



# Indian Health Service/California Area Office

## Patient Newsletter

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### Area Director's Message Ms. Margo Kerrigan, MPH

Did you know that you can prevent or delay the onset of diabetes? A fine balance within the body must be preserved. When that balance is disrupted, individuals develop chronic diseases such as diabetes. American Indians/Alaska Natives (AI/AN) are at a higher risk than most ethnic groups in the United States to develop diabetes, but the disease can be prevented or at least delayed for many years.

IHS tribal and urban Indian healthcare programs have established 16-week lifestyle intervention courses for AI/AN patients. Lifestyle coaches are available to support a patient's effort to change their lifestyle habits, lose at least 7% of their body weight, and increase their physical exercise to a minimum of 150 minutes per week. The courses address diet, exercise, and behavior modification. Many healthcare programs translate educational

concepts into tribal languages and incorporate activities from their local culture such as talking circles, indigenous foods, and drumming.

This is only the beginning of a new approach to prevent diabetes. Exciting efforts are growing in California within Native communities. Tribal members are learning how to analyze diabetes data, read and compose diabetes research articles. They also learn to lead others in their communities toward healing diabetes. Preventing this chronic disease is the best way to defeat it. Let's work together to make diabetes a rare occurrence in our Native population once again.

For more information, visit:

**Division of Diabetes, Indian Health Service**  
<http://www.ihs.gov/MedicalPrograms/Diabetes/index.cfm?module=home>

## Help Your Clinic Providers Help You!

Your clinic providers track performance measures in order to determine how they care for you. Performance measures are tools that assist your clinic managers and improve their adherence to procedures. Most performance measures can be grouped into one of the following six categories of good healthcare:

- **Safety:** You should not be harmed by the care that is intended to help you
- **Efficiency:** Care should be given without wasting equipment, supplies, ideas, and energy
- **Effectiveness:** Care should be based on scientific knowledge and offered to all who could benefit
- **Patient-Centered:** Care should be respectful of and responsive to individual patient preferences, needs, and values
- **Timely:** Excessive waiting and delays in care should be reduced both for those who receive care and those who give care
- **Equitable:** Care should not vary in quality because of personal characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, geographic location, and socio-economic status

You as a patient can ask your healthcare provider if it uses performance measures and how well it is doing on providing quality care to its patients. In order to improve the quality of healthcare provided by your clinic:

- Ask your healthcare provider if you are due for any screenings/ tests and ensure appointments are scheduled for you for the needed tests
- Tell your provider if you drink alcohol and/or smoke
- Tell your provider about any tests/procedures/immunizations you had at a facility other than where you normally receive care
- Show up for your appointments whenever possible and call to reschedule if you cannot make it so the appointment can be offered to someone else
- Take care of yourself



## Do You Have Mold in Your Home? By Lisa Nakagawa, MPH

Everyone has mold inside their home. Some mold spores can be found floating through the air and in dust. Everybody inhales some mold every day without apparent harm. Mold becomes a problem when wet or damp and starts growing in large numbers. Mold only grows when there is moisture present. Some examples where moisture can occur include:

- Leaky roofs
- Sprinklers hitting the house
- Plumbing leaks
- Damp basement or crawl space
- Wet showers

The health effects from mold exposure include inflammation, allergy, or infection. Symptoms can range from itching eyes, sneezing, allergic reactions, and asthma attacks. The population at greatest risk is individuals with existing respiratory conditions, weakened immune systems, children, and the elderly.

Small mold problems (10 square feet) can be cleaned by the homeowner with personal protective equipment (N-95 mask, gloves, and eye protection) and proper research. Larger amounts of mold may require an experienced professional contractor.

