

WINTER 2006

PREMIERE ISSUE!

# Health Connection

A PUBLICATION OF BARSTOW COMMUNITY HOSPITAL

## Dedicated doctors

More contact, better care

## A sharper image

New technology at BCH

## When is the ER your best option?

Finding the right  
doctors for your family

How health-wise  
are you?

Find out inside!

 **BARSTOW  
COMMUNITY  
HOSPITAL**



# Nimble body, nimble mind

## Question:

To fight memory loss and dementia, it's a good idea to:

- A. do a crossword puzzle
- B. take up a new hobby
- C. exercise regularly
- D. all of the above

If you answered D, you're right. Scientists now know it takes more than mental stimulation to keep your brain sharp well into your later years. Physical activity gives your body and your brain a boost. A half-hour of moderate exercise—walking, golfing, gardening, performing household chores—on most days of the week can help you think more clearly and feel better at any age.

## HOW EXERCISE HELPS

Exercise increases blood flow to your brain, promoting brain-cell growth, and helps reduce stress—important since chronic stress causes the release of hormones that can damage your brain over time. Some studies suggest exercise increases levels of important chemicals that maintain brain health. Other studies on mice show that exercise appears to delay or prevent plaque development in brain regions used in memory, thinking and decision making.

Regular exercise also helps preserve healthy brain functioning by:

- **Reducing your risk for heart disease.** Exercise lowers homocysteine, an amino acid in your blood that makes

nerve cells in the brain stop working and die.

- **Controlling your blood sugar.** Diabetes is linked with several types of dementia, including Alzheimer's and vascular dementia (common to stroke survivors). Both aerobic and weight-bearing exercises control your blood sugar by increasing your metabolism.
- **Lowering your blood pressure.** Unchecked, high blood pressure can damage blood vessels in your brain and reduce its oxygen supply, leading to a decline in decision making, memory and verbal skills.
- **Controlling your body weight and improving physical fitness.** Studies show a link between dementia and being overweight, possibly because overweight individuals have more cardiovascular risk factors associated with dementia than people at a healthy weight.

## DIVERSITY IS KEY

For the most brain benefits, vary your exercise routine often. It's not how hard you exercise but how many activities you participate in that's key to preventing cognitive decline. Johns Hopkins University found that adults ages 65 and older who were involved in a number of activities (such as walking, biking, swimming, dancing and bowling) experienced less dementia than people who participated in fewer activities. One explanation could be that the variety of activities keeps more parts of the brain active.

So don't worry about how much you're sweating or how vigorously you're moving—just enjoy a variety of activities every day and keep trying new ones.

**W**ith good health habits and a little luck, you may never face a sudden medical crisis. But sooner or later, many of us find ourselves involved in one. Suppose it's chest pain, stomach cramps or a nasty kitchen accident—what's the right response? Should you get emergency help or just go see your family doctor?

A true medical emergency is a situation that's life threatening or could cause permanent harm if not treated immediately. Every minute counts. That's the difference between cases needing instant, emergency room intervention and those your doctor can handle in the office.

Doctors say there are no wrong reasons to call for medical assistance in a real emergency, especially if it's heart related. At such a critical time, don't drive yourself to the ER or get someone else to drive you—it could be dangerous. Plus, you need the expertise and equipment that's in an ambulance.

Below are examples of symptoms that constitute a medical emergency. Call for emergency assistance right away if you or a friend experiences any of them. And remember, if you're ever in doubt, play it safe and get help. It could save a life.

#### **SEEK EMERGENCY TREATMENT ...**

##### **In cases of trauma:**

- uncontrollable bleeding
- wounds with gaping edges



- wounds that involve the face or hands
- wounds caused by a puncture or wounds in which glass, metal or other objects have pierced the body
- severe burns
- head, neck or back injuries
- abdominal injuries or sudden, severe abdominal pain
- problems with movement or feeling after injury
- suspected broken bones
- animal or human bites
- contact with poisonous substances
- sunburn with nausea, vomiting, fever and chills

