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# UConnHouseCall

REMARKABLE CARE THROUGH RESEARCH AND EDUCATION



## DO NUTRITIONAL SUPPLEMENTS HELP WITH HEART HEALTH?

Americans' penchant for finding faster and better ways to accomplish goals combined with our "take a pill and feel better" mentality makes for a population who wants shortcuts to healthy living. However, according to most health professionals, if a shortcut to better health sounds too easy to be true, it probably is.

### HEART HEALTH IN A BOTTLE?

Nutritional supplements, such as omega-3 fish oils, green tea extracts, garlic, B-vitamins and the skins of red grapes have all been touted in the popular media as "heart healthy." But do they work? David Silverman, M.D., a cardiologist at the UConn Health Center's Pat and Jim Calhoun Cardiology Center, urges caution. "For the most part, none of these supplements—or others you've heard about—have been conclusively proven in scientific studies to reduce heart disease in large populations," he says. "This is important for people to understand. Until something is proven over and over again in large studies across populations, you should be skeptical that any single ingredient or food is a 'magic bullet.'"

There are a few narrow applications for some of these supplements, such as using high doses of omega-3 fish oils to reduce extremely high levels of triglycerides in patients who haven't responded to medication. "But the fish oils have some unpleasant and unwanted side effects," says Dr. Silverman. "Overall, supplements aren't really useful in improving heart health in the general population."

### YOU ALREADY KNOW THE GOOD NEWS

The good news, says Dr. Silverman, is that we already know how to reduce and prevent heart disease. "Eating a low-saturated fat, high-fiber diet, rich in fruits and vegetables, along with exercising regularly and maintaining an ideal body weight, will greatly reduce your chances of having cardiovascular disease," says Dr. Silverman. "People may not

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263 Farmington Avenue  
Farmington, CT 06030-5385  
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want to hear that, but it has been proven over and over again to be the true keys to cardiovascular health.”

Nutritionally speaking, separating ingredients from their naturally occurring foods—as is done with supplements—is questionable. Linda York, M.S., R.D., a registered dietitian at the UConn Health Center, says, “We know that whole fruits and vegetables are good for you, and now we are identifying the chemical compounds that make them so heart-healthy. However, it’s likely that there are other yet unidentified naturally occurring ingredients in these foods that are essential to completing the puzzle. For this reason, instead of wasting money on supplements, eating a well-balanced diet that is low in saturated fat and cholesterol, and high in fiber with fruits and vegetables is still your best bet when it comes to heart health.”

### LETTING YOUR DOCTOR HELP YOU

Some people are embarrassed about taking supplements and may not be entirely honest with their physicians about it. “This can be a big mistake,” says Dr. Silverman. “Not only are some supplements ineffective, but they are dangerous when taken with other drugs. Always tell your doctor everything you are taking.”

Dr. Silverman reminds patients that when it comes to heart disease, there’s plenty of hope. He is enthusiastic about how cardiologists are really helping today’s patients. “In the last decade, we’ve lowered death rates from heart disease by 25 percent, and we aren’t done yet,” he says. “Sometimes patients take supplements because they want hope. But, modern cardiology is doing amazing things for patients.”

To make an appointment with a UConn cardiologist or a nutritionist, please call UConnLink at 800-535-6232.

## THE PAT AND JIM CALHOUN CARDIOLOGY CENTER

In recognition of Pat and Jim Calhoun’s generous support of cardiology research, the cardiology program at the UConn Health Center has been named the Pat and Jim Calhoun Cardiology Center. Since 1998, the Calhouns have contributed and raised almost \$1 million to benefit cardiology research at the UConn Health Center. The Pat and Jim Calhoun Cardiology Center will include cardiology research, education and patient care. The Calhouns’ commitment to cardiology research will positively impact current and future cardiology patients treated here. The UConn Health Center is deeply grateful to Pat and Jim for their leadership, generosity and friendship.



Jim Calhoun

## THE PICNIC PLATE PRINCIPLE

Linda York, M.S., R.D., a registered dietitian at the UConn Health Center, often uses a paper picnic plate to demonstrate good nutritional habits to her patients. “When preparing each meal, think of a paper picnic plate that has three unevenly divided sections,” she says. “Fill the largest section with colorful fruits and vegetables, fill the medium-sized section

with whole grains and complex carbohydrates, and fill the smallest section with a low-fat protein. Now you have a healthy meal!”



## UConn MAKES HEALTH CARE

Quality health care is now convenient, too. The UConn Health Center offers locations in Farmington, East Hartford, West Hartford and Simsbury.

The UConn Health Center offers an impressive range of clinical services supported by more than 300 physicians in over 50 specialties. In fact, the UConn Medical Group is the largest physician practice in the greater Hartford area. No matter what expertise you are seeking, chances are you’ll find it at UConn.

The UConn Health Center’s main campus is located in suburban Farmington, just off Interstate 84 and Route 9. A wide range of primary care and specialty services is offered at the main campus as well as in Simsbury and at the UConn Health Partners offices in East Hartford and West Hartford. All of our facilities offer ample free parking and most major health plans are accepted.

For more information, or to make an appointment, call UConnLink at 800-535-6232. You also can visit the UConn Health Center online at [www.uchc.edu](http://www.uchc.edu).

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# CARPAL TUNNEL SYNDROME:

## A CONDITION MORE COMPLEX THAN PREVIOUSLY THOUGHT

**Y**ou may have heard about *carpal tunnel syndrome* or even know someone who has been diagnosed with the disorder. Many people associate carpal tunnel syndrome with repetitive keyboard motions, and to some extent this is true. However, there are other causes—known and unknown—for this potentially debilitating disorder.