Here are some tips to prevent indoor mold problems:

- Find the moisture source and stop it from occurring
- Get rid of any excess water with a mop or wet vacuum
- Move wet items into a dry, well-ventilated area so it can be properly dried
- Dry water-damaged areas and/or items within 24-48 hours
- Run portable fans to increase air circulation
- Frequently clean home

For more information, visit:

<http://www.cdc.gov/mold/faqs.htm> or <http://www.epa.gov/mold/moldguide.html>

## Staying Healthy in Autumn By Amy Patterson, PhD

In the fall, the air grows drier and colder, people spend more time indoors, children go back to school, and the opportunities for catching a cold or flu virus increase. Fortunately, there are some simple ways to boost your immune system and prevent getting sick as the seasons change.

**Get some exercise every day.** Even though the weather is cooler, it's important to keep your body moving. A daily walk will improve circulation and keep your immune system strong.

**Wash your hands.** As people around you get sick, germs can spread through surfaces that get touched by many people including door handles, grocery carts, and money. Remember to practice good hygiene and wash your hands frequently, especially before eating. Remind your children to do so as well. Also, if you do get sick and are sneezing, remember not to sneeze into your hands.

**Get a flu shot.** Particularly if your immune system is compromised or you are over the age of 65 (or a caretaker for

someone who is), getting a flu shot every year is essential. Also, remember that children under the age of 6 months cannot get a flu shot and have no natural defense against the flu virus, so consider getting a flu shot for everyone else in the family.

**Get more sleep.** Follow the change of seasons by sleeping more as the days grow shorter. As the weather grows colder, the body needs more sleep to keep healthy and prevent illness. Today, it can be a challenge, but turning off televisions and computers and getting to bed at a reasonable time will help keep your entire family healthy.

**Eat with the seasons.** Autumn is the season of squash, pumpkin, and other harvest vegetables. These vegetables are high in vitamins and help boost natural immunity. Soups and stews made with seasonal foods are a great way to keep the body healthy and warm.

**Dress for the weather.** Wearing flip-flop sandals and tank tops when the weather is cold makes your body work harder to keep you warm. Dress for the weather and consider wearing a scarf on colder, windier days.





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Protect the Circle of Life



## Your Flu Vaccine Protects Me My Flu Vaccine Protects You

- The flu vaccine is safe. You can't get the flu from a flu vaccine.
- Pneumonia and flu are a leading cause of death among Native elders.
- Please get a flu vaccine each year to protect you and your family.



Learn more at [www.cdc.gov/flu](http://www.cdc.gov/flu)  
or call 1-800-CDC-INFO

## Improving Health—Meaningful Questions By Beverly Calderon, RD, CDE

Despite over 40 years of research showing “what works” to change lifestyle behaviors aimed at improving health, most of us still fight change. Slogans or quotes such as, “Just Do It”, “Eat Right Be Right”, “The first wealth is health”, or “Health is not valued until sickness comes” can encourage thinking about the importance of health. Similarly, and possibly more powerful, are questions that stick with us, stimulate thinking, and promote us to action. Let's try asking ourselves one powerful question per week. Then, during the week, reflect on it and how taking action can positively impact our health. The questions should be focused on wellness versus illness, what is working instead of what doesn't work, and on feeling thankful instead of guilty. This can help some of us make a shift and take a simple step toward significant change that will positively impact our health.

Try these steps:

1. Take a minute to feel the gift of each breath and heart beat.
2. Consider all of the incredible things the human body does.
3. Think of your personal question for the week, and choose one that is important and will make you think.

Consider the following questions:

- What can I do to amplify my health?
- What would my life be like if I was strong, agile, and had more energy throughout the day?
- In five years, what do I want and which health status do I need to be in to enjoy it?
- Given my reality, what changes will help me shift my focus to health?

Regardless of age or health situation, it is worth our time to consider how our life may positively change if we shift to a focus on our health. By keeping our questions focused on wellness, we are promoting optimistic thinking, empowerment, and seeing the glass as half full.

