



# Indian Health Service/California Area Office Patient Newsletter

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**You Can Prevent Fetal Alcohol Syndrome!**

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

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) are preventable causes of mental retardation. FASD are a group of conditions that can occur in a person whose mother drank alcohol during pregnancy. It is not clear how much alcohol causes FAS or FASD, but experts believe no amount of alcohol is safe to drink during pregnancy. American Indian people have higher rates of alcoholism and some of the highest rates of FAS and FASD in the country. Some tribes report the rates at 1.5 to 2.5 per 1,000 births as compared to the general U.S. population which is between 0.2 and 1.0 per 1,000 births.

The symptoms of FASD vary from child to child, but the effects are irreversible. Research confirms that the development of facial features, the heart, and other major organs including bones and the central nervous system usually occur during the first trimester of pregnancy and some

mothers may not even know they are pregnant during this time. Below are physical characteristics and mental deficiencies associated with FAS and FASD:

- Distinctive facial features which include small eyes, thin upper lip, a short upturned nose and smooth skin between the nose and upper lip
- Deformities of limbs and joints
- Visual and/or hearing problems
- Small head and small brain size
- Delayed developmental and learning disabilities
- Abnormal behavior such as hyperactivity, poor impulse control, and extreme anxiety

What can we do to prevent FAS and FASD? Actually, there is a lot we can do. The first step is to increase awareness of these disorders and educate your community.

*(Continued on page 3)*

## Stay Healthy During the Winter By Helen Maldonado, PA-C

Winter is a time to be indoors, close to family and friends. Historically, this was a time of year elders would pass on stories to the younger generation and teach good habits and the right way to be. One tradition to now pass on to families is protecting yourself



from sicknesses that live all around. Carrying packs of "Wet Wipes" can be helpful when traveling to wipe down surfaces on airplanes, tables, cars, and shopping carts. This lowers the risk of exposure and increases the

chances of getting sick. Make sure you get your flu shot and avoid touching your face until you have washed your hands or used a hand sanitizer. People with diabetes and other chronic conditions will get much sicker than young, healthy adults. So, protect your loved ones and community, stay home when you are sick with the flu, and ALWAYS cover your mouth into your sleeve when you have a cough. Stay well!

### What to Do About the Flu:

Seasonal flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by flu viruses. It spreads between people and can cause mild to severe illness. In some cases, especially those with chronic diseases like diabetes, the flu can lead to death.

For more information, visit: <http://www.flu.gov/>

## Protect Young Children From Injuries At Home

By Christine Brennan, MPH

Unintentional home injuries account for approximately 2,100 deaths of children under the age of 14 each year. Injuries occurring at home are also one of the leading causes of emergency room visits for children. Researchers estimate that there are more than 4 million emergency room visits each year in the U.S. due to childhood injuries sustained at home. More than half a million of these children have moderate to severe injuries. The best way to prevent injuries is by adult supervision, but there are also several other simple ways to prevent your children from being injured in the home:

- Use safety latches and locks on all cabinets and drawers in the kitchen, bathroom, and laundry room, or anywhere else in the home that medications, toxic chemicals, cleaning products, or sharp objects may be stored
- Use safety gates on stairs to prevent falls
- Use doorknob covers and door locks to prevent children from going into areas of the home that have possible dangers
- Install smoke alarms and Carbon Monoxide alarms on every floor of the home, especially near sleeping areas. Be sure to replace the batteries in the alarms once a year
- Use window guards and safety netting to prevent falls from windows, balconies, or decks. Limit window openings to less than 4 inches
- Install corner and edge bumpers on sharp edges of furniture and fireplaces
- Install outlet covers and outlet plates to prevent electrocution
- Install cordless window coverings to prevent children from strangulation. Strangulations can occur anywhere in the home where a window covering with a cord is installed
- Anchor furniture and appliances to prevent tip-overs; bookshelves, dressers, TVs, and other heavy items can easily tip on a child and cause injury or death
- If a pool or spa is present at the home, be sure to use, at a minimum, a 4 foot self-closing and self-locking gate around the pool or spa to prevent accidental drowning

For more information, visit:

- U.S Consumer Product Safety Commission Guide to Childproofing Your Home: <http://www.cpsc.gov/cpsc/pub/pubs/252.pdf>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Protect the Ones You Love website: <http://www.cdc.gov/safekid/>

## Dentures

By Steve Riggio, DDS

Dentures are removable prosthetic devices designed and constructed to replace missing teeth. Tooth loss can occur because of dental diseases (such as periodontal disease and tooth decay), developmental effects, trauma, and drug use. Dentures can help restore functions such as chewing, speaking, providing support for lips and cheeks, and restoring your smile.



