



HBR Report



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June 14, 2002

Flag Day has special meaning this year

Perhaps more than at any time in our history, since September 11 the American flag has been the unifying symbol of our nation. You can see it on lapels, waving from cars, and flying proudly over our buildings.

It's always been true that the emotions of Americans move deeply at the sight of Old Glory. But this year it means we stand together against terrorism, and it means we are fighting and rebuilding.

It's the symbol of everything our country stands for. Each time we see our flag, we remember who we are and the price we have paid to keep our nation free.

We see a country where men and women are judged only by their own accomplishments. We see a land where we are free to choose our place of worship, elect our officials, and, if we want, run for office ourselves.

Our flag personifies the kind of country that shapes heroes like those who landed on D-Day, who fought wars that brought or preserved our freedom, and who gave their lives to rescue others in the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks.

As we honor the flag on June 14, the American Legion recalls these words of Henry Cuyler Bunner:



*"Off with your hat as the flag goes by!
And let the heart have its way.*

*You're strong enough for a tear in your
eye
That you will not wipe away."*

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DIRECTOR'S REPORT



Thomas H. Young, Jr.
Director

HBRs are the walking, talking “billboards” of the NALC HBP!!

During the past several months, as I perused the various branch publications that cross my desk, I am again moved to repeat a concern I have about the lack of HBR reports at branch meetings and in branch newsletters.

I am honestly mystified why any Health Benefit Representative has nothing to say about the Health Benefit Plan.

One of the complaints I have often heard is that the Plan doesn't advertise like Blue Cross or some other federal plans. Most of you are very aware that the NALC's philosophy is to promote the Plan only to letter carriers. Letter carriers and their families are the sole reason for our existence.

Sure, we do have members from other federal agencies, but they are incidental to why we are here.

HBRs are the walking, talking “billboards” of the NALC Health Benefit Plan. Your presence and promotion year-round is an important part of the HBRs' duties. You, me, everyone have every reason to be proud of the Health Benefit Plan and we need to take and create every opportunity to “spread the word.”

Now, having gotten that off my chest again, I want to express my appreciation to those Health Benefit Representatives who do all I have suggested above. Thank you for performing a tough job to the utmost of your ability.

I can't let this issue go past without mentioning the National Agreement. This

morning I mailed my ratification ballot to affirm my support of President Sombrotto's and the NALC's accomplishment. Not only do I support the length and security this contract provides, I am very appreciative of the fact that there are no givebacks. That includes maintaining the level of Postal Service contribution toward the health benefits premium.

As we again face the pressure and certainty of health care costs rising, the fact that there is no diminishing of the USPS share certainly helps to make the pay raises more meaningful.

So, as you extol the virtues of the Health Benefit Plan at your next branch meeting or in the branch newsletter, you can also point to the contract and the protection of a benefit that is vital to every brother and sister letter carrier.

The Pharmacy Corner



Will New Drugs Head Off Diabetes?

There are many new drugs in development that may one day stop diabetes before it happens – BUT WHY WAIT – there’s already a terrific treatment for the pre-diabetic condition known as “impaired glucose tolerance (IGT)” that’s reaching epidemic proportions in the United States.



“Today, the best proven therapy is without side effects,” says Dr. Daniel Einhorn, medical director of the Scripps Whittier Diabetes Institute in La Jolla, California. What is this great treatment? Doctors call it lifestyle modification. We all know it as diet and exercise. Your diet goal would be to lose 5-7% of your body weight in a year and **KEEP IT OFF**. If you presently weigh 200 pounds, that’s only a 10 to 14 pound weight loss. Your exercise goal should be to do some sort of aerobic exercise (walk, run or bicycle) for



at least 150 minutes a week – or about 20 minutes a day.

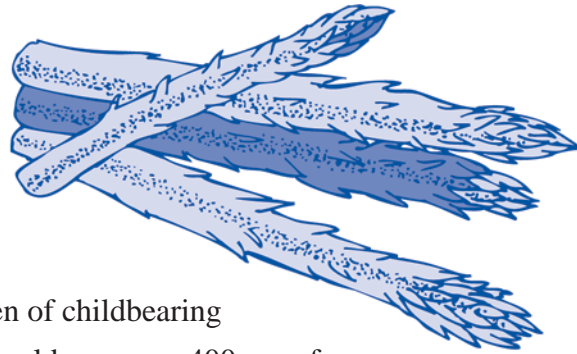
Why all of the fuss over a “pre-diabetic” condition? Doctors now see impaired glucose tolerance as a dangerous medical condition. This is a strong indication that real diabetic condition is on the doorstep, bringing with it possible heart disease. IGT is when your blood sugar gets too high after a normal meal. People with type 2 diabetes

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HEALTH IN THE NEWS

Food of the Month

Asparagus



In April and May you can see the brilliant green tips of asparagus poking out of the ground to welcome spring. Those delicious shoots are filled with foliate. They are rich in vitamins A, C, E, thiamine, riboflavin and calcium. They are definitely a nutritional powerhouse.

