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UConnHouseCall

REMARKABLE CARE THROUGH RESEARCH AND EDUCATION

HORMONE REPLACEMENT THERAPY: WHAT WOMEN NEED TO KNOW

In July 2002, women, their families and members of the medical community learned that some aspects of hormone replacement therapy (HRT) might not be as safe as previously thought. The news was first presented to the public after an important clinical trial, the Women's Health Initiative (WHI), suddenly halted one area of its study. The WHI study involved more than 16,000 healthy women without heart disease. "The study was designed to assess the health benefits and risks of Prempro, the most commonly used form of HRT in the United States," says Bruce T. Liang, M.D., cardiologist and chief of the division of cardiology at the UConn Health Center.

THE PROBLEM WITH HRT

After a little more than five years of continual monitoring, the researchers found that the rate of invasive breast cancer, pulmonary embolisms (blockages in the lungs) and heart disease among those taking HRT had exceeded a preset limit. For this reason, the study was called off.

"These results were not totally surprising," says Dr. Liang. "It was already known that HRT could slightly increase the risk for breast cancer and pulmonary embolisms." The real surprise was in HRT's impact on the heart. Results showed an increase in coronary heart disease in healthy women. The medical community already knew that HRT did not prevent coronary heart disease, but the finding that HRT could actually increase the risk of coronary heart disease was important new information. "HRT was thought to be protective of the heart," says Dr. Liang.

HRT: YES OR NO?

"HRT is usually taken to treat the symptoms of menopause, which include hot flashes and vaginal dryness," says Stephen L. Curry, M.D., chairman of obstetrics and gynecology at the UConn Health Center. "Some women say they feel better in general when they're taking HRT, so there are real benefits as far as improving quality of life." For reasons of well-being, some women aren't anxious to stop taking HRT—and, the good news is, they may not have to.

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists recently made recommendations regarding the use of HRT. These recommendations include the following:

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- *Every woman considering HRT use should discuss with her physician the potential risks and benefits as well as alternative treatments.* In general, the risk that HRT poses to an individual woman is relatively small. "However, if you decide to take HRT, you should remain under close medical supervision, especially if there's a risk for heart disease," says Dr. Liang.
- *Women who take HRT for the management of menopausal symptoms should take it for as short a time as possible.* "The results of the study are based on long-term use," says Dr. Curry, "which is considered to be five years or more." Women also should use the lowest effective dose.
- *Continuous HRT should not be used for the sole reason of prevention of cardiovascular disease and, if prescribed for that, it should be discontinued.*
- *Women and their physicians should discuss alternative therapies for prevention of cardiovascular disease.* "In women with heart disease, there are known medical treatments that have proven to be beneficial in women, such as taking aspirin, lowering blood pressure when it's high, lowering cholesterol when it's high, stopping smoking, exercising and, when necessary, losing weight," says Dr. Liang. "These well-proven treatments work."

The WHI study did discover some benefits of HRT, including a reduced risk of osteoporosis-

related hip fracture. "For women with osteoporosis, there are other preventive therapies that should be discussed," says Pamela Taxel, M.D., an endocrinologist at the UConn Health Center. "While estrogen does reduce bone loss, it is only one component of bone health. The basics include getting enough calcium and vitamin D and getting regular weight-bearing exercise. In addition, there are other drugs available to treat osteoporosis."

Whether or not you should take HRT is a very individual decision. For guidance and support,

talk to your physician. "Women who decide to discontinue HRT, however, should not simply stop taking the drug, because menopausal symptoms may be experienced as a result," says Dr. Curry. Instead, women should talk to their doctor about tapering off HRT by gradually taking lower doses.

Also, note that the results of the WHI study do not apply to women taking estrogen alone. "That part of the WHI trial continues today," says Dr. Curry.

WOMEN AND HEART DISEASE

"It is the perception that heart disease is less important in women," says Bruce T. Liang, M.D., cardiologist and chief of the division of cardiology at the UConn Health Center. "That is a misperception." Heart disease is the leading cause of death in women.

"We, the physicians, as well as the patients, need to be more aware," says Dr. Liang. "Women with symptoms of heart disease should seek physician help. Also, physicians treating women with heart disease should be attuned to the particular set of symptoms that women experience when having a heart attack, which are often different from those symptoms experienced by men. These symptoms include jaw pain, neck pain, palpitations, nausea and abdominal pain." Men, however, are more likely to experience chest pain or radiating pain in the left arm.



WOMEN'S HEALTH JUST GOT BETTER Introducing our new women's



A portrait of the late Charlotte Johnson Hollfelder

Good news for women: The UConn Health Center recently opened The Charlotte Johnson Hollfelder Center for Women's Health. "This is a very exciting step for women's health services at the UConn Health Center," says

Kristen Zarfos, M.D., a breast cancer specialist and medical director of women's specialty health programs. The new 3,300-square-foot center, located off the main hospital lobby of the UConn Health Center, offers a variety of women's health services, including *obstetrics and gynecology, maternal-fetal medicine, breast health services, osteoporosis care, and integrative medicine consultations and classes.*

The center includes nine exam rooms and one procedure room. The waiting area, designed with comfort in mind, is decorated in light yellows and blues. It includes a mural created by Linda Webber, a Bloomfield artist. A portrait of Charlotte Johnson Hollfelder also hangs in the waiting area.

