Healthy Family, Happy Family

Keeping yourself and your family healthy can seem like a full-time job.

With UPMC HealthTrak, you now have a convenient way to manage your health anytime and anywhere.

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When to Get Help

Your back is an integral part of everyday movement, providing strength, flexibility, and stability for the entire body. Keeping your back healthy means knowing when to get help for an injury.

Minor back injuries can be self-treated with rest; over-the-counter anti-inflammatory medication for pain; the use of ice for the first 48 hours, followed by heat; and exercises to build the core muscles of the stomach and lower back.

However, Dr. El-Kadi recommends that you seek prompt medical attention if you experience any of the following after sustaining a back injury:

• Any neurologic symptoms such as numbness, weakness, or searing pain down the leg
• Bowel or bladder problems
• Pain that gets progressively worse
• Pain at night or at rest
• Longer-than-usual recovery time

For more information about the Spine Center at UPMC Passavant, or to make an appointment, call 1-877-967-2225, or visit www.UPMC.com/Passavant.

Coming Back from a Back Injury

UPMC Passavant’s state-of-the-art spine care services offer the latest surgical and nonsurgical treatments

Nearly 12,000 spinal injuries occur in the United States each year. While most are the result of motor vehicle accidents or falls, nearly 12 percent are the result of sports-related injuries. An accident, a sudden fall, or the accumulated trauma of several minor injuries can sideline anyone with a serious back injury.

Just ask John Busse* of Charleston, W. Va. The gifted basketball player started playing on his high school’s varsity team as a freshman. By his senior year, John was close to matching the high school record of legendary NBA player and fellow West Virginian Jerry West. But then he started experiencing lower back pain.

“I can’t blame my herniated disk on any one injury,” says John, now a wildlife biology/pre-vet major in his junior year at Auburn University in Alabama. “I continued playing until I realized I couldn’t really feel my legs any more.”

Following in his father’s footsteps

John’s dad — himself an active outdoorsman — wasted no time convincing his son to make the journey to Pittsburgh’s North Hills for evaluation by Matt El-Kadi, MD, chief of Neurosurgery at UPMC Passavant and clinical professor, University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine. “My dad had undergone four failed back surgeries until Dr. El-Kadi operated on him. There was no question that’s where I wanted to go,” adds John.

The Spine Center at UPMC Passavant features one of the region’s most comprehensive programs for the treatment of spine injuries, with a multidisciplinary team of specialists who can provide both surgical and nonsurgical options.

“We’re generally able to treat most back pain and injuries with conservative measures (including rest, medication, and physical therapy),” explains Dr. El-Kadi. “When an operation is the only option, we specialize in minimally invasive surgery, which incurs less damage to muscle tissue so that patients generally recover more quickly and experience less postoperative pain.”

Spine Center offers advanced neurologic services

Individuals with back injuries have access to the latest imaging and diagnostic tools at the Spine Center. UPMC Passavant’s new pavilion also houses a complete navigation suite for spine surgery where surgeons can perform a wide range of complex and advanced spine surgeries that attract patients from hundreds of miles away.

While most herniated disks don’t require surgery, it was John’s only recourse due to the extent of his injury. “Everything went like clockwork. Except for being a little stiff right after the operation, the whole thing was painless,” he says. “I did physical therapy for a few months afterward, too, mostly for reconditioning. Nothing has stopped me since — I’m now playing intramural basketball and football at Auburn.”

* John Busse’s treatment and results may not be representative of similar cases.
Everyone gets a stomachache — or abdominal pain — from time to time. Usually, stomachaches are harmless conditions caused by overeating, gas, or indigestion. Frequent or recurring stomachaches are often due to stress and worry, even in children. But they can point to more serious medical problems.

Harmless abdominal pain usually subsides or goes away within two hours. If you have the stomach flu, your stomach may hurt before each episode of vomiting or diarrhea. In serious cases, the pain worsens or becomes constant.

According to gastroenterologists at UPMC Passavant, you should call your primary care physician if mild pain lasts more than a couple of days, or if the pain is accompanied by other symptoms.

The primary goal of drug therapy is to reduce inflammation in the intestines. Medications include anti-inflammatory drugs; antibiotics to kill germs in the intestinal track; probiotics to restore good bacteria; corticosteroids to provide short-term relief during flare-ups; and immunosuppressants.

In addition, the IBD Center recently developed a Visceral Inflammation and Pain (VIP) Center to help patients deal with both the physical pain and emotional stress of coping with IBD.

Exciting breakthroughs

The latest generation of drugs, called biologic therapies, are proving very effective in inducing remission so that patients can lead normal lives.