According to *The Doctor's Book of Food Remedies* (Rodale), asparagus was popular with royal households of France in the seventeenth century. The French royals enjoyed its flavor, but they also considered it to be a powerful aphrodisiac.

While the aphrodisiac powers of asparagus have never been documented, authorities today do know that its rich stores of foliate may help prevent birth defects of the brain and spinal

cord.

Women of childbearing age should consume 400 mg of foliate per day. (Five asparagus spears contain 110 mg.)

All adults should get 400 mg of foliate each day because research suggests it protects the heart. Research shows that foliate controls the amount of homocysteine in the bloodstream. When foliate levels fall, homocysteine levels rise, causing damage to the arteries of the heart and brain. For preventing heart disease, medical authorities believe foliate may be just as important as controlling cholesterol.

Today, just 12 percent of Americans get 400 mg of foliate each day. By some estimates, 13,000 Americans could avoid heart disease with adequate foliate.

Nutrition Plan Repairs Bad Habit Damage

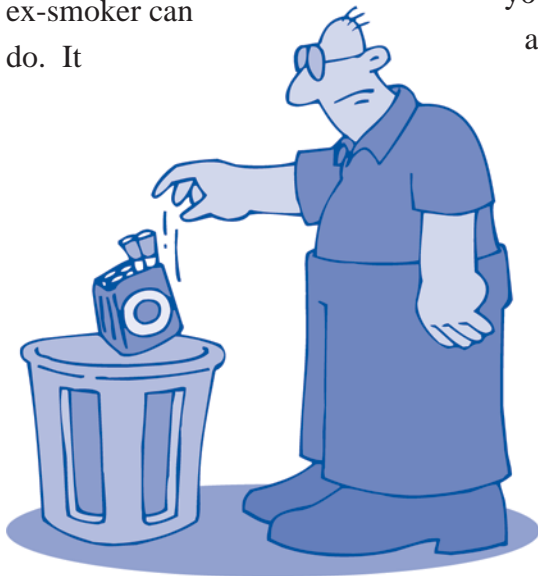
Remember when you could attack a keg of beer, eat the biggest steak, get a suntan and smoke cigarettes. Those days are gone. Now what?

The good news is that the human body adapts to almost everything you put it through, and much damage can be repaired says Dr. Susan Kleiner, author of *Power Eating* (Human Kinetics). These are some of the unwise things people do and how to repair the damage:

Drink a six-pack: Huge amounts of liquid flush away stored vitamins and nutrients needed for immunity, muscle contraction, relaxation and

growth. Best advice – take a multivitamin that includes B vitamins and antioxidants, says Dr. Alan Magaziner, author of *The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Living Longer and Healthier* (Alpha Books). Quoted in *Men’s Fitness*, Dr. Magaziner says liver and brain damage caused by moderate drinking is reversible if you quit.

Smoke: The list of consequences is too long to mention. Smoking affects most body functions. Best advice – quit! Eat at least six servings of fruits and vegetables a day. Break your dining into six or seven small meals to avoid weight gain and include complex carbohydrates like whole wheat bread. Starting an exercise program is the most beneficial thing an ex-smoker can do. It



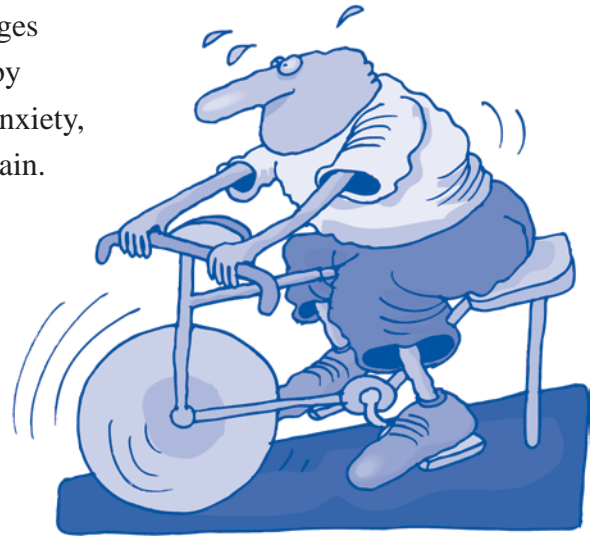
produces chemical changes similar to those caused by nicotine and decreases anxiety, depression and weight gain.