An Upper Complete Denture

There are two main categories of dentures based on the number of teeth needing replacement; removable partial dentures and complete dentures. Complete dentures are used when all the natural teeth in an arch (upper or lower) are missing.

Complete dentures are held in place when a seal forms between the denture base material and the gums. They may also be held in place with dental implants. Partial dentures can be used to replace any number of missing teeth in a dental arch. Removable

dentures typically have a metal framework and a plastic base which supports artificial teeth. These appliances are usually attached to adjacent teeth with metal clasps.

Adapting to a denture can be difficult, and problems include having something new in your mouth, sore spots, gagging, and difficulty speaking and eating. Challenges such as gagging and difficulty chewing and speaking can be quickly overcome by practice and repetition. New dentures often cause sore spots on the supporting gums and tissue. These sore spots can be relieved by your dentist by making minor adjustments to the denture.

Plaque and tartar can build up on dentures just like they do on natural teeth. You should clean and brush your denture daily with a soft-bristled toothbrush and a non-abrasive cleaner. It is also very important to continue to thoroughly clean your mouth, including gums, cheeks, tongue, and roof of the mouth. Be careful, dentures can break when dropped. Don't wear your dentures at night. At night, put your dentures in water to avoid the materials from getting dry. It is important to see your dentist on a regular basis. Regular visits will help you to keep your mouth and gums healthy and ensure that your dentures are comfortable.

## You Can Prevent Fetal Alcohol Syndrome! (continued from page 1)

Education and awareness regarding FAS and FASD is number one. Abstinence from alcohol during pregnancy should be the gold standard. Other primary prevention strategies that have worked within American Indian communities include:

- Build upon cultural strengths and participate in talking circles and traditional ceremonies
- Implement educational programs and adopt the "Pregnancy is sacred" campaign
- Provide non-judgmental counseling services for woman who are pregnant and continue to drink
- Recommend early pregnancy testing for mothers who are drinking and believe they could be pregnant.

There is no cure or specific treatment plan for FAS and FASD. Primary prevention intervention is the

most effective treatment option. Although early education about avoiding alcohol during childbearing years is critical, if a woman becomes pregnant and is drinking, offer support and programs that suggest abstinence for the remainder of her pregnancy. There are numerous websites to obtain additional information about successful primary and secondary prevention programs. For additional information, visit <http://fasdcenter.samhsa.gov/>.

You may also contact your local tribal or urban program's behavioral health and medical programs. They offer information and support regarding FAS and FASD prevention. FAS and FASD within the American Indian population can be eradicated. Indian communities can end this mental health problem. Today's babies are tomorrow's leaders.



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## Food, More Than Just Food By Beverly Calderon, RD, CDE

Food can have meaning that is connected to family, traditions, social customs, and health. The people we have around us influence our food choices in addition to our environment. Culture and tradition are the strongest influences on food preferences. Food is integral to initiating and maintaining relationships, regardless of how simple or complicated. Culture and diet (foods and beverage a person eats and drinks) affect each other. Although culture and experience give food meaning, the body has a fundamental need for food - to get the nutrients it needs. Nutrients in foods support normal growth and development. Some nutrients are considered essential nutrients, because the body cannot make or cannot make enough. Nutrients support normal growth and development, maintaining cells and tissues, fuel for physical and metabolic work, and regulating hundreds of thousands of processes in our bodies. The six nutrient classes are:

- carbohydrates (starch, sugars, and dietary fibers)
- lipids (fats and oils)
- protein (animal and plant)
- Vitamins
- Minerals
- Water

They are all important for life and are all part of culture and tradition. Many illnesses and diseases affect the proportions of nutrients needed. Registered dietitians can help us stay connected to culture and tradition by better understanding our individual nutrient needs. Sure, we can learn on our own in this information drenched world, but what are we learning? Is it helpful or harmful? Food is more than just food; it helps us to stay connected to culture and tradition, and understand our own individual nutrient needs.