# When the ER is your best option

## Medical conditions that require emergency care

#### **Any time these symptoms are present:**

- chest discomfort
- difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- nausea, dizziness, fainting or profuse sweating, especially when combined with chest pain and breathing difficulty—classic signs of heart attack
- sudden numbness on one side of the face or limbs, confusion, slurred speech, vision loss, severe headache or dizziness—all signs of a possible stroke
- severe allergic reactions from insect bites, food or beverages
- sudden or persistent vomiting or diarrhea
- coughing up or vomiting blood
- fainting, dizziness or hallucinations
- convulsions or seizures
- stiff neck with fever or headache
- sudden severe fever coupled with sensitivity to light
- stupor or dazed behavior
- drug or alcohol overdose
- attempted suicide or suicidal threats or statements

## Dear readers,

I hope you enjoy the first edition of *Health Connection*, our new quarterly newsletter. We want to keep our community as informed as possible about the many changes, opportunities and innovations at Barstow Community Hospital (BCH).

As you're reading this, we're putting the final signatures on an agreement to build a new facility in Barstow. The new state-of-the-art hospital will be directly across from our present site and will feature paperless charts and filmless X-rays, along with private rooms and an expanded emergency room (ER), to name just a few of the amenities.

While we prepare for the new hospital, we're not standing still. We're the only hospital in the High Desert with the latest high-speed, high-resolution computed tomography (CT) scanner and an open magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) system. (For more about this new technology, read *A sharper image* on page 5.) In addition, last year we added new monitors to our intensive care unit and ER and a new telemetry system.

*Dedicated to your health*, on page 8, explains our new hospitalist program. The addition of hospitalists to our healthcare team is another first for BCH and a great benefit to the patients and physicians who've supported us for so many years. The hospitalist program ensures you'll have a dedicated physician providing your primary care throughout your hospital stay.

Recently, we launched Discovery Hospital on our Web site, [www.barstowhospital.com](http://www.barstowhospital.com), to provide you with the information and tools you need to manage your personal health and gain a greater understanding of health issues you may be confronting. This partnership allies our community with Discovery Communications, one of the world's most trusted media companies, which provides award-winning cable health programming to more than 60 million households via the Discovery Health Channel and DiscoveryHealth.com.

Our Web site features numerous educational and interactive components, including a medical library on various diseases and conditions, an anatomy explorer, a body mass calculator, explanations of various procedures and tests, nutrition information, a symptom explanation module, health centers and more. This new service is just one more way we strive to provide quality care ... close to home.



RANDALL HEMPLING  
Chief Executive Officer  
Barstow Community Hospital



Find Discovery Hospital's health information on our Web site, [www.barstowhospital.com](http://www.barstowhospital.com).

# A sharper image

New high-tech equipment gives doctors an inside view

**B**arstow Community Hospital (BCH) recently purchased a \$1.5 million open magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) system and a high-tech multi-slice computed tomography (CT)

scanner. This noninvasive, high-tech imaging equipment provides the most advanced diagnostic imaging techniques available to patients. It improves patient comfort, reduces procedure time and allows our physicians to effectively detect and treat a range of life-threatening illnesses.

## OPEN MRI

MRIs allow physicians to look inside the human body and obtain anatomical and functional diagnostic information. They generate high-quality images through the use of an effective, yet safe, magnetic field. MRI uses no radiation and is noninvasive, and there are no known side effects or aftereffects.

Our patients will be pleased with the increased comfort offered by the new MRI. The patient area is open on all four sides, which minimizes anxiety and claustrophobia in most cases. The new MRI also features a lightning-fast workstation computer to make the procedure as quick as possible.

## CT SCANNER

A CT scan produces a cross-sectional image of the human anatomy, which helps the clinician rule out or confirm the presence of disease and, in some cases, evaluate the extent of injuries to a trauma patient. The new CT scanner enables our doctors to more effectively detect and treat a range of illnesses, including heart disease, cancer, stroke



Our new imaging equipment produces highly detailed images that can help doctors detect and treat diseases.

and lung disease. Discovering disease in an early stage, when a wider array of effective treatment options may be available, helps doctors make an accurate diagnosis and recommend appropriate treatment for patients.