Worship the sun: Exposure to the sun causes skin aging, puts a ton of free radicals into the system and increases the risk of skin cancer.

Best advice – stay out of the sun at mid-day and wear SPF 45 sunscreen at other times. Take a supplement that includes vitamins C and E, selenium, copper, zinc and manganese. Drink eight to 10 glasses of water a day.

Eat a 32-oz steak: Aside from fat making you gain weight, eating too much meat increases your risk for heart disease and certain cancers. Best advice – eat leaner cuts but replace most red meat with poultry and fish. Take vitamin E and folic acid supplements and get more fiber into your diet.

Watch TV constantly: Do something else for part of each evening.



Exercise for 30 minutes a day three times a week. Eat meals in the kitchen. Stock low-fat snacks like fat-free yogurt and fresh vegetables. Use an exercise bike while watching TV.

Regardless of what you have done to your body in the past, it’s never too late to get healthier and stronger.

Cardiac Arrest and Cold Packs

Doctors at the University of Pittsburgh say using ice packs or cold air to chill bodies of cardiac-arrest victims greatly improves their chance of surviving without brain damage.

When the heart stops because of a heart attack, drowning or



drug overdose, lowering the body temperature to about 92 degrees Fahrenheit can stop brain-damaging chemical reactions. The doctors suggest that ambulances carry ice packs and place them on the body immediately.

Doctors are testing to determine if the method helps prevent damage caused by stroke and traumatic brain injuries.

Immunizations Don't Increase Risk of Juvenile Diabetes

Some 25 percent of parents think too many immunizations weaken a child's immune system and that children get more immunizations than are good for them. Today children are immunized against 11

different diseases and their vaccines are much safer than those used in the 1980s.

Big Difference Between Heartburn and GERD

Heartburn is no big deal – just pop a pill and it's gone.

If you cough in the morning, you may think it's no problem. You don't cough for very long.

If you only get heartburn a couple of times a year, you're probably OK. If it happens very often, you could have gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), a condition in which the acid contents of the stomach move back into the esophagus.

Studies at the University of Miami School of Medicine show that the risk of esophageal cancer is more than seven times higher among people who regularly suffer acid reflux. Esophageal cancer is often fatal.

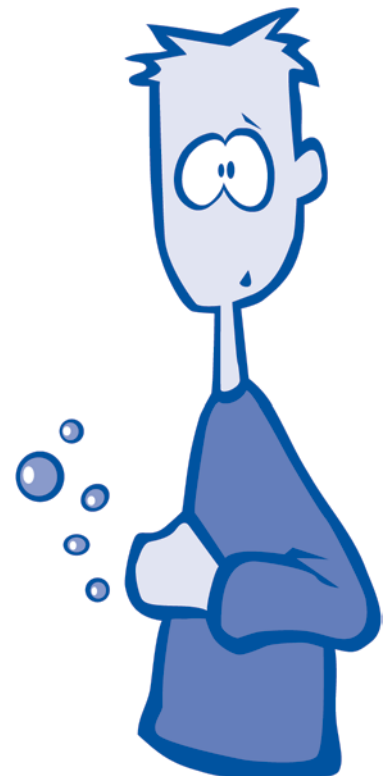
The Society of Thoracic Surgeons in Chicago says the risk group may include 10 to 20

million Americans who have a malfunction of the valve that joins the stomach and the esophagus.

People who often have heartburn are advised to avoid chocolate, peppermint, alcohol, caffeine and carbonated beverages. In addition, citrus fruits and juices, chili, mustard and raw onions are thought to irritate the esophagus.

Doctors writing in *Prevention* say these are other steps you can take:

- Stop smoking. It relaxes the valve from



the stomach to the esophagus.

- Lose weight if you are overweight.
- Eat smaller meals.
- Don't lie down for three hours after you eat.
- Raise the head of your bed.
- Switch to acetaminophen in place of aspirin, ibuprofen and other over-the-counter painkillers.

Over-the-counter antacids help neutralize the acid in the stomach and work for occasional heartburn. If you have symptoms one or more times a week, you should see a physician.

For more information, call the GERD Hotline at (888) 964-2001, or visit www.aboutgerd.org to learn more about this disease.

