

WINTER 2009



metroplusgold

health news

we care for our own



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moisture from deeper layers of the skin, as well as from humid environments. These ingredients include urea, glycerol, lactate and alpha hydroxy acid.

Later, Alligator

While you can't do anything to improve conditions outside, you can control the world inside. Combat alligator skin and the drying effects of heaters by switching on a humidifier. With more moisture in the air, less water evaporates from the skin. And with humectants, your skin can absorb moisture from the air.

Quench that thirsty skin!

Winter can sure come with its hazards: slick roads, chilly temperatures and the annual flu. Perhaps the most vulnerable is that exposed, delicate tissue, your skin. Beat the dehydrating effects of the cold, dry weather and heaters on overdrive with the following tips.

To Protect and Preserve

Your skin can soak in plenty of moisture with five or 10 minutes in a warm bath or shower. However, any longer, and the water will begin to dry the skin. Avoid hot water, which tends to sap away the skin's natural oils, and use warm water instead.

Choose soaps that contain oil or mild, non-soap cleansers. If

you must use soap, restrict it to certain areas such as your face, armpits and genitals.

Seal in the water by slathering on moisturizers within three minutes of drying off.

Moisturizers, despite the name, don't add moisture. These products mainly function to protect the skin and seal up its microscopic crevices, blocking moisture from escaping. Petroleum jelly does this effectively. But, many people find the greasy texture unpleasant. For mild cases of dry skin, creams and lotions should work just fine. More severe cases require ointments, which contain mostly oil.

Some moisturizers, called humectants, contain ingredients that encourage the skin to absorb

Hand to Mouth

Your hands can often bear the brunt of the winter's harsh conditions. Show them some care by wearing gloves when you're outside. Rub in hand cream immediately after washing. Also keep lip balm handy; applying it readily can heal or prevent dry, cracked lips.

Not Just for Summer

Don't pack away the sunscreen just yet. With snow reflecting up to 80 percent of the sun's rays (sand reflects only 17 percent), you need sunscreen now just as much as those warm days on the beach. Choose a product with an SPF of 15 or higher. For maximum convenience, select a moisturizer that comes with sunscreen. ☀️

Making and keeping healthy resolutions

It's an annual ritual. We look ahead to a new year with optimism and create a list of resolutions to improve our lives and well-being. Within a matter of days or weeks, however, many of those resolutions fall by the wayside. Below are some ways you can keep some of the most frequently made New Year's resolutions all year long.

Fitting in Exercise

Staying active is one of the most important things you can do for your health. To successfully add exercise into your life, bear these strategies in mind:

- ✦ Talk with your doctor before starting any exercise program.
- ✦ Make it fun. Choose a variety of activities that you enjoy and

experiment with new ones. Always wanted to take a dance class or try yoga? There's no better time than the present!

- ✦ Be flexible. If you miss a workout, be more active in other ways. Try taking the stairs instead of the elevator or walking to lunch.
- ✦ Increase your routine gradually until you're exercising 30 to 60 minutes a day most days of the week.
- ✦ Reward yourself for successes. For example, if you stick with your fitness plan for a month, treat yourself to a massage.

Balancing Work and Family

Stress can increase your risk for heart attack, stroke and other cardiovascular problems. Juggling work and family may be one of

your biggest challenges—and stressors. A little extra planning can help you thrive at work and at home:

- ✦ Get up early enough so you don't have to rush to get to work or get the kids off to school.
- ✦ Create a to-do list every day to help you accomplish what's most important to you.
- ✦ Make a family calendar so everyone knows what needs to be done and when.
- ✦ Consolidate your errands to save time.
- ✦ Lay out your clothes for work the night before, and keep things you need for your job in one location.
- ✦ Say no to activities that don't fit with your priorities. 🌟



Take heart disease prevention to heart

Heart disease is the leading killer of men and women in the United States. Nearly one in four people dies of heart disease. It's also a major cause of disability. These unsettling statistics mean that there's a good chance that you or your family members will battle heart disease at some point in your lives.

Fortunately, it's never too early or too late to take steps to keep your heart healthy. Here are some proven methods that can help you cut your risk for heart attack and heart disease.

Know Your Risk

Some risk factors for heart disease can't be changed, such as age, gender, heredity and race. But you can change many other factors, including diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, an inactive lifestyle, obesity, smoking and excessive alcohol consumption.