For more information, visit:

**Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion,  
Department of Health and Human Services**  
<http://odphp.osophs.dhhs.gov/initiatives.asp>



## How to Stop Tooth Decay By Steve Riggio, DDS



Tooth with decay

Tooth decay can change with age. Decay in children tends to start in the enamel (hard outer layer of the tooth) while older adults often get decay on the exposed roots of teeth. Decay develops in the sticky film of bacteria that coats the teeth, called plaque. The bacteria in the plaque produce acids after we eat or drink. This acid can cause tooth enamel to partially dissolve and lead to tooth decay. The enamel will repair itself during the periods when we do not eat or drink (water has no impact on decay). This enamel repair is called remineralization. Remineralization can be helped by the use of rinses, pastes, and coatings containing fluoride, calcium, or phosphates. These work best when the decay is caught early.

For more advanced decay, the dentist will need to remove the decay and restore the tooth with a filling or crown. Severe decay can cause a tooth abscess which can be very serious. This is why visiting the dentist is important no matter how old you are.

The best way to prevent decay is good oral hygiene. Brush regularly with toothpaste containing fluoride and be sure that you floss daily. Drinking water with fluoride helps strengthen the enamel. Limiting snacks reduces the acid exposures to the enamel and helps prevent decay. Your dentist can apply sealants on the biting surface of the teeth which is particularly effective on children.

## Hearing Loss By Wendy Blocker, MSN

Hearing loss that occurs gradually as you age (presbycusis) is common. According to the National Institutes of Health, an estimated one-third of people in the United States between the ages of 65 and 75 and close to one-half of those older than 75 have some degree of hearing loss.

You can't reverse hearing loss. However, you don't have to live in a world of muted, less distinct sounds. You and your doctor or hearing specialist can take steps to improve what you hear.



Signs and symptoms of hearing loss may include:

- Muffling of speech and other sounds
- Difficulty understanding words, especially against background noise or in a crowd of people
- Frequently asking others to speak more slowly, clearly and loudly
- Needing to turn up the volume of the television or radio
- Withdrawal from conversations
- Avoidance of some social settings

Factors that may damage or lead to loss of the hairs and nerve cells in your inner ear include:

- Aging. Exposure to sounds over the years can damage the cells of your inner ear
- Heredity. Your genetic makeup may make you more susceptible to ear damage
- Occupational noises. Jobs where loud noise is a regular part of the working environment, such as farming, construction or factory work, can lead to damage inside your ear
- Recreational noises. Exposure to explosive noises, such as from firearms and fireworks, can cause immediate, permanent hearing loss. Other recreational activities with dangerously high noise levels include snowmobiling, motorcycling or listening to loud music. Personal music

players, such as MP3 players, can cause lasting hearing loss if you turn the volume up high enough to mask the sound of other loud noises, such as those from a lawn mower

- Some medications. Drugs, such as the antibiotic gentamicin and certain chemotherapy drugs, can damage the inner ear. Temporary effects on your hearing—ringing in the ear (tinnitus) or hearing loss—can occur if you take very high doses of aspirin, other pain relievers, antimalarial drugs or loop diuretics
- Some illnesses. Diseases or illnesses that result in high fever, such as meningitis, may damage the cochlea

Hearing loss can have a significant effect on your quality of life. Among older adults with hearing loss, commonly reported problems include:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- An often false sense that others are angry with you

Talk to your doctor if difficulty hearing is interfering with your daily life. Treatment options include:

- Removing wax blockage. Earwax blockage is a common reversible cause of hearing loss
- Hearing aids. If your hearing loss is due to damage to your inner ear, a hearing aid can help by making sounds stronger and easier for you to hear. You may need to try more than one device to find one that works well for you
- Cochlear implants. If you have severe hearing loss, a cochlear implant may be an option for you. A cochlear implant compensates for damaged or nonworking parts of your inner ear.

Getting treatment can improve your quality of life dramatically. People who use hearing aids report these benefits:

- Greater self-confidence
- Closer relationships with loved ones
- Improved outlook on life, overall

Family and friends of people who have begun using a hearing aid are even more likely to report these improvements in shared quality of life.