

partners in health

winter
2008

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

QUARTERLY NEWS TO HELP YOU THRIVE

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don't let **AH-CHOO** get the best of you

If you catch a cold or flu this season, keep in mind that your body will usually cure itself in a week or two. Most winter ailments, including colds, the flu, and sore throats, are caused by viruses. Antibiotics won't work for these illnesses, because they only fight bacteria. And if you take antibiotics when you don't need them, they may not work as well for you when you do need them and can cause side effects.

Avoid the misery of seasonal colds and flu.

- Get a flu shot each year. For flu shot clinic information, call **1-800-573-5811**.
- Wash your hands often and avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Eat well and exercise to keep your immune system strong.

- Get plenty of rest and reduce your stress to help fight off infections.
- Cough or sneeze into a tissue or your sleeve to keep from spreading the cold or flu.

Ease the discomfort of a cold or flu.

- Get extra rest and drink plenty of warm liquids.
- Take acetaminophen or ibuprofen for aches and fever.
- Use cough drops (if older than 6 years old) or cough syrup, and drink lots of fluids to ease coughing.
- Gargle with warm salt water or suck on lozenges or sugar-free hard candies (if older than 6) to soothe a sore throat.
- For a stuffy or runny nose, use a saline nose spray or sinus rinse kit, and breathe warm, moist air from

a steamy shower or humidifier. Adults can take a decongestant, such as pseudoephedrine or phenylephrine. (Don't use either of these drugs if you have high blood pressure or heart disease.)

► **For more information, visit kp.org/colds. You can also browse our Health Encyclopedia at kp.org/health for topics ranging from bronchitis to stomach flu.**



Read to your child Did you know that 45 Northern California pediatric clinics are now Reach Out and Read sites? Kaiser Permanente is committed to the education and health of our children, and that is why we're helping to make books a routine part of pediatric primary care. Bring your child in for his or her well-child visit and learn more.

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organ donation saves lives

Before the age of 2, member Kelly Olmo received a life-saving liver transplant. Now 21, she continues to be thankful for one family's generosity and courage.



As an infant, Kelly Olmo was diagnosed with neonatal hepatitis, which affected her liver. As a last resort, a liver transplant was performed. Looking back, she doesn't remember anything about the delicate procedure, but she knows the effect it's had on her life since.

"I had a pretty normal childhood," says Olmo. "But I wouldn't have had the opportunity to

experience any of it without someone making this amazing gift."

Today, about 20,000 Californians are waiting for a donor match. But the reality is, nearly one-third of them will die while on the waiting list, according to Donate Life California, a nonprofit tissue and donor registry.

"There are more people on the waiting list than there are organs available," says Gordon Loo of Kaiser Permanente's National Transplant Network.

Olmo feels forever grateful to the family who made the life-changing decision. "I think about it all the time," she confides. "In the weakest moment of life, having a loved one pass away, a family still said yes to saving someone they didn't even know. That's amazing. That's heroic."

► It only takes a couple of seconds to register to become an organ and tissue donor. Visit donatelifecalifornia.org/register or register at any DMV when you apply for or renew your California driver's license.

If more people and families take the step toward organ donation, urges Loo, "They can pass on the gift of life to someone who's desperately waiting."

GET SCREENED for colon cancer

When it's found early, colorectal cancer (also called colon or rectal cancer) can be treatable and curable. Tests are not pleasant, but they're simple! Two widely available and effective tests for detecting colon cancer are:


■ Fecal occult blood test (FOBT) / fecal immunochemical test (FIT).

Usually done once a year, this test looks for occult (hidden) blood in your stool, which may be a symptom of colon cancer. You can start the test at home with a kit, and then send it to the Laboratory to get your result.

■ Flexible sigmoidoscopy.

Your doctor examines the lower half of your colon, where most colon cancers grow, with a flexible viewing tube. This screening is usually done every five years.

► If you're 50 or older, call your personal physician to schedule a colorectal cancer screening. For more information, talk to your doctor or go to kp.org/health and look up "colon cancer."



A sound sleep
is in your reach.

get a better NIGHT'S REST

DO YOU WAKE UP REFRESHED

and ready to face the day? If not, you're not alone.

According to the American Academy of Sleep Medicine, about one in five adults aren't getting enough sleep. And more than 50 million Americans have some kind of sleep disorder.