It's a good idea to talk with your doctor about your personal risk for heart disease and to ask for advice about how to reduce your risk.

Know Your Numbers

Another way to reduce your risk is

to know your key numbers: your blood pressure, cholesterol, blood glucose (if you're at risk for or have diabetes), body mass index (BMI) and waist circumference. Monitor how these numbers change over time.

Health by the Numbers

Blood pressure: 120/80 or lower

Cholesterol

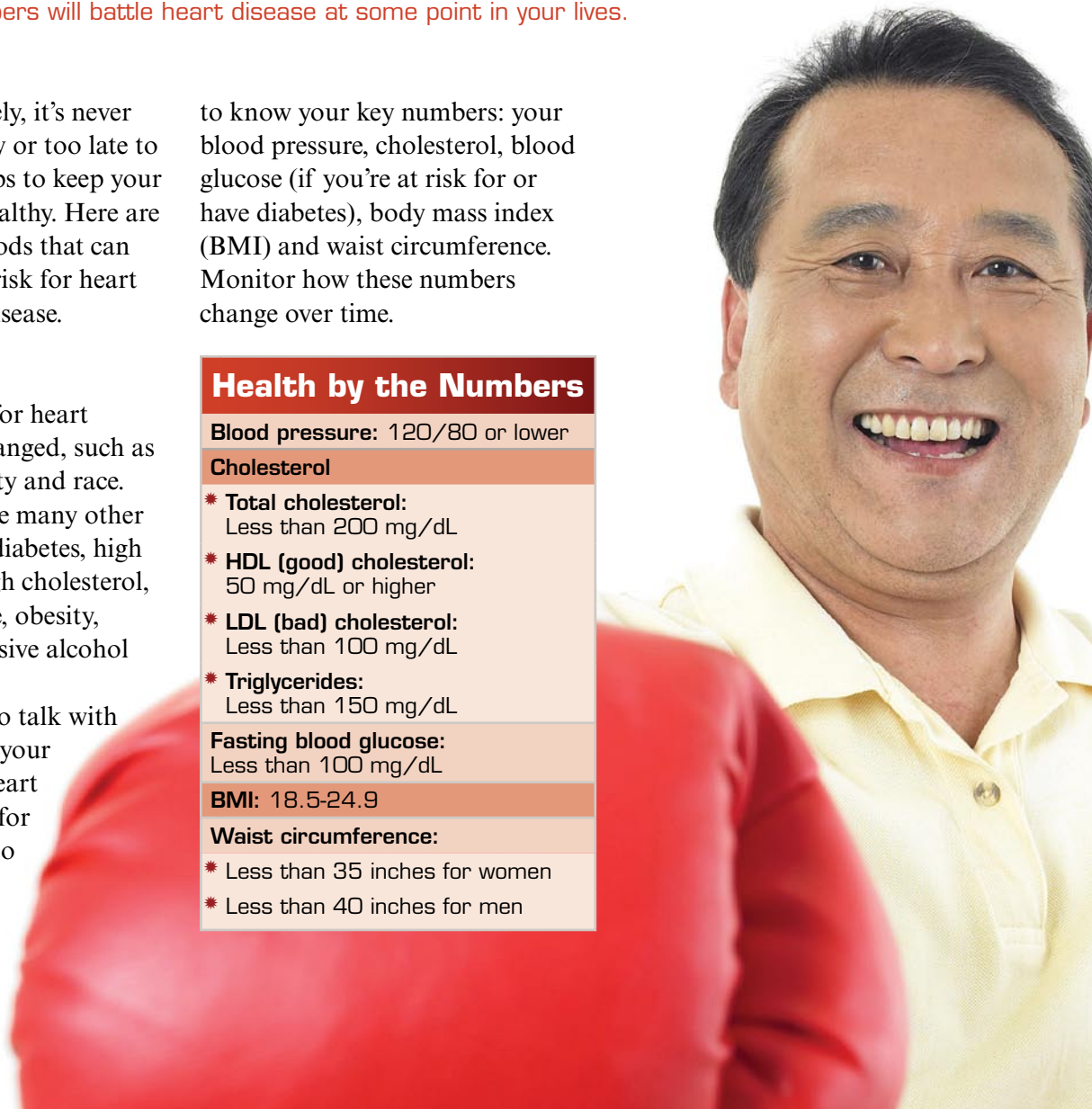
- * **Total cholesterol:**
Less than 200 mg/dL
- * **HDL (good) cholesterol:**
50 mg/dL or higher
- * **LDL (bad) cholesterol:**
Less than 100 mg/dL
- * **Triglycerides:**
Less than 150 mg/dL

Fasting blood glucose:
Less than 100 mg/dL

BMI: 18.5-24.9

Waist circumference:

- * Less than 35 inches for women
- * Less than 40 inches for men



Your doctor can tell you if your numbers are in a healthy range and what you should do if they aren't.