The extensive image information our radiologists receive from the new CT scanner includes detailed 3-D images that can be used for diagnosis and quickly shared with referring physicians and surgeons, when needed, for presurgical planning, treatment evaluation and follow-up. The unmatched speed and submillimeter detail of the new CT scanner also contributes to more rapid assessment and decision making in trauma cases, when life and death decisions must be made within minutes.

All CT scanners use X-rays, but the new scanner uses a significantly lower amount of X-ray energy than many other CT systems. Another advantage is that we now can provide heavier patients with a CT scan. The new scanner has a weight capacity of up to 440 pounds.

## Join us!

**C**ome see for yourself how this new technology can make a difference for you and your family. BCH's Radiology Department is hosting an open house on Thursday, March 23, at 4 p.m. No appointment is necessary.

## HEALTHWISE QUIZ

### How much do you know about **asthma**?

Test your knowledge and learn more about asthma.

- 1** Which of the following statements about asthma is *not* true?
- Cockroaches are a major trigger of asthma symptoms.
  - Asthma can develop at any age.
  - Approximately 4,000 Americans die from asthma each year.
  - People with severe asthma should avoid exercise.

- 2** Which of the following is a risk factor for asthma?
- hay fever
  - chronic sinusitis
  - obesity
  - all of the above

- 3** Asthma is the most common chronic childhood disease. According to the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology, the number of U.S. children estimated to have asthma is:
- 1.5 million
  - 5 million
  - 10 million
  - 20 million

- 4** All of the following are asthma triggers *except*:
- stress
  - home appliances that use natural gas as fuel
  - corticosteroid medications
  - mold

- 5** If someone is having an asthma attack, one of the first things you should do is:
- Take him or her outside for fresh air.
  - Have him or her breathe into a paper bag.
  - Help the sufferer get his or her prescribed asthma drugs and inhaling equipment.
  - Use the sufferer's Epi-Pen to administer an injection of epinephrine.

# Conspiracy theory

How 5 risk factors join forces against your health

**W**hen it comes to heart disease, you know that risk factors like family history and being overweight don't work in your favor. Now, experts say a combination of five factors—a condition called metabolic syndrome—also conspire against you, adding up to a far greater chance of suffering a heart attack, stroke or diabetes.

You have metabolic syndrome if you have three or more of the following problems:

- **abdominal obesity**—a waist circumference of 40 inches or more for men; 35 inches or more for women
- **high blood pressure**—135/85 mm/Hg or higher
- **high triglyceride levels**—150 mg/dL or more
- **abnormal cholesterol**—HDL cholesterol levels of less than 40 mg/dL for men and 50 mg/dL for women
- **high blood glucose or insulin resistance**—a fasting glucose, or blood sugar, level of 100 mg/dL or higher

Studies show people with metabolic syndrome are twice as likely to suffer a heart attack or stroke than people without these factors.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

You can head off future trouble if you take these steps now:

- **Lose weight.** Losing as little as 5 percent to 10 percent of your body weight can reduce insulin levels and bring blood pressure down.
- **Eat healthier.** Include more fiber-rich foods like whole grains, beans, fruits and vegetables to aid weight loss and lower insulin levels. Reduce the salt, calories and fat you consume.
- **Exercise.** Get at least 30 minutes of moderately strenuous activity most days of the week.
- **Kick the habit.** Smoking increases insulin resistance and worsens many health problems.
- **Schedule regular checkups.** Get timely checks on your blood pressure, blood sugar and cholesterol levels.
- **Consider drug therapy.** Your doctor may prescribe aspirin therapy or medication to control risk factors.



# MATCH GAME

## Finding the right doctor for you and your family

**D**ifferent stages of life bring different medical scenarios. Still, one factor remains a constant: the need for a primary care provider who knows you well and can treat you and your family best. So, how should you go about choosing a primary care doctor?

The first step is to put together a list of candidates. Ask friends, family members, co-workers or people you know who work in the medical community. You'll need to find out which doctors are on your health plan.

Once you've chosen a few candidates, call their offices and find out more by asking:

1. Which hospital does the doctor use?
2. What are the practice's office hours?
3. How far in advance do I have to book a routine visit?

