

Older Adults and Risk of Falls and Fall-Related Injuries By Susan Ducore, RN, MSN

In the United States, one of every three persons aged 65 years and older falls each year. Among older adults, falls are the leading cause of injuries, hospital admissions for trauma, and deaths due to injury. Fractures are the most serious health consequences of falls. Approximately 250,000 hip fractures, the most serious fracture, occur each year among people over age 65. Many of these falls and resulting injuries can be prevented. Strategies to prevent falls among older adults include exercises to improve strength, balance, and flexibility; reviews of medications that may affect balance; and home modifications that reduce fall hazards such as installing grab bars, improving lighting, and removing items that may cause tripping.

What can I do to reduce my risk of falling?

- ◆ Exercise regularly; exercise programs like Tai Chi that increase strength are especially good
- ◆ Ask your doctor or pharmacist to review your medicines, both prescription and over-the-counter, to reduce side effects and interactions. Reviews should be done at least once a year, more frequently based on changes in medications and health status
 - As you get older, the way some medicines work in your body can change. Some medicines, or combinations of medicines, can make you drowsy or light-headed which can lead to a fall



- Nearly all older adults can safely participate in moderate physical activity such as a brisk walk or gardening for at least 30 minutes a day, most days of the week. Be sure to talk with your health care provider about which activities will be most beneficial to you based on your particular health condition or situation



- ◆ Have your eyes checked by an eye doctor at least once a year
 - Poor vision can increase your chances of falling. You may be wearing the wrong glasses or have a condition such as glaucoma or cataracts that limits your vision
- ◆ Improve the lighting in your home
 - As you get older, you need brighter lights to see well. Lamp shades or frosted bulbs can reduce glare
- ◆ Make your home safer by reducing hazards in your home that can lead to falls
 - Remove things you can trip over (such as papers, books, clothes, and shoes) from stairs and places where you walk
 - Remove small throw rugs or use double-sided tape to keep the rugs from slipping
 - Avoid having to use a step stool by keeping items you use often in cabinets that you can easily reach
 - Install grab bars next to your toilet and in the tub or shower
 - Use non-slip mats in the bathtub and on shower floors
 - Have handrails and lights installed on all stairways
 - Wear shoes that give good support and have thin non-slip soles. Avoid wearing slippers and athletic shoes with deep treads

Additional information can be found at www.cdc.gov/injury

Important Events

- **Medical Providers' Best Practices and GPRA Measures Conference (November 3-4)**
Location: Holiday Inn Capitol Plaza, Sacramento, CA — This conference is designed for medical professionals throughout the IHS network as well as clinic staff that support the quality improvement process.



Inside this issue:

Area Director's Message	1
Linking Poor Oral Health to Poor General Health	1
Optimal Nutrition From the Start	2
Blood Pressure Control	2
"Flu"; What it is, Who is At-Risk, and How to Avoid Getting Sick	3
Older Adults and Risk of Falls and Fall-Related Injuries	4
Important Events	4

California Area Indian Health Service

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Area Director's Message Ms. Margo Kerrigan, MPH



Cardiovascular Disease Awareness

As the Area Director for California, I see the rising problem of uncontrolled blood pressure as a state-wide and even country-wide problem for the Native population. This is a problem because uncontrolled blood pressure leads to other problems like cardiovascular disease (heart disease), retinopathy (blindness), chronic kidney disease (dialysis), stroke and even death.

Cardiovascular Disease is the #1 killer of American Indian/Alaska Native people, and the rates continue to rise. Native people are dying or living with life-altering disabilities too

young. There are tests your medical provider can perform to see if you have an increased risk for developing serious health problems or disabilities in the future.

Only YOU can make the changes in your life to prevent those problems, but there are ways to work with your medical provider as a team member. Make sure you get your blood pressure checked every time you go to the clinic. If you don't go often and you are over 20 years old, you should go at least once a year to have it checked. Scientific studies have shown that serious health problems can be prevented by keeping your blood pressure less than 130/80 mmHg if you have Diabetes or Chronic

Kidney Disease or less than 140/90 mmHg if you do not have those conditions.

When your medical provider tells you to take medication to "control" your blood pressure, make sure you take it every day as he or she prescribes. Ask a lot of questions about the medication and your condition. As a patient, you have the right to be totally informed on your medical treatment and most providers enjoy your questions.

If a medication makes you feel different or funny or if you have any changes in your health, tell your medical providers as soon as possible, there are many different types of medications that they can give you as an alternative.