"A lot of people don't think much about feeling sleepy," says Anil Rama, MD, medical director of the Regional Sleep Medicine Laboratory at our San Jose Medical Center. "The symptoms develop so gradually that they think it's normal to be sleepy during the day."

The importance of sleep

With its round-the-clock demands and obligations, modern life leaves many of us bleary-eyed.

"Technology has given us more gadgets to spend time on, and more people are working longer hours or holding down two jobs," says Dr. Rama. "Sleep ends up being sacrificed. People just cope with it by lining up at the coffeehouse every morning."

If you miss an hour of sleep now and then, it's probably not a problem. But when you don't get enough sleep on a regular basis, your family and social life suffer, work performance declines, and your body struggles to fight off infections. Chronic sleep problems have been associated with a higher risk of depression and may even increase the risk of heart disease and cancer.

If you have difficulty falling asleep for more than four weeks, talk to your doctor. Sleep disorders come in many forms—insomnia, sleep apnea (where

you stop breathing for 10 seconds or longer while sleeping), and restless leg syndrome are just a few examples. Some disorders can be diagnosed and treated easily, while others require testing before treatment can be recommended.

Beyond counting sheep

Sleeping pills, whether over-the-counter or prescribed, can be helpful for occasional or short-term use. But frequent use of sleep medications can cause daytime drowsiness and memory problems, as well as dependence. They may also lose their effectiveness after prolonged use and can prevent you from getting the deep, restorative sleep you need.

Dr. Rama encourages people to consider behavioral changes to help train their bodies to get ready for sleep (see box below).

tips for an easier bedtime

Dr. Anil Rama encourages people to:

- **Develop a routine.** Go to bed at the same time every night, and get up at the same time every morning (even on weekends). Read, listen to music, or take a warm bath before bed to help you relax.
- **Create a sleep environment.** Reserve the bedroom for only sleep and intimacy. Don't lie awake in bed at night for longer than 15 to 20 minutes. Get up and do something relaxing—such as reading—until you feel sleepy. Try going to

bed later when you are sleepier, rather than tossing and turning for hours before falling asleep. Consider using a white noise machine to eliminate distractions.

- **Cut back.** Avoid alcohol, caffeine, and tobacco before bedtime. Cut back on fluids in the evening to avoid having to get up to use the bathroom.
- **Get active.** Getting at least 30 minutes of physical activity every day helps improve deep sleep. Avoid working out two hours or less before bedtime.

→ YOUR RESOURCES

- **Online programs.** Get personalized online action plans from the HealthMedia[®] Overcoming[™] Insomnia and Relax[™] programs at kp.org/healthylifestyles.
- **Healthy living classes.** Search kp.org/classes for classes on insomnia and stress reduction, or call your local Health Education Center for details and fees.
- **Talk to your doc.** Your doctor can help determine if your insomnia is caused by a medical condition, and can refer you to a Kaiser Permanente sleep lab, if needed.
- **Health encyclopedia.** For more tips on insomnia and sleep, visit kp.org/health.

There's also a new online program, free for Kaiser Permanente members, that's designed to help people fall asleep faster, sleep longer, and wake up more refreshed. Look for HealthMedia[®] Overcoming[™] Insomnia at kp.org/healthylifestyles. Complete the short questionnaire about your sleep patterns to get a personalized action plan.

the ABCs of a healthy heart

My female patients ask me all the time about the threat of breast cancer, but I remind them to also think about their hearts. Heart disease is the No. 1 cause of death for women in the United States. But because the symptoms aren't always obvious—such as breathlessness, heartburn, nausea, jaw pain, back pain, or fatigue—some women don't worry about heart disease until it's too late.

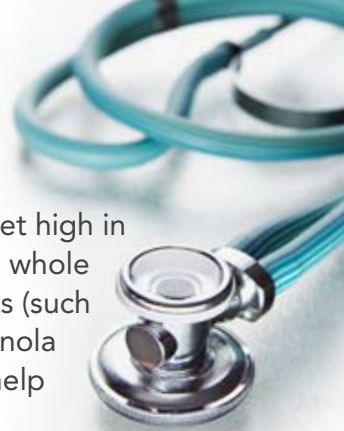
Help reduce your risk by following these simple prevention tips for a healthy heart:

- **A** is for **Aspirin**. If you're over 65, talk to your doctor about taking a low-dose aspirin (81 mg) every day to help prevent a heart attack or stroke.
- **B** is for **Blood Pressure**. Check your blood pressure regularly, and aim to keep it below 120/80 mmHg.
- **C** is for **Cholesterol**. Cholesterol damages your heart vessels. Keep your total cholesterol under 200 mg/dL (your LDL, or "bad" cholesterol, below 100; and your HDL, or "good" cholesterol, above 40).