At UPMC, doctors took this approach a step further — as in John’s case — by prescribing biologic anti-TNF therapy after performing surgery to remove the damaged section of the intestine. In use now at other hospitals, this treatment has reduced the recurrence of Crohn’s disease in patients by nearly two thirds.

* John Oliver’s treatment and results may not be representative of similar cases.

IBD: Who’s at risk?

Nearly two million Americans live with IBD, which is not to be confused with irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). IBD involves two chronic diseases that cause inflammation of the intestines: ulcerative colitis and Crohn’s disease. Symptoms include abdominal cramps and pain, diarrhea, weight loss, and bleeding.

Crohn’s disease can affect any part of the small and large intestines, while ulcerative colitis affects the large bowel alone.

IBD cuts across all ages, genders, and ethnicities, but generally affects Caucasians ages 15 to 35. While the exact cause is not known, experts believe IBD involves a compromised or overactive immune system. Because IBD may run in families, doctors also believe genetics plays a role. While stress and certain foods do not cause IBD, both can make symptoms worse.

Treatment

According to Dr. Regueiro, drugs cannot cure IBD, but they can be effective in reducing the inflammation and accompanying symptoms. While some patients have mild symptoms requiring little medication, others have more debilitating flareups, and some patients have severe problems requiring surgery and even transplants.

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Good Night, Sleep Tight!

Are you among the millions of Americans suffering from lack of sleep? If so, droopy eyelids, wide yawns, and low energy are the least of your worries. Sleep disruption — not sleeping enough or sleeping poorly — can affect your memory, disease resistance, and leave you struggling to stay alert in school, on the job, and on the road.

Studies show that people who get the appropriate amount of sleep on a regular basis also tend to live longer, healthier lives than those who sleep too few or even too many hours each night. So, what is a good night’s sleep?

According to the National Institutes of Health, most adults need seven to eight hours of sleep a night. School-aged children and teens need at least nine hours of sleep each night.

Tips to help you sleep

• **Stick to a sleep schedule.** Get up about the same time each day, no matter how many hours of sleep you got the previous night.

• **Maintain healthy sleep habits.** Go to bed only when you’re sleepy. Make sure your bedroom is quiet, dark, and relaxing — not too hot or too cold. Don’t text, e-mail, read, or watch TV in bed.

• **Make sure your mattress is comfortable.** Remember, even a good quality mattress needs to be replaced within 10 years.

• **Exercise is great, but not too late.** Avoid exercising within a few hours before bedtime.

• **Avoid caffeinated drinks after lunch.** The stimulating effects of caffeine in coffee, colas, teas, and chocolate can take as long as eight hours to wear off.

• **Avoid large meals at night.** A large meal can cause indigestion that interferes with sleep.

• **Avoid alcoholic drinks before bedtime.** While a nightcap may help you relax, alcohol keeps you in the lighter stages of sleep and tends to wake you during the night.

**And, for adolescents and young adults:**

• **Avoid stimulating activities around bedtime.** This includes intense studying, text messaging, video games, and lengthy phone conversations.

• **Avoid pulling “all nighters” during exams.**

• **Sleep in on weekends — but not more than two to three hours past your normal wake time.** Sleeping longer may disrupt your body clock.

Find a more complete list of the benefits of good sleep at www.UPMC.com/Today.

Are You Allergic to Your Bed?

The dust in your bedroom might be making you sick.

Dust mites, and dander, and fibers — oh my! These are just some of the microscopic menaces in ordinary house dust that can cause health problems.

Dust mites are a common cause of allergies and asthma. It’s not the dust mite itself that can make you sick; it’s the dust mite debris (the mite’s feces and decaying body).

Dust collects in every room of the house because it is easily trapped in linens, upholstery, carpets, and draperies. But the bedroom is a favorite habitat for dust mites because it provides a warm, humid environment, and plenty of food (dead skin from humans and pets).

**Five ways to help wipe out dust mites**

While you can’t completely eliminate dust mites, these simple steps may help reduce their numbers:

1. **Cover your mattress and pillows in dust-proof or allergen-blocking covers, and encase box springs in vinyl or plastic covers.**

2. **Wash and dry bed sheets, pillowcases, blankets, curtains, and bedcovers weekly in hot water (140 degrees Fahrenheit).** If bedding can’t be washed, put the items in the dryer set at a high temperature for 20 minutes.

3. **Vacuum carpeting and upholstery weekly.** Using a HEPA-filter vacuum can help keep dust from floating back into the air.