Linking Poor Oral Health to Poor General Health

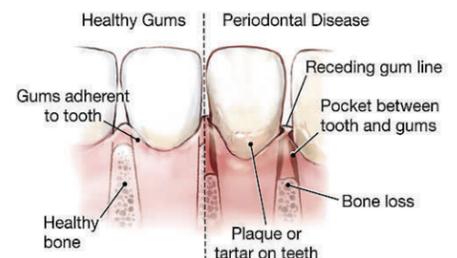
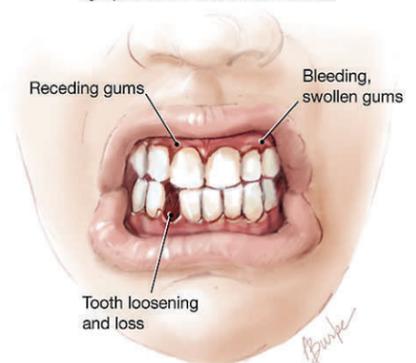
By Steve Riggio, DDS

Gum disease (also known as periodontal disease) can lead to loss of teeth and may also contribute to other health risks. Gum disease often begins with gingivitis, which is a mild gum infection. The signs and symptoms of gingivitis include: swelling, bleeding, redness and tenderness in the gum tissues. Gingivitis can be prevented by removing plaque through regular brushing and the use of dental floss. Plaque is a buildup of food and bacteria on the teeth. If plaque is not removed it can harden and become tartar. Tartar build-up can lead to a more serious infection that is called periodontitis. Periodontitis can lead to the loss of teeth and bone. Smoking can make gum disease worse because smoking decreases oxygen to the gums and makes them more susceptible to infections.

Evidence suggests that gum disease may be associated with other systemic (whole body) diseases. For example, there is a known link between diabetes and gum disease. People with diabetes are more susceptible to gum disease and it can put them at greater risk of diabetic complications. Some research has found that gum disease is associated with cardiovascular disease, stroke, and bacterial pneumonia. Still other research suggests that pregnant women with gum disease may be at increased risk for delivering babies that are pre-term, have low birth weight, or both.

Given the possible link between gum disease and other serious health problems, preventing gum disease may turn out to be an important step in maintaining overall health. In most cases this can be done by daily brushing and flossing and regular professional care. Make sure to tell your dentist about changes in your health including any recent illness or chronic conditions. Also provide your dentist with a list of your medications, including both prescriptions and over-the-counter products.

Symptoms of Periodontal Disease



Optimal Nutrition from the Start...Breastfeeding By Beverly Calderon, RD, CDE

Experts agree that mothers should breastfeed whenever possible, as breastfeeding confers many nutritional and developmental benefits. The Department of Health and Human Services encourages all women to breastfeed exclusively for six months before introducing solid foods and to continue breastfeeding for 12 months or longer, as desired. If this is not possible, even breastfeeding for a brief period of time is preferable to not breastfeeding at all. Scientific evidence shows that breastfeeding has a beneficial effect on child and maternal health. Further, breastfeeding honors traditions of American Indians and Alaska Natives by respecting heritage, culture, and family values.

Unique benefits that breast milk gives babies that formula (artificial milk) cannot provide:

- Made by mom specifically for her baby, with antibodies to prevent illness
- Contains all the nutrients that babies need and is easily digestible
- Protects babies from a wide variety of illnesses (including diarrhea, ear infections, and pneumonia)

- Promotes self-regulation of hunger and fullness cues
- Can lower the risk of becoming overweight and possibly developing diabetes in later life

Special qualities that breastfeeding provides mom to help keep her healthier:

- Helps decrease maternal stress, promote confidence, supports bonding, and may reduce risk of postpartum depression
- Increases likelihood of returning to pre-pregnancy weight if breastfeeding is continued for at least 3 months
- Reduces risk for breast, endometrial, and ovarian cancers
- Reduces risk for type 2 diabetes for mothers without a history of gestational diabetes
- Lowers total cholesterol, LDL cholesterol, and triglyceride levels during lactation, while elevating good HDL cholesterol
- May protect against rheumatoid arthritis

Blood Pressure Control By Helen Maldonado, PA-C, CDE

American Indian and Alaska Natives have many health problems to deal with every day. It may feel as though we are a "sick race" but we are not. Our relatives before us experienced many wrongs and now those reactions are showing up in the generations that followed: diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, drug and alcohol abuse, domestic violence, child abuse, and suicide. Having diabetes or high blood pressure is not your fault; don't feel so guilty that you are unable to help yourself. As Native people, we are able to turn this around and make sure the generations that follow will not have to

endure many more problems, if we work together to help ourselves.