The center is named in memory of Mrs. Hollfelder, who died in 1996. Her husband, Fred, has made many gifts to the UConn Health Center in her name, including the establishment of the Charlotte Johnson Hollfelder Foundation, which

has helped hundreds of Connecticut women pay for mammograms and other health care needs. It was important to Mrs. Hollfelder that all women have access to quality health care.

Some of the UConn Health Center's specialty health services for women will continue to be

INTEGRATIVE MEDICINE

A new integrative medicine program is now offered at the UConn Health Center. Services include:

- **Consultations.** Meet with Karen Prestwood, M.D., and learn about integrative medicine. Dr. Prestwood helps patients learn how to combine alternative and complementary medical services with traditional medical care. Nutrition is an important aspect of her consultations.
- **Massage therapy.** Massage offers deep relaxation and stress reduction and helps to reduce muscle tension, stiffness and spasms.

PREVENTING OBESITY IN KIDS

The problem of childhood obesity in the United States continues to grow and is a real threat to the health of young people. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the percentage of children and adolescents who are defined as overweight has more than doubled since the early 1970s. About 13 percent of children and adolescents are now seriously overweight.

Larry Scherzer, M.D., a pediatrician with UConn Health Partners, says, "Overweight children are more likely to become overweight adults unless they adopt and maintain healthier patterns of eating and exercise. There is a real danger that today's young people will be known as 'Generation O' unless they adopt major lifestyle changes."

HOW DO I KNOW IF MY CHILD IS OVERWEIGHT?

A child is overweight if he or she is heavier than 85 percent of other children who are the same age and height. Obesity most commonly begins in childhood between ages 5 and 6, and during adolescence. Studies have shown that a child who is obese between ages 10 and 13 has an 80 percent chance of becoming an obese adult.

WHAT CAUSES OBESITY?

"In general, obesity occurs over time when a person eats more calories than his or her body burns up," says Dr. Scherzer. Obesity in childhood and adolescence can be related to poor eating habits (overeating or bingeing); lack of exercise; family history of obesity; medical illnesses (endocrine, neurological problems); medications (steroids, certain psychiatric medications); stressful life events or changes (separation, divorce, moving, death, abuse); family and peer problems; low self-esteem; and depression or other emotional problems.

Although certain medical disorders can cause obesity, less than 1 percent of all obesity cases are caused by physical problems.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF OBESITY?

There are many risks and complications associated with obesity. Physical consequences include increased risk for heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, breathing problems and trouble sleeping.

"Obesity also has an emotional impact," says Dr. Scherzer. Teenagers with weight problems tend to have lower self-esteem and be less popular with their peers. Depression and anxiety can result.

HOW CAN OBESITY BE AVOIDED?

Here are some tips to help you keep your child at a healthy weight:

- Don't make your child eat when he or she isn't hungry.
- Don't use food to comfort or reward. Don't offer dessert as a reward for finishing a meal.
- Offer your child a healthy diet. "In general, a diet should emphasize fresh fruits and vegetables, be high in fiber, and be low in fatty or fried foods," says Dr. Scherzer. "Soft drinks should be an occasional treat, not an everyday beverage. Sometimes, children eat too much food that in smaller amounts is healthful. A child can drink too much milk or juice, for example, or eat salads that are loaded with fatty, creamy salad dressing. Ask your doctor or a dietitian to teach you about the right kinds of food to feed your child."
- Don't eat at fast-food restaurants more than once a week.
- Limit how much TV your child watches. "Also limit computer time," says Dr. Scherzer. Instead, get your child interested in doing something active, like riding a bicycle or going for a walk.
- Make sure your child is getting regular exercise at least five days a week in addition to physical



education in school. Look into basketball, swimming, indoor soccer or other sports programs during the winter.

- Teach your child good eating and exercise habits now to help him or her have a healthy life.

Research shows if one parent is obese, there is a 50 percent chance that the children also will be obese. However, when both parents are obese, the children have an 80 percent chance of becoming obese. "A weight management plan for a child can often benefit other members of the family," says Dr. Scherzer.

HOW CAN I HELP MY CHILD LOSE WEIGHT?

The best way to lose weight is to eat healthier and exercise more. Talk to your child's doctor about the best ways for your child to lose weight.

"Also, it's important to positively support your child," says Dr. Scherzer. Parents can improve their child's self-esteem by emphasizing his or her strengths and positive qualities rather than just focusing on the weight problem.

LEARN MORE!

UConn Health Center pediatricians can help with obesity management for children and are accepting new patients in the East Hartford and West Hartford offices of UConn Health Partners. Please call UConnLink at 800-535-6232 for an appointment.