4. **Use a damp cloth or mop to remove dust from hard surfaces and exposed floors.** This will prevent dust from becoming airborne and resettling.

5. **Keep the indoor temperature at 70 degrees Fahrenheit and humidity at no more than 50 percent.**

Dust mites aren’t the only puny pests that can invade your bedroom. Bed bugs have made a comeback in recent years. For tips on ways to avoid a bed bug infestation, visit www.UPMC.com/Today.

Sources: National Institutes of Health, Environmental Protection Agency
Keeping track of health issues, test results, and medications is challenging for Sandy Hogue*, who is disabled and chronically ill. Because she must rely on cabs for transportation, seeing a primary care doctor can be an all-day affair.

That’s why she was eager to sign up for UPMC HealthTrak, an Internet-based service that enables patients to receive and manage information about their health. Sandy uses it to monitor her glucose and high cholesterol levels, check test results, make appointments, renew prescriptions, and diagnose medical conditions — all from the comfort of her home in Westmoreland County.

“It’s a good system. I get the medical treatment I need faster without spending a day traveling around,” says Sandy. “It keeps me in contact with my doctor and helps me monitor my medical conditions. And if I have anything contagious, like the flu, it prevents me from infecting other people.”

More patients choosing HealthTrak

Approximately 42,000 UPMC patients have signed on to HealthTrak, which gives them secure electronic access to their medical records, medications, and other information. HealthTrak recently was expanded to include eVisits — an online digital house call — with a primary care physician.

During an eVisit, patients select a symptom and complete an interactive questionnaire. A UPMC doctor then reviews the information and makes a diagnosis. If medication is needed, a prescription can be sent electronically to the patient’s pharmacy.

Oakmont resident Mark Gleeson* uses HealthTrak primarily to keep track of his medical records. In October, when the computer-savvy 83-year-old came down with a cough and cold late in the day, he decided to “see” a doctor via eVisit. Within an hour of completing the questionnaire, a UPMC doctor responded with medical instructions and a prescription for his sinus infection and chest congestion.

“It was so convenient, and it worked! Within three days, I felt good as new,” Mark says.

Convenience and comfort

As a graduate student, Robin Sales* relied on HealthTrak to connect with her hometown doctor while attending school in Nevada. Now a young professional living in New York City, she continues to use the online service for eVisits, to fill prescriptions, and access her medical records.

“It’s comforting. Having easy access to a doctor back home gives me the chance to find the right doctor for me locally, without rushing into it. It’s one less thing to worry about,” she says.

Robin, who first used eVisit to consult a doctor about an eye infection, says the online questionnaire asks the same questions the doctor would ask at an appointment. When she needs medicine, her doctor in Pittsburgh faxes the prescription to her New York drug store two minutes away.

“HealthTrak is great for college students who are far from home, the elderly, and other people who have trouble getting to the doctor. It doesn’t take the place of going to the doctor for regular check-ups, but it’s very useful,” Robin says. “If only UPMC could figure a way for me to see my dentist online!”

UPMC HealthTrak Benefits

Manage your health from home with HealthTrak. Here’s what you can do online:

- Send a message to your doctor
- View medical records and test results
- Renew prescriptions
- Track current health issues such as glucose levels and blood pressure
- Request appointments
- Ask billing questions
- “See” a doctor (digital house call)

For more information or to sign up, visit www.UPMCHealthTrak.com.
Imagine being in a terrible car accident on your way to the mall. For days and weeks afterwards, you constantly relive the accident in your mind. You take a different route to shop and, worst of all, your body won’t let you relax. You can’t sleep — and when you finally do doze off, you’re awakened by nightmares. You can’t concentrate, your heart pounds, and you break out in cold sweats.

“We know that anyone who has undergone some kind of trauma can be at risk for posttraumatic stress disorder,” explains Anne Germain, PhD, associate professor of Psychiatry at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine. Based at Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic of UPMC, she currently leads several sleep research projects with returning veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan who have PTSD.

PTSD can be triggered by a single event you’ve experienced or even witnessed — be it an accident, violent crime, or natural disaster — or by ongoing trauma, such as child abuse or domestic violence.

When we experience a life-threatening event, it’s normal for our body to react with a powerful, stressful response; it’s what enables us to fight or flee.

“But for some people, these symptoms persist and worsen,” says Dr. Germain. “The toll can be profound if symptoms are ignored. PTSD has a devastating impact on the lives of people who have it — and on those around them. It also has enormous financial and economic implications.”

