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HealthNet News

May/June 2017



Linking Connecticut Patients and Families to Reliable Health Information

In this issue: snuggling with chickens, apps for visually impaired, new colon cancer treatment guidelines, and more!

Helpful Apps for Persons Who are Blind or Visually Impaired

Check out the AppAdvice.com recommended iOS apps for persons who are blind or have visual impairments. The apps include: *Aipoly Vision* an app which speaks out loud what it sees; *Braille Tutor* which helps you learn and practice Unified Braille on your iPad, or iPhone; *iDentifi* which lets you take a picture of an object or text and hear a description read aloud in 25 different languages; *NantMobile Money Reader* which identifies monetary bills in 21 currencies and a variety of languages; *Color Inspector* which helps to identify colors; and *TapTapSee* an object identifier with a barcode reader which enables you to take a photo with your phone and hear a description of the object read back to you. Wow! Check out this collection of amazing and FREE apps for Apple devices on the AppAdvice.com website. Visitors to the site can download the apps or learn more about them.

Ordering Healthier Takeout

Feeling guilty about your weekly visits to your corner Pad Thai restaurant? The ChooseMyPlate.gov website offers tips to make your favorite Asian meals healthier. Choose dishes that highlight vegetables. Try steamed foods rather than fried. Ask that your order be cooked with less oil or half the sauce. Add sauces sparingly. Salt and added sugars in sauces add up quickly. Finally, use chopsticks. Chopsticks can help slow you down and recognize when you are full. Visit ChooseMyPlate.gov for more tips, tools and activities for healthier eating.

The True Cost of Growing Older

Do you have sufficient financial resources to age in place? The "[Elder Economic Security Standard Index](#)" (Elder Index) is a tool developed by the Gerontology Institute at UMass Boston with Wider Opportunities for Women. It measures the income older adults need to cover the costs of housing, health care, transportation, food, and miscellaneous essentials. Anyone can use the database to find out how much she/he would need to be economically secure by location and family type. According to the Gerontology Institute, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Jersey, New York, and Vermont had the highest economic insecurity rate for single older adults in 2016. Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, Kentucky, and Utah had the lowest rates of economic insecurity.

Safer Cleaning Products

June is "National Healthy Homes Month." As you scrub floors and wash windows, take a minute to look at the cleaning products you are using. Do they bear the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) "Safer Choice" label?

Safer Choice is EPA's label for safer chemical-based products. Every chemical, regardless of percentage, in a Safer Choice-labeled product is evaluated through EPA's rigorous scientific process and only the safest ingredients are

allowed. The agency considers toxicity to people and animals as well as long-term potential for harm to the environment. You can search the [Safer Choice database](#) of over 2,000 products by category, product name, or manufacturer. You can also search for safe cleaning products on the Environmental Working Group's (EWG) [Guide to Healthier Cleaning](#). EWG provides easy-to-navigate hazard ratings for over 2,500 cleaning products commonly used in the home.

Don't Snuggle With Your Chickens

As more people keep chickens in their backyards, [outbreaks of salmonella infections](#) have increased. In 2016, a record number of illnesses were linked to backyard flocks. So far this year, there have been eight outbreaks in 47 states sickening 372 people. Salmonella germs are found on chicken feet, feathers, and beaks. Germs can also get on cages, coops, feed, water dishes, hay, and plants where the birds live and roam. People caring for chickens can get the bacteria on their hands, shoes, and clothing. Small children with developing immune systems, and older adults who may be immune-compromised are most susceptible to salmonella infections.

You may think of your chickens as pets or even family members, but don't let them wander into your house. Here is more advice from the Centers for Disease Control about how to prevent salmonella infections if you have a backyard flock:

- Always wash your hands with soap and water after touching live poultry or anything in the area in which they live and roam.
- Don't let children younger than five, or older adults with weakened immune systems handle live poultry.
- Collect eggs often. Throw cracked eggs away.
- Brush or wipe eggs off with fine sandpaper or a dry cloth. Don't wash eggs. Colder water pulls salmonella bacteria into the egg.
- Thoroughly cook eggs you collect.
- Don't eat or drink in the area where the birds live and roam.
- Don't kiss chickens, or cuddle them then touch your mouth.
- Clean equipment or materials used to raise poultry outdoors.

- Buy your chickens from hatcheries that participate in the U.S. Department of Agriculture [National Poultry Improvement Plan](#).

Can Traditional Chinese Medicine Help Heart Disease?

Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) has over 2,000 years of history, yet robust scientific studies demonstrating its effectiveness are lacking. Western scientists are also critical of TCM because these products are formulas with dozens of ingredients and numerous chemical molecules which make it difficult to determine exactly how they work in the body. Additionally, TCM products are not rigorously reviewed to assure quality and safety.