If you've never had problems with your hands and wrists, you probably take them for granted. Most people use and overuse them every day without a thought, until something like carpal tunnel syndrome occurs. Mary Lynn Newport, M.D.,

One of the best methods for treatment and prevention of carpal tunnel syndrome is aerobic exercise.

a board-certified orthopaedic hand surgeon at the UConn Health Center, describes carpal tunnel syndrome:

“In your hand, nine tendons and the median nerve pass through a ‘tunnel’ bounded on three sides by wrist bones and on the fourth side by a strong ligament. In carpal tunnel syndrome, the coating that surrounds and

nourishes the tendons becomes thickened and inflamed. This coating takes up more space in the canal, so the tendons don't glide well and the median nerve gets compressed. This compression is the main problem in carpal tunnel syndrome, and it may cause symptoms such as numbness, pain and weakness of grasp.”

For the majority of people with carpal tunnel syndrome, there is no obvious cause. “Although several things can cause carpal tunnel syndrome—a wrist fracture, a tumor, pregnancy, thyroid problems and rheumatoid arthritis, to name a few—in most cases, we can't find an underlying cause for the problem,” says Dr. Newport. “However, we think a root cause may be systemic, meaning something is wrong with the entire body that manifests itself in the hands and wrists. We think this because people who have carpal tunnel syndrome with no obvious cause often get the condition in both hands at the same time.”

Interestingly, one of the best methods for treatment and prevention of carpal tunnel syndrome is aerobic exercise. “We aren't really sure why this works, but people who engage in aerobic exercise—walking, running, swimming, dancing, etc.—have decreased symptoms associated with carpal tunnel syndrome,” says Dr. Newport. “People with early carpal tunnel



syndrome are often treatable solely with aerobic exercise. This is another reason that we believe carpal tunnel syndrome is more of a systemic problem than we previously thought.”

Surgery is available for people for whom conservative treatment doesn't work. “A carpal tunnel release involves cutting the thick ligament that is part of the tunnel,” says Dr. Newport. “We've have good results with surgery if nothing else works.”

To help patients regain maximum use of their hands, patients recovering from surgery can benefit from hand therapy delivered by UConn's certified occupational therapists.

**To make an appointment or for more information, call 800-535-6232.**

## CONVENIENT

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Surgical  
Consultations

# UPCOMING EVENTS

## DISCOVERY SERIES

*Always Informative, Always Free  
All programs begin at 7 p.m.*



### **Men's Health: Early Detection of Colon and Prostate Cancer**

Thursday, March 4

### **Understanding Clinical Trials**

Tuesday, April 27

### **Be an Active Member of Your Health Care Team**

Thursday, May 13

## GET READY FOR BABY

### **Infant Care Class**

Monday, March 8, April 12 or May 10, 7 to 9 p.m.

Fee: \$10

### **Childbirth Preparation Class**

Wednesdays, March 3 to April 14 (no class on March 10) or May 19 to June 9, 7 to 9 p.m.

Fee: \$100

### **Childbirth Preparation Refresher Class**

Wednesday, March 24, March 31, May 19 or May 26, 7 to 9 p.m.

Fee: \$40

### **Breastfeeding Class**

Thursday, March 4, April 1 or May 6, 7 to 9 p.m.

Fee: \$10

# INFORMATION

## FOR OUR PATIENTS

**James F.X. Egan, M.D.**, was recently named vice-chairman of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology (OB/GYN) at the UConn Health Center. Dr. Egan, a maternal fetal medicine expert, sees patients at the Health Center and manages all clinical facets of the Health Center's general OB/GYN and maternal fetal medicine practices.



*James F.X. Egan, M.D.*

Dr. Egan is not new to the Health Center. He completed a fellowship in maternal fetal medicine through the UConn School of Medicine in 1989, after several years as an OB/GYN in private practice. He has been part of the medical staff ever since.

Dr. Egan is active with the Connecticut March of Dimes and currently serves as chairman of its campaign to raise awareness about the prevention and treatment of premature births. He has lectured extensively on issues relating to maternal fetal medicine, including fetal echocardiography, diabetes in pregnancy, screening for Down's syndrome and pre-term labor, and is widely published in scholarly journals.

UConn Health Center welcomes **Wilner Samson, M.D.**

Dr. Samson attended University of Wisconsin Medical School and completed his internship and residency in internal medicine at Hennepin County Medical Center in Minneapolis. He completed his fellowship in nephrology, a branch of medicine that focuses on the kidneys, at Mount Sinai Medical Center in New York. He is seeing internal medicine and nephrology patients at our West Hartford office.



*Wilner Samson, M.D.*

**For more information, or to make an appointment, call 800-535-6232.**

**To register, call UConnLink at 800-535-6232.**

## UConn: New England's Only SIRT Site

**A** new radiation treatment for liver tumors is now available at the UConn Health Center, the only site in New England offering the specialized procedure. The treatment, called *selective internal radiation therapy*, or *SIRT*, is for patients with inoperable primary liver cancer or other cancers that have spread to the liver.

Internal radiation in many forms is becoming more and more prevalent in cancer treatment as physicians seek ways to minimize healthy tissue's exposure to radiation. Additionally, since the radiation can be targeted to the tumor directly, higher doses of radiation are possible, thus increasing the chances of shrinking or eliminating the tumor.

This kind of "targeted" radiation is used in SIRT. The radioactive substance for the procedure is contained in minuscule spheres, each about the size of a speck of flour. The spheres are injected into the main artery in the liver and delivered directly to the cancer tumor. These spheres are just large enough so that they lodge in the blood vessels of the tumor, directly irradiating the tumor while minimizing radiation exposure to healthy liver tissue and surrounding tissue.

**SIRT can significantly affect the length and quality of a patient's life, but it's not a complete cure. For more information about this procedure, ask your doctor or call 800-535-6232.**



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