PTSD is a relatively new specialization in psychology, and experts are still trying to determine why it affects some people and not others. Fortunately, for most people, the symptoms of PTSD begin to ease in about a month. “If they continue, it’s extremely important to seek professional help,” notes Dr. Germain. “The best place to begin is to talk with your family doctor and seek a referral to a qualified psychologist or psychiatrist.”

**Did You Know?**

UPMC’s Sleep Medicine Center — accredited by the American Academy of Sleep Medicine — is the only multidisciplinary sleep medicine facility in western Pennsylvania. The center performs approximately 2,000 sleep studies annually for adult patients with all types of sleep disorders. The staff at the UPMC Sleep Medicine Center include board certified physicians, certified nurse practitioners, and registered sleep laboratory technologists.

To schedule an appointment, call 412-692-2880.

**Posttraumatic Stress Disorder**

*Most of us associate posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) with returning military veterans who have experienced the tragedy of war. But you don’t have to be a soldier to undergo the intense feelings of helplessness, horror, and fear that characterize PTSD.*

PTSD and sleep disorders

Among the most troubling aspects of chronic PTSD for patients are the recurring nightmares and insomnia it can bring. There is growing evidence that such sleep disorders have a direct impact on both a person’s mental and physical health.

Individuals with PTSD often say they have problems falling or staying asleep, and that the sleep they get isn’t refreshing and restorative. “Our sleep research studies with veterans show that they have many more sleep disorders than the general public, including sleep apnea and other breathing problems,” notes Dr. Germain.

With PTSD, nightmares can become an ingrained behavior, affecting a person’s daytime functioning — from faltering concentration and poor memory, to emotional outbursts.

“By stopping the nightmares and helping to make sleep more normal, restful, and restorative, patients can overcome other aspects of chronic PTSD in their lives a bit more easily. And sleep can be improved in a matter of weeks,” she says.

Dr. Germain uses several methods to treat PTSD-related sleep disorders, including image reversal therapy. “We help patients replace a recurring nightmare with a more positive, affirming dream. They write it down and rehearse it several times a day to train the brain to have a new dream image.”

Individuals interested in participating in Dr. Germain’s sleep research studies for military veterans are invited to call 412-246-6404 or visit www.veteranssleep.pitt.edu.
Understanding the Cardiovascular System and You
Tuesday, Mar. 15, 6:30 p.m.
Tuesday, Apr. 19, 6:30 p.m.
CCAC North Campus
Speakers: Daniel Edmundowicz, MS, MD, FACC and Darlene Loebig, RN
These educational sessions are for those who want to begin living a heart healthy lifestyle. Please call 412-369-3701 to register.

Colorectal Cancer: What You Need to Know
Wednesday, Mar. 16, 12:30 p.m.
Senior Center, Cranberry Township Municipal Building
Speaker: Ved Kaushik, MD
Prevention, detection, and advancements in treatment options related to colorectal cancer will be discussed at this seminar. Please call 412-367-6640 to register.

Autism Through the Lifespan
Wednesday (day one), Apr. 13, 8 a.m.
Thursday (day two), Apr. 14, 8 a.m.
Passavant Hospital Foundation Conference Center and Legacy Theatre
This two-day event will cover autism from early childhood to adolescence (day one), and adolescence through adulthood (day two). CEUs available. Registration is required. For more information, visit www.passavanthospitalfoundation.org.

Good Nutrition for Seniors: Attaining and Maintaining a Healthy Lifestyle
Wednesday, Apr. 20, 12:30 p.m.
Senior Center, Cranberry Township Municipal Building
Speaker: Joan Avolio, RN, LDN
Learn about healthy eating and exercise, and practical ways to incorporate good nutrition into day-to-day living. Please call 412-367-6640 to register.

Legacy Music Series
UPMC Passavant–McCandless
Passavant Hospital Foundation is seeking talented musicians who want to help lift people's spirits and volunteer their time to give the gift of music. Inquiries are now being accepted for 2011 dates. Please call 412-367-6640 for more information.
The strength of UPMC’s advanced spine care is right here.

If you’re suffering from back or neck pain, put your trust in the experts at UPMC Passavant. Our world-class, specially trained surgical team delivers high-quality care for spinal injuries and painful disk conditions, including highly advanced fusion techniques and the latest in minimally invasive procedures. And with the addition of several high-tech operating rooms in our new pavilion, our surgeons have access to real-time, integrated, 3-D imaging. This can increase the accuracy of stabilization techniques, minimize operating time, and enable surgeons to perform more complex procedures closer to your home. We even offer a full range of nonsurgical options, including on-site physical and occupational therapy programs. It all adds up to the premier spine care center north of the city.

Call us at 1-800-533-UPMC or visit UPMC.com/Passavant