## Upcoming Events

May 20-23, 2013  
Annual Medical  
Providers' Best  
Practices Conference in  
Sacramento, California

- No registration fee!
- All community members welcome!
- IHS-sponsored CME units!

## When To See a Doctor for Joint Pain By Wendy Blocker, MSN

Joint pain is discomfort that arises from any joint; the point where two or more bones meet. Joint pain is sometimes called arthritis or arthralgia. Joint pain can be mild, causing some soreness each time you move your joint. Joint pain can also be severe, making it impossible to use your joint. Joint pain is rarely an emergency. Most cases of mild joint pain can be successfully managed at home.

Joint pain can be caused by injury or disease affecting any of the ligaments (connecting tissue), bursae (joint cavity), or tendons (fiber-like tissue) surrounding the joint. Injury or disease can also affect the ligaments, cartilage, and bones within the joint, leading to a painful joint. Pain is also a feature of joint inflammation and infection and can be a feature of rare tumors of the joint.

Seek emergency help when your joint pain is caused by an injury

and is accompanied by:

- Bleeding
  - Exposed bone or tendon
- Ask someone to drive you to an urgent care center or emergency room if your joint pain is caused by an injury and is accompanied by:
- Joint deformity
  - Inability to use the joint
  - Intense pain
  - Sudden swelling

Make an appointment with your doctor if your joint pain is accompanied by:

- Swelling
- Redness
- Tenderness and warmth around the joint

Begin self-care measures while you wait for your appointment with your doctor:

- Try an over-the-counter non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) to help relieve

pain and swelling. Options include aspirin, ibuprofen (such as Advil or Motrin), or naproxen sodium (such as Aleve)

- Avoid using your joint in ways that cause or worsen pain
- Apply an ice pack to your painful joint for 15 to 20 minutes a few times each day



## Tobacco Cessation By Amy Patterson, PhD

Do you need a reason to quit smoking? We all have heard that smoking can cause lung cancer, but you might be surprised to know that it also causes chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), heart disease, stroke, aneurisms, pneumonia, and cancers of the esophagus, larynx, mouth, pancreas, kidney, cervix, stomach, and bladder. Smokeless tobacco can lead to cancers of the gum and mouth, and contributes to tooth loss. Studies have also demonstrated that women who use tobacco during pregnancy are more likely to have spontaneous miscarriages. Smoking during pregnancy has also been linked to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and low birth weight. Not surprisingly, smokers die earlier than non-smokers; men

lose an average of 13.2 years, and women lose an average of 14.5 years.

Smoking doesn't just affect smokers, it impacts everyone around them. Each year, because of exposure to environmental tobacco smoke, an estimated 3,400 nonsmoking Americans die of lung cancer and 46,000 die of heart disease. Exposure to secondhand smoke is especially bad for



children, and is associated with increased risk for SIDS, asthma, bronchitis, pneumonia, and more frequent colds and ear infections.

Tobacco use among American Indians and Alaska Natives is higher than among other groups. In 2004, 23.1% of all Indian youths smoked, compared to 14.9% for non-Hispanic whites. Indian women have the highest rate of smoking during pregnancy among all groups; almost 18% reported smoking during pregnancy in 2005. Indians also have the highest rates of smokeless tobacco use.

Even a long-time smoker can significantly improve their health and longevity by quitting. Nicotine patches, nicotine gum and nicotine lozenges are available over-the-counter. Nicotine nasal sprays and inhalers are also available by prescription. Zyban and Chantix are non-nicotine pills. While tobacco cessation medications or counseling can help smokers quit, a combination of both is more effective. If you're a smoker who has tried to quit before, remember that quitting smoking often requires multiple attempts. It's never too late to take this important step to improve your health.

The Indian Health Service has a performance measure relating to Tobacco Cessation. In FY 2012, 35.2% of all tobacco-using patients received tobacco cessation counseling or a prescription for a tobacco-cessation aid. But don't wait for your health program or mid-level provider to offer them. If you are a tobacco user and are ready to quit, ask your physician for help.