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HealthNet News

July/August 2018

Linking Connecticut Patients and Families to Reliable Health Information

In This Issue: Pricy HIV Prevention Drug, Unnecessary Sinus Surgery, New Test for Sepsis, and More.

Pill Dramatically Reduces Chances of Getting HIV; Many in U.S. Can't Afford It

When taken once daily, PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis), reduces the risk of getting HIV from sex by **more than 90 percent**. In the U.S., PrEP is sold under the brand name Truvada, at a cost of over **\$1,600 a month**. In other countries, patients can take the generic version of PrEP for less than **\$6 a month**. Why

don't U.S. patients have access to the generic version of PrEP? According to the co-founders of the "PrEP4all Collaboration," it's [a matter of greed](#).

Millions Wasted on Unnecessary Sinus Surgery

Endoscopic sinus surgery (ESS) was introduced in the U.S. in 1985 as a minimally invasive, safe approach for difficult-to-treat sinus infections. The procedure quickly became a huge money maker for doctors, hospitals, and device manufacturers. In the 1990s, new antibiotics and a short course of [high-dose oral steroids](#) virtually eliminated the need for ESS. Ear, nose, and throat physician, Arthur Curtis describes how physicians in his specialty [created a new disease](#), "chronic rhinosinusitis," to justify continuing to perform ESS operations. He writes that the science behind ESS is badly flawed. Most ESS research studies did not include a [control group](#). Without a control group, any treatment can be made to look like it works. ESS costs our healthcare system [over \\$3 billion a year](#).

Could Your Medications Be Making You Depressed?

Over [200 commonly prescribed drugs](#) may cause depression or suicide. These drugs include beta blockers (taken for high blood pressure), proton pump inhibitors (taken for acid reflux), birth control pills, and even prescription-strength ibuprofen. According to a new study in [JAMA](#), over one third of U.S. adults take one or more of these drugs. The study also found that adults taking these drugs reported feeling depressed at rates higher than adults not taking these drugs.

Too Many Women Die Unnecessarily During Childbirth

Women giving birth in the United States [are more likely to die](#) of complications than women in any other industrialized country in the world. An article in [USA Today](#) reports that recommended safety practices are often ignored by hospital staff. [National Public Radio](#) reports that in California, however, a standardized approach to common childbirth emergencies can make it much safer for women to give birth.

LASIK Surgery Is Popular, but not Risk-Free

Lasik (Laser-Assisted In Situ Keratomileusis) is a popular 15-minute surgery that is supposed to correct both near- and farsightedness. It works by changing the shape of the cornea which improves the eye's ability to focus. According to the *New York Times*, eye doctors encourage the belief that Lasik is "fool-proof." But for many patients, **new vision problems**, including sensitivity to light, painful dry eye, mild glare, and halos persist months to years after surgery.

Tech Products Promote Accessibility

Check out these tech developments that make life more accessible for those who have hearing or vision problems:

- Apple is adding the "**Live Listen**" feature to their AirPods. This feature will make it easier to hear conversations in noisy settings. For some people with hearing loss, Live Listen may represent a lower-cost alternative to hearing aids.
- OrCam's "**MyEye**" is a tiny camera and microphone that attaches to a pair of glasses. By pointing at text, the wearer triggers text recognition technology and a computerized voice reads what's in front of the camera.

New Blood Test May Prevent Sepsis Deaths

Sepsis is the body's "**overwhelming response** to infection, which can lead to tissue damage, organ failure, amputations, and death." It is the **third leading cause of death**, behind heart disease and cancer. Quick recognition of sepsis symptoms and immediate treatment saves lives. But diagnosing sepsis can be tricky. A recently approved **blood test** rapidly identifies the bacteria causing the infection and makes it possible for doctors to give targeted antibiotics immediately.

Study Finds Acupuncture Works for Some Chronic Pain Conditions

A new study in the *Journal of Pain* found acupuncture provided lasting relief for patients with chronic musculoskeletal pain, chronic headache, and osteoarthritis pain. The study analyzed findings from 40 randomized controlled trials involving almost 21,000 patients. Patients in these studies reported pain relief up to one year following acupuncture treatment.

Toolkit to Prevent Opioid Overdoses

The "Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration"(SAMHSA), has updated its opioid overdose prevention toolkit. The toolkit contains factsheets and resource links tailored to the needs of community members, first responders, prescribers, patients, and families. [Download your SAMHSA toolkit here.](#)

Visiting the Doctor with Your Older Adult

Doctor visits can be a source of conflict between elders and their family caregivers. Elders and caregivers may have different ideas about which things to discuss with the doctor. "Next Step in Care," a program of the non-profit "United Hospital Fund," offers a free ["Guide to Doctor Visits"](#) for family caregivers. The guide provides practical tips to help elders and caregivers coordinate agendas before an appointment and communicate effectively together during the visit. Spanish, Russian, and Chinese translations of the guide are available.

Chronotherapy - a Fringe Cancer Treatment no More

Some researchers believe cancer gains a toehold when our body's biological clock (circadian rhythms) are disrupted. Chronotherapy, previously a fringe treatment, is gaining renewed interest as a possible avenue to making cancer treatments more effective and less toxic to patients. A recent article in the [Washington Post](#) explores how physicians at the University of Pennsylvania and other institutions are using circadian rhythms to develop new cancer drugs and safer ways to deliver medications to patients.

More Health Information You Can Use:

- [Podcast explores](#) Alzheimer' disease facts and state-of-research
- [HerbList](#) app offers trustworthy information on common herbal products
- Low-tech, low-cost strategies to get a [good night's sleep](#)
- Biotech [buzzwords](#) translated
- Self-improvement guides cover how to make [friends](#), overcome [alcohol addiction](#), and manage conflict with [humor](#)
- [Phage](#) cocktails treat stubborn bacterial infections

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