4. If I'm sick, will the doctor see me the day I call?
5. Who covers for the doctor when he or she isn't available?
6. How long is the average waiting room time?
7. What is the office policy on appointment cancellations?
8. What do I do if I have an emergency after office hours?
9. Does the doctor give advice over the phone for common problems?
10. How long will I have to wait for a call back from the doctor or a staff member?

Consider your interaction with staff during your phone calls. Were they friendly, efficient and knowledgeable?

Narrow your list to one or two physicians and make an appointment to talk to them. Most likely, you'll have to pay for these visits. As you talk to the doctor, notice whether he or she pays attention to your questions or seems distracted, giving "stock" answers.

Now you should be ready to choose the doctor who can treat you and your family best—and give you peace of mind.

# Food for thought

## Eating right can help you control diabetes

**I**f you're one of the 16 million Americans who have diabetes, you understand that nutrition should always take center stage. Healthy food choices, along with exercise and medication, are vital to keeping your blood sugar, or glucose, in line and avoiding complications.



hydrate intake, sugary sweets and desserts helps control blood sugar levels. However, you must consume a moderate amount of carbohydrates to supply your body with the valuable energy they provide. But choose quality fuel. Variety among all food groups is key: fresh fruits and vegetables in abundance; beans,

brown rice and whole-grain breads and cereals; lean meat, poultry and fish; and low-fat dairy products. Drink plenty of water, too, and avoid sweetened drinks. If you drink citrus juice, limit the serving to no more than 6 ounces. If you drink soda, switch to a diet variety.

It's important to stick to proper portion sizes. Learn how to measure and weigh portions. Read food labels, paying particular attention to serving sizes and total carbohydrates. A diabetes educator or dietitian can help you develop an eating plan. By learning to eat properly and controlling your weight and blood sugar levels, you can avoid most diabetes complications.

### WHEN YOU EAT

If you have diabetes, you should eat three balanced meals and two snacks a day. Spacing food and trying to eat meals at the same time each day will help control blood sugar and weight. Eating reasonable portions of carbohydrates throughout the day—instead of consuming all your servings at one meal—will keep blood sugar levels stable.

### WHAT YOU EAT

Planning what you'll eat at each meal will help you keep blood sugar within a healthy range all day. Limiting carbo-

# Dedicated to your health

Hospitalists put  
your care first



Janet Lee, D.O.



Ravindra Gautam, M.D.

**B**arstow Community Hospital (BCH) has recruited two new physicians, known as hospitalists, who specialize in caring for patients in the hospital. Ravindra Gautam, M.D., and Janet Lee, D.O., bring their hospitalist practice to BCH to provide patients with dedicated physician care during their hospital stays.

## ATTENTION TO DETAIL

Hospitalists serve as an extension of the primary care provider and attend to a patient's every need during a hospital stay—they order tests, prescribe medications and monitor results. During each step of the process, the hospitalist communicates with the patient's primary care physician to ensure the patient gets the proper care. Communication is ongoing, direct and delivered in whatever manner the primary care physician chooses. Because they communicate so thoroughly with the referring physician, hospitalists can effectively provide sound patient consultation, promptly answer patient inquiries and serve as a present, calming voice for families of those who are hospitalized.



Hospitalists help coordinate care, improve communication and assist patients and families.

## ONE PRIORITY

As hospitalists, Dr. Gautam and Dr. Lee don't have outpatient medical practices—they're dedicated solely to the acute care needs of patients in our hospital. Hospital-based physicians provide distinct advantages in terms of quality of care to hospital patients because they rapidly coordinate inpatient care and react in real time throughout the day to clinical data and changes in patients' medical status.

## SMOOTH TRANSITION

A hospitalist program gives referring physicians assurance that their patients are receiving the highest level care during an inpatient stay. When patients leave the hospital, they have a smooth transition back to their physician's office practice.

While the service is available to all physicians on our medical staff, participation is completely voluntary on the part of physicians, with each choosing whether he or she uses the service and to what extent.

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# Health Connection

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