- **D** is for **Diet**. A diet high in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, healthy fats (such as olive oil and canola oil), and fish can help you stay healthy.
- **E** is for **Exercise**. Physical activity for at least 30 minutes most days of the week can help you manage your weight and keep your heart strong. If you smoke, stop. It's the best thing you can do for your heart. And if you drink alcohol, do so in moderation. People with diabetes are at higher risk for heart disease. If you have diabetes, work to keep your blood sugar under control.

► [To learn more about how you can stay a beat ahead of heart disease, go to kp.org/heart.](http://kp.org/heart)

Tracy Flanagan, MD, our women's health leader in Northern California, offers expert advice and information on health issues facing women today.



alternative approaches to better sleep

Insomnia may affect concentration, school and job performance, and may lead to medical problems such as depression and anxiety. So, people often turn to complementary and alternative medicine to sleep better.

The herb valerian has been shown to help many fall asleep and stay asleep. It can be taken as a tea or in pill form. Side effects, including dizziness or headaches, are possible but not common. Valerian may also interact with other medications, so check with

your doctor if you are taking an antidepressant, any drug that may cause drowsiness, or any other dietary supplement. Prolonged use may cause dependence.

Melatonin, a natural hormone, is a supplement that has been shown to help people fall asleep. It's believed to help you regain your sleep cycle, especially if you're suffering from jet lag. Although generally safe in small doses, there have been reports of seizures, blood clots, and intensified dreams with use of melatonin. It may

also interact with blood pressure and diabetes medications, blood thinners, and anti-seizure medications.

You may also improve your sleep with relaxation techniques that include music or guided imagery. Regular exercise has also been shown to help sleep, when done more than two hours before bedtime.

► [See our story on page 8 for more tips to help sleep better, and check out kp.org/naturalmedicines for information about herbs and other supplements.](http://kp.org/naturalmedicines)



Harley Goldberg, DO, is the director of our Complementary and Alternative Medicine Program in Northern California. If you have specific questions about your care, please ask your physician.

GET THE WHOLE PICTURE AT KP.ORG

Get a good look at your current overall health—from how often you exercise to what you eat in the morning—with a total health assessment from Health Media® Succeed™*. This online tool, free to members, will help you prioritize the kinds of health changes you may want to make.

After you complete an online questionnaire, you'll receive an overview

of where your health stands today and a customized action plan for you to start making changes when you're ready. You can even submit a summary of your results to your electronic medical record for your personal physician to see. Simply click on the option to share your information with your health care team when completing the questionnaire. Your doctor will

then have access to the summary and can work with you to help you achieve your health goals.

► Get a picture of your health on kp.org today. Go to the My Health Manager tab and select "My medical record," then click on the link for the total health assessment.

* This feature requires you to be registered and signed on to our Web site. If you haven't registered yet, start by going to kp.org/register.



baby on board?

How can I get my baby to stop crying? What should I do if he has a fever? When can she start eating solid foods?

If you're a new parent and have questions about your growing baby, you're not alone. Get the latest on infant health and development, along with helpful parenting tips and links to Kaiser Permanente resources in *Healthy Babies*, our new monthly e-newsletter for moms and dads. It's free for members.

Healthy Babies is a continuation of *Healthy Beginnings*, our popular

online newsletter for pregnant women and parents-to-be. "We've supported moms through their pregnancies, and we want to continue that same support for new parents," says Amanda Howell, project manager for Pediatrics and Adolescent Health for Regional Health Education at Kaiser Permanente.

"We know it's a busy time, especially for first-time parents who may have a lot of questions."

To get you started on the right foot, and

because there's so much to cover, you'll get two issues of *Healthy Babies* during the first month of your subscription.

To subscribe to *Healthy Babies*, go to your pediatrician's home page at kp.org/mydoctor and click on the "Healthy Babies" link.

Look for similar e-newsletters for parents of children and teenagers in the future.

Our heart's in the right place With our care and treatment of heart disease, Kaiser Permanente has reduced heart-related deaths among our 3 million Northern California members to rates 30 percent lower than the rest of the population in the state.* To read more about healthy heart choices, turn to page 10. * National Committee on Quality Assurance Annual Report, 2002.



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