Knowledge equals power, especially when it comes to our own health. Make sure you learn as much as you can from your medical providers and nearest Indian health clinic. Most clinics receive specialized training and information to help you address diabetes and the prevention of complications. This year there will be an extra effort put on blood pressure control, especially for those that have diabetes, as this will help you to avoid having a heart attack or stroke. **Blood pressure control is as important as having blood sugar control, especially when you have diabetes.**

Here are some tips to help lower your blood pressure:

- Reduce salt in your diet
- Achieve a healthy body weight
- Increase foods high in calcium

- Reduce caffeine intake
- Drink plenty of fluids
- Take medication prescribed by your doctor
- Exercise regularly (30 minutes a day is recommended)



It is true that historical grief and trauma have impacted our Native people in a big way, but it's also important to look at it from the other side - the side of the survivors and "thrivers" of today. I'd like to quote a young California Poma man, Mikela Jones, who, when talking about historical grief and trauma, described Native people as also holding "historical beauty." Stay well my friends.



Cardiovascular Disease Awareness (continued from page 1)

Bring in all of your medicines in a bag at least once every 3 months to let your medical provider review them, make sure you let your medical provider know you will do this and schedule the appointment to accommodate the time it will take.

Keep a written list of your medications in your purse or wallet in case of an emergency. If you are being taken to the hospital for any reason, you or your family members will not be able to recall the names and dosages of all your medications to tell the emergency personnel or emergency room doctors.

Everyday choices in your life will help you to control your blood pressure, pre-

vent heart disease, and to live longer and stronger:

- Stop smoking (help is available)
- Don't add salt to your food
- Learn what foods are better for your condition
- Start walking or do some sort of "intentional exercise"
- Lose weight, losing even 10-15 pounds can improve blood pressure

Lifestyle changes are difficult to start and keep as habits; it takes practice. Look first to your Indian Health clinic for programs that do just that. If there is nothing available where you live, look for other resources in your area. You can even make

changes on your own within your family.

My wish is for every one of you to live well and stay healthy.

Visit our website for a health clinic near you:

<http://www.ihs.gov/FacilitiesServices/AreaOffices/California/Universal/PageMain.cfm?p=20>

"Flu"; What it is, Who is At-Risk, and How to Avoid Getting Sick

By Susan Ducore, RN, MSN

What is Influenza ("Flu")?

- Influenza is a highly infectious viral illness. Two strains of flu, seasonal flu and the H1N1 (swine) flu, are currently circulating in the United States

Every year in the U.S., on average:

- 5 to 20 percent of the population get the flu
- More than 200,000 people are hospitalized from flu-related complications
- About 36,000 people die from flu-related causes

What are the symptoms of the flu?

- The symptoms for all flu, including seasonal and H1N1 flu, are similar. They include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headaches, and chills
- Most healthy people recover from the flu without problems, but certain people are at high risk for serious complications*

What can I do to avoid getting the flu?

- Getting vaccinated is the best way

to avoid getting either the seasonal or the H1N1 flu

- Ask your health care provider about getting a seasonal flu vaccination now and the H1N1 vaccination when it becomes available

The following groups of people are more likely to have complications from the seasonal flu:

- Persons age 65 years and older
- Children younger than 2 years
- People of any age who have chronic medical conditions*

If you fall into one of the following "H1N1 High Risk Groups", you will want to ask your medical provider about receiving the H1N1 vaccination:

- Pregnant women
- Household contacts and caregivers for children younger than 6 months
- Healthcare and emergency medical services personnel
- All people from 6 months to 24 years of age
- Persons aged 25-64 years who have health conditions associated with a higher risk of medical com-

plications from flu (diabetes, heart disease, COPD, etc)



In addition to getting vaccinated, the following "Good Health Habits" can help stop the spread of germs:

- Avoid close contact
- Stay home when you are sick
- Cover your mouth and nose
- Wash your hands often
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth
- Practice other good health habits
- Clean and disinfect

For additional information please talk with your health care provider and/or visit the Center for Disease Control's www.flu.gov website.

*If you have one of these health conditions—asthma, diabetes, cancer, HIV/AIDS, and heart or kidney disease — and you develop flu-like symptoms, contact your health care provider or seek medical care immediately.