to slavery. It is we who control these, and not another.”

Richard Bach

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Glaucoma

Glaucoma is the increase in the intraocular pressure in the eye. This can lead to blindness because of the damage done to the optic nerve. Glaucoma is sometimes referred to as the silent thief of sight, especially in open angle glaucoma that is not painful.

Symptoms:
- Gradual loss of vision
- Tunnel vision
- Nausea and vomiting
- Visual disturbances especially in low light
- Blurred vision
- Halos around lights
- Reddening of the eye

Regular eye exams are the best way to catch glaucoma early enough to start a preventative treatment. If you are experience two or more of the symptoms you should seek medical care.

Cause:
The definite cause for glaucoma is still not clear; however, we do know that the cause is the buildup of aqueous humor in the eye. Closed angle glaucoma is caused by the drainage angle being narrowed and not letting the aqueous humor flow out properly. Opened angle glaucoma is caused by the over production of the aqueous humor.

Risk factors:
- Being over 60 is an increased risk of glaucoma
- African Americans are 6 times more likely to get glaucoma. Mexican Americans are also at an increased risk.
- Family history of glaucoma
- Hypertension, heart disease and thyroid problems can also increase your risk for glaucoma
- Any eye injury that can lead to the increase in intraocular pressure
- Being nearsided increases the risk for glaucoma
- Using corticosteroids for a prolonged period also increases the risk for glaucoma

Source: mayoclinic.com

The latest on Birth Defects

Birth defects are structural or functional abnormalities present at birth that cause physical or mental disability. Some of them may be fatal. Researchers have identified thousands of different birth defects. Currently, birth defects are the leading cause of death for infants during the first year of life. Most birth defects happen during the first 3 months of pregnancy. One out of every 33 babies in the United States is born with a birth defect.

Birth defects can be caused by genetic factors and by a variety of environmental injuries such as infection, radiation, and drug exposure during pregnancy. Consumption of alcohol and other drugs, as well as malnutrition can contribute to the development of birth defects. The majority of birth defects, however, are without detectable cause.

The most common birth defects include:

- Neural Tube Defects
  - Spina bifida
  - Anencephaly
- Cleft lip and/or palate
- Heart defects
- Cerebral Palsy
- Cystic Fibrosis
- Down Syndrome
- Muscular Dystrophy
- Sickle Cell Disease
- Fetal Alcohol Syndrome
- Tay-Sachs disease

Source: www.medicinenet.com
In The News

Babies Born Just a Few Weeks Too Soon at Greater Risk of Cerebral Palsy and Other Developmental Delays

- The March of Dimes organization reports that babies born just a few weeks prematurely are more than three times as likely to have cerebral palsy than full-term infants – adding to the mounting evidence that the last few weeks of pregnancy are critical to a child’s health and development. The team of researchers from the March of Dimes, Kaiser Permanente Division of Research, Columbia University and the Harvard School of Public Health analyzed the medical records of more than 140,000 children born in California between January 2000 and June 2004 who had at least one follow-up doctor visit.
- These children had health insurance coverage through the Kaiser system and as a result had access to preventive care, diagnostic tests and treatments. Findings include that the earlier an infant was born, the higher the risk of some neuro-developmental problems, infants born between 30 and 33 weeks gestation were nearly eight times as likely as full-term infants to have cerebral palsy.
- However, exactly it is important to mention that what causes the increased risk of cerebral palsy and neuro-developmental delays in late preterm infants cannot be determined from this study, and should be the subject of future research, the investigators said.

Source:
http://www.marchofdimes.com/aboutus/22684_48756.asp

Birth-Defect Research Breakthrough

- Scientists have discovered how to prevent certain craniofacial disorders in what could ultimately lead to at-risk babies being treated in the womb. The University of Manchester researchers, working with colleagues at the Stowers Institute for Medical Research in Kansas, have successfully treated mice with Treacher Collins syndrome - a rare genetic disorder characterized by underdeveloped facial bones, absent or deformed ears and occasionally cleft palate.
- The team had previously found that the condition, which affects one in 10,000 individuals, was caused by a mutation in a single gene called TCOF1. They later discovered that this mutation causes cells, known as neural crest cells, to die prematurely in the early stages of pregnancy resulting in the facial anomalies. The researchers have shown that preventing the neural crest cells from dying allowed mice with the Treacher Collins gene to develop normally. The principle, say the authors, could also be applied to other single-gene birth defects. The anomalies caused by Treacher Collins syndrome, including underdeveloped jaw and cheek bones, occur during the first few weeks of pregnancy. Since tests to identify the disorder in the unborn child can only be carried out at nine weeks, long after the damage has been done, any future treatment would have to target those babies most at risk.

"This is an exciting step in our investigations and, once we have found a safe method of stimulating the production of neural crest cells in mice, we can look at early clinical trials in humans."

Source:
www.medicalnewstoday.com/University of Manchester
Exercise

As we age our body’s connective tissues – muscles, tendons, and ligaments – start to shorten and tighten, and lose elasticity. Add poor posture (causes tightening and slows bloodflow) and minimal exercise creates a build-up of calcifications (the hard knots that are in the upper back, hunchback look). Flexibility can be recovered by stretching regularly. By stretching you will lengthen the muscles and tendons. When muscles are flexible the joints can completely flex, extend, and move in many directions. The following are tips on stretching and some simple stretching exercises.

1. Follow a program that is specific to your activities and needs.
2. Stretch regularly, at least 3 times a week.
3. Warm up before stretching.
4. Stretch only to the point where you feel tension in the belly of the muscle, not pain in the joint.
5. Hold each stretch for 15 – 60 seconds.
6. Do each stretch 2 – 4 times.
7. Stay relaxed.
8. Breathe throughout the stretch.
9. Progress in a slow, controlled manner.
10. Do not bounce.

Reduce Stiffness
Kneel on your hands and knees with your head, neck, and back in alignment. Keeping your shoulders relaxed, lower your chin toward your chest, pull in your belly, and round your back (like a cat arching). Hold, and then slowly return to the starting position. Next, arch your back, creating an inward curve with your butt lifted toward the ceiling and your head looking up just slightly. Hold, and then repeat the sequence.

Relieve Stress
Sit on edge of a chair with your pelvis tilted slightly forward toward the floor and your legs spread as wide as comfortable. Slide your chin back so that your ears align over your shoulders. Lift your chest and squeeze your shoulder blades together and down away from your ears. Reach both arms wide and slightly behind you. Your palms should be facing forward, fingers spread. Do not arch your lower back. Hold, and then repeat.

Prevent Soreness
Stand with your feet a few inches apart and one leg about 1 – 2 feet in front of the other. Bend your knees, making sure your front knee is directly over the ankle. Your back heel will come off the floor. Keep your posture upright as you tuck in your abdomen and butt and tilt your pelvis. Hold. Repeat.

Source: www.prevention.com