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health center

housed in other locations on the Farmington campus as well as at the East Hartford and West Hartford offices of UConn Health Partners. To learn more about The Charlotte Johnson Hollfelder Center for Women's Health or for a doctor referral, call UConnLink at 800-535-6232.

SERVICES NOW AVAILABLE!

Massage also can improve posture, flexibility and sleep quality.

- **Reiki.** Reiki is based on the belief that when spiritual energy is channeled through a Reiki practitioner, the patient's spirit is healed, which in turn heals the physical body.

These services are offered in the new Charlotte Johnson Hollfelder Center for Women's Health, located off the main hospital lobby. To learn more or to make an appointment, call UConnLink at 800-535-6232.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

DISCOVERY SERIES

Always Informative, Always Free

All programs begin at 7 p.m.

- Integrative Medicine, *Tuesday, March 11*
- GI Disorders, *Tuesday, April 8*
- Healthy Aging, *Tuesday, May 27*
- Heart Health in Men and Women, *Call for date*

FOCUS ON DIABETES

The UConn Health Center offers a variety of diabetes management classes, including Adults New to Diabetes, Diabetes Meal Planning, Living with Diabetes Series and Intensified Insulin Management.

The Diabetes Support Group meets on the second Monday of each month, 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. Individual appointments also are available.

GET READY FOR BABY

The UConn Health Center offers a variety of classes for parents-to-be, including Breastfeeding, Childbirth Preparation and Infant Care.

A Sibling Class (for children ages 3 and older) and hospital maternity tours also are available.

For more information or to register for any of these classes, call UConnLink at 800-535-6232.

CALL UCONNLINK FOR ANSWERS!

Do you have questions about the UConn Health Center and its physicians or services? Call UConnLink. "UConnLink is one-stop shopping for all the information you're looking for," says Milissa Woodward, UConnLink manager.

UConnLink is the first encounter many callers have with the UConn Health Center. "That's why we're strongly committed to customer service," says Woodward. "We have the information our callers need right at our fingertips."

Each month, Woodward and three staff members answer the questions of nearly 4,000 callers. What can UConnLink do for you?

- *Book, cancel and reschedule appointments with the majority of UConn Health Center physicians and specialists.*
- *Send out brochures and information on a variety of topics.*
- *Provide information and schedule appointments for the UConn Health Center Travel Clinic and Taste and Smell Clinic.*
- *Provide registration for UConn Health Center classes, seminars and support groups.*
- *Provide fluoride testing information and kits.* Tooth decay can be reduced with the proper use of fluoride. While many Connecticut communities add fluoride to their water supply systems, some local water supplies are not fluoridated. "If you have a child with developing teeth, you should know the fluoride levels in your water," says Woodward. "We can give you more information and supply you with an at-home fluoride testing kit."
- *Screen candidates for various UConn Health Center research studies.*
- *Provide Celebrate Women enrollment and program scheduling.*

"Celebrate Women is our free membership program aimed at improving the health of women of all ages," says Woodward.

Do you have questions? UConnLink has the answers. Call UConnLink at **800-535-6232**, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. If you leave a message after business hours, your call will be returned.

INTRODUCING...

THE UCONN HEALTH CENTER WELCOMES:

Michael S. Dahn, M.D., Ph.D., is a board-certified vascular surgeon specially trained in the most advanced approaches to diagnose and treat blocked arteries and veins. Dr. Dahn has more than 20 years experience as a vascular surgeon in an academic setting.

Dr. Dahn received his medical degree from the State University of New York at Buffalo and a doctorate in biochemistry from Wayne State University. He completed his surgical training at Boston University Medical Center and Wayne State University. Dr. Dahn sees patients in Farmington.



Michael Dahn, M.D., Ph.D.

Raymond Foley, D.O., is a board-certified pulmonary medicine and critical care specialist. Dr. Foley brings expertise in pulmonary vascular disease, lung cancer and critical care to the UConn Health Center's comprehensive pulmonary hypertension program.

Dr. Foley received his medical degree from the New York College of Osteopathic Medicine. He completed a residency as well as a fellowship in pulmonary and critical care medicine at the UConn School of Medicine. Dr. Foley sees patients in Farmington.



Raymond Foley, D.O.

Mary Ellen Goldhamer, M.D., a board-certified internal medicine physician, focuses on preventive medicine and women's health. Dr. Goldhamer also serves as an assistant professor with the UConn School of Medicine.

Dr. Goldhamer received her medical degree from Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia. She completed her residency program and a fellowship in curriculum development for internal medicine residency programs at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania. Dr. Goldhamer sees patients in Farmington.



Mary Ellen Goldhamer, M.D.

Cardiologist **William Leete Hiser, M.D.**, who is board-certified in cardiology and internal medicine, is a specialist in noninvasive cardiology. Dr. Hiser also is an assistant professor with the UConn School of Medicine.

Dr. Hiser received his medical degree from the University of Texas Southwestern Medical School. He completed a residency at Baylor University Medical Center in Dallas and a fellowship in cardiology at University of Nebraska Medical Center. Dr. Hiser sees patients in Farmington and East Hartford.



William Leete Hiser, M.D.