A new state-of-the-art review of TCM in the June 2017 issue of the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology* (JACC) suggests that some TCM products may be helpful in treating several heart conditions including high blood pressure, dyslipidemia, atherosclerosis, and heart failure. The JACC article analyzes 56 randomized controlled trials of at least 50 patients who were followed for at least four weeks. Highlights of the review appear in the blog [MEDPAGE TODAY](#).

Pregnancy Seems to Be Safe for Breast Cancer Survivors

Breast cancer survivors who want to have children have some [good news](#). A new study has found that pregnancy after treatment for breast cancer does not increase the likelihood of the cancer returning. Some forms of breast cancer are fueled by the hormone estrogen. Because estrogen levels increase during pregnancy, there has been concern that pregnancy might spur breast cancer's recurrence. A [European study](#) of over 1,200 breast cancer survivors - more than half who had estrogen-fueled tumors - found no difference in recurrence rates among women who became pregnant after treatment and those who did not. Researchers looked at breast cancer recurrence rates for more than 12 years after conception.

In the US, a big study is underway which builds on the European study. US researchers will test whether it is safe for breast cancer survivors who want to become pregnant to temporarily suspend taking hormone-blocking drugs.

Currently hormone-blocking drugs like tamoxifen are recommended for five years after the initial breast cancer treatment. Some women may not be too old if they wait five years before they attempt to become pregnant. The US study which is called [POSITIVE](#) is currently enrolling patients.

Not Your Ordinary Green Beans

How can you encourage people to eat more vegetables? It turns out using indulgent descriptions may be the key. In Stanford University's cafeteria, researchers labeled eight vegetable dishes one of four different ways each day without changing the ingredients or how the dishes were prepared. For example, there were green beans and shallots; "light 'n' low-carb green beans and shallots"; "healthy energy-boosting green beans and shallots"; and "sweet sizzlin green beans and crispy shallots." Vegetable dishes with indulgent names were taken by 25 - 41% more people in the cafeteria than dishes with plain names or health-focused names. Cafeteria goers also took larger portions of the vegetable dishes with the least-healthy name. The study authors propose that this simple, low-cost marketing tactic could easily be used in other settings to encourage healthier eating choices. Critics of the study, which appears in [JAMA Internal Medicine](#), say the authors do not tell us whether overall consumption of vegetables (not just the featured vegetable) increased. Also not disclosed was how much of the dish was actually eaten, and how much was tossed.

Updated Patient Guides for Colon Cancer

The National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) has updated its colon cancer patient resources. These include a plain-English version of the practice guidelines health professionals around the world use to decide the best way to treat a patient's colon cancer. The "[Patient Guidelines](#)" feature questions to ask your doctor, patient-friendly illustrations, and explanations of medical terms and abbreviations. An accompanying one-page "NCCN Quick Guide" summarizes key points in the patient guidelines. The NCCN's goal is to help patients living

with cancer talk with their physicians about the best treatment options for their cancer.

The NCCN is a nonprofit [alliance of 27 leading cancer centers](#) devoted to patient care, research, and education. Member institutions are recognized for dealing with complex, aggressive, or rare cancers. The organization publishes patient guidelines on many other cancers affecting adults, young adults, and adolescents.

A Simpler Approach to Searching for Cancer Trials

Researcher Tom Marsilje is trying to simplify and increase the success rate of finding clinical trials for patients with his type of colon cancer. The National Institute of Health's [Clinicaltrials.gov](#) database is enormous, listing close to 250,000 studies in all 50 states and in 241 countries. It is also designed more for researchers and physicians than for patients. Automated searches for terms like "colorectal cancer" miss trials designed for "solid tumors" which do not specifically mention colorectal cancer by name. Marsilje recently partnered with a health technology startup, Flatiron Health, and the advocacy group "Fight Colorectal Cancer" to launch a free online site that makes it easier to search for clinical trials for his disease, microsatellite stable (MSS) colon cancer. The new search site, called the "Late-Stage MSS-CRC [Trial Finder](#)" focuses on finding treatments with better odds or the possibility of long-term benefits. This site also includes links to scientific papers and other resources for the treatments being tested. Patients using the site will be able to hand their oncologist a short list of trials along with copies of scientific studies and medical information about the drugs and their targets. An article about this project appeared in [STAT news](#).

Other Health and Wellness Stories

From NPR: [using drones](#) to deliver automatic defibrillators to people in cardiac arrest. From *Smithsonian Magazine*: researchers at Massachusetts General

Hospital discover a new class of small molecules that allow [skin cells to tan themselves](#). From *Kaiser Health News*: minorities receive an abundance of [low value health services](#) and far fewer effective services than do whites. From the *CT Mirror*: [medical marijuana](#) approved for 22 health conditions. From *STATnews*: doctors resist [sepsis protocols](#) even though they save lives. And from the Environmental Working Group website recommendations for safe and effective [sunscreen products](#).

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