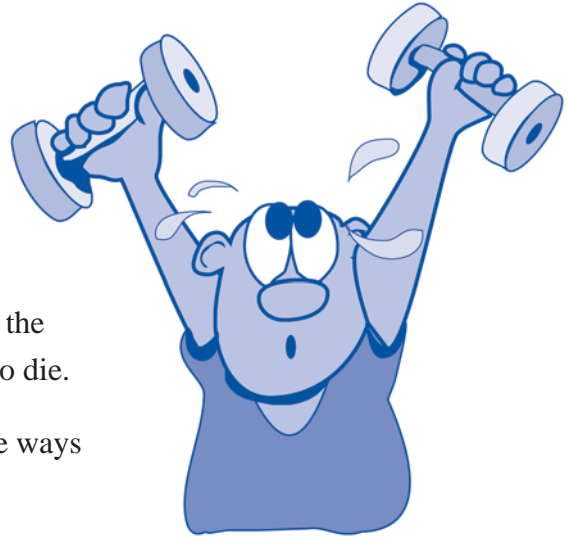
May is Stroke Awareness Month: Nine Ways to Avoid a Stroke

Americans don't have a clear understanding of what a stroke is, according to the National Stroke Association (NSA).

A stroke is similar to a heart attack. It occurs when blood vessels in the brain either burst or become blocked. In either case, oxygen from blood doesn't reach the brain. Brain cells begin to die.

The NSA gives these nine ways to avoid stroke:

1. Know your blood pressure. Undiagnosed hypertension is a big factor.
2. Have any abnormal heart rhythm treated. It may create a blood clot that will travel to the brain.
3. Don't smoke. It doubles your risk.
4. Drink alcohol only in moderation. Heavy drinking increases stroke risk.
5. Take special care if you have diabetes. It increases your odds for a stroke.
6. Exercise daily for 30 minutes even if you just take a walk.
7. Maintain a low-salt diet.
8. Get checked for circulatory disorders. They are dangerous but treatable.
9. Know the symptoms of a stroke: Sudden weakness or numbness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body; sudden blurred or decreased vision in one or both eyes; difficult speaking or understanding speech; dizziness or loss of balance or coordination; or sudden intense headache.



If you suffer any of these symptoms, have someone drive you to an emergency room immediately. Treatment within three hours of a stroke can make the difference between recovery and disability.

The Pharmacy Corner

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have the same kind of problem, but in this diabetic condition the blood sugar shoots up to even higher levels.

IGT is a very common problem affecting approximately 20 million Americans. If they don't address this issue, they are definitely on the road to full-blown diabetes. Every year, as many as 10 out of every 100 people with IGT become diabetic. It is just one part of the whole diabetic cycle.

After a meal your body works hard to turn the food you eat into the sugars it burns for "fuel" to keep you going. Your pancreas controls this process by making a hormone called insulin. When too much fuel is stored away as fat, the body becomes resistant to the effects of insulin. As this resistance increases a person gets IGT and possibly type 2 diabetes.

So, please try to help address this new epidemic and make a

resolution to watch your diet and become more active. This process really does help – it is actually remarkable how little it takes to make huge changes in outcome.

Learn to Recognize a Stroke –

Recognizing a stroke and treating it as a medical emergency is the key to preventing potential stroke-related disabilities.

Some of the symptoms of a stroke include:

- ✓ Sudden blurred or decreased vision in one or both eyes.
- ✓ Sudden loss of balance or coordination, especially when accompanied by another symptom.
- ✓ Sudden difficulty speaking or understanding simple statements.
- ✓ Sudden weakness, numbness or paralysis in the face, arm or leg.

- ✓ Sudden severe headache with no known cause.

Most strokes can be treated, but we need to have a keen awareness of our risks and a thorough knowledge of the symptoms so we can get the treatment we need.

The only FDA-approved treatment for clot-caused stroke available today is t-PA, a drug that dissolves the blood clot and restores blood flow to the brain. The treatment must be given within three hours of the first signs of stroke symptoms. Stroke patients who receive t-PA are at least 30 percent more likely to leave the hospital with little or no disability after three months. Only one to three percent of those eligible for this treatment are receiving it because it takes the average American 12 to 24 hours to get to the hospital and they miss the three-hour window of opportunity.

Other treatments available include neuroprotectants, drugs that protect the brain cells surrounding the area of a stroke and limit the spread of brain damage.

Recorded Benefit Information	1-888-636-NALC	PPO Locator Service	1-800-622-6252
Fraud Hot Line	1-888-636-NALC	Precertification	1-800-622-6252
Health Benefit Plan	1-703-729-4677	Prescription Drug Program	1-800-933-NALC
Health Benefit Plan	1-888-636-NALC	Mental Health/Substance Abuse	1-877-468-1016