Know Which Habits Help and Hurt

Many of the things you do every day, such as the foods you eat, how much you exercise, and even how much you sleep, affect your risk for heart disease. Healthy choices not only make you look and feel better, they also help keep your heart healthy. Everyone in your family can benefit from these healthy habits:

- ★ **Eat right to maintain a healthy weight,** keep your blood pressure and cholesterol levels in check and reduce your risk for diabetes. Whole grain foods, fruits and vegetables and foods high in fiber are good choices. Cut back on foods high in fat, cholesterol and salt. You also should watch your portions and avoid fast and processed foods. If you need to lose excess pounds, set realistic goals and avoid fad diets.
- ★ **Stay physically active.** Exercising 30 to 60 minutes most days of the week can help you stay fit and lower your risk for heart disease. Plan fun family activities that get everyone moving. If you have any medical conditions or haven't been active for a while, ask your doctor for

advice about what type of exercise program is right for you.

- ★ **Don't smoke or breathe in second-hand smoke.** Smoking or inhaling smoke from others puts your heart at risk. Have a smoke-free home and encourage smokers in your family to quit. Your primary care provider (PCP) can help you with methods to quit for good.
- ★ **Drink alcohol in moderation,** if at all. Small amounts of alcohol may help prevent heart attacks and heart disease and lower blood pressure. But excessive alcohol consumption can raise your blood pressure and may harm your health. Experts recommend no more than two drinks a day for men and one drink a day for women.
- ★ **Getting adequate sleep** is vital to your overall health. Not getting enough sleep over a period of time can raise your risk for high blood pressure and heart disease. 🌸

Get Started Many resources are available online to help you assess, monitor and reduce your risk for heart disease:

- ★ **American Heart Association:**
www.americanheart.org
- ★ **National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute:**
www.nhlbi.nih.gov
- ★ **The National Women's Health Information Center:**
www.womenshealth.gov

Good fats, bad fats: how to tell them apart

Whether you're buying foods that are frozen, canned or boxed, the "Nutrition Facts" section on the label spells out how much fat is inside and what type of fat it is.

Where Bad Fats Hide Out

Saturated fat, cholesterol and trans fat will raise your blood cholesterol, which can lead to blocked arteries, heart attack and stroke.

Saturated fat is found in baked goods made with lard, and in high-fat meats and dairy. Cholesterol is found in animal foods, such as egg yolks, beef, chicken and shellfish. Trans fats are found in stick margarine, shortening and foods made with partially hydrogenated oils.

The current *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, published by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, recommends eating less than 300 milligrams of cholesterol per day and very little trans fat. Saturated fats should account for less than 10 percent of your daily calories.

Good Fats to the Rescue

We all need some fat every day for energy, healthy skin, growth and proper body functioning. Many foods contain healthy fats, called monounsaturated fats. These fats protect your heart by lowering your blood cholesterol and helping prevent clogged arteries.

The *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* recommends choosing monounsaturated fats as often as possible and keeping your total fat intake between 20 and 35 percent of your daily calories. You'll find good fats in such foods as avocados, salad dressings, fish (salmon, tuna, mackerel), nuts (almonds, cashews, peanuts, walnuts) and liquid oils.



Getting to the heart of depression

A person coping with extreme sadness is called “heartbroken.” Now, scientists say there is some medical truth to this description. Recent studies suggest that depression can cause serious heart problems—and vice versa.

In an article recently published in *Circulation*, the journal of the American Heart Association, the

scientific authors reviewed years of evidence showing a strong link between depression and heart disease. These studies reveal that:

- * People who are depressed, but otherwise healthy, have a greater chance of developing heart disease than people who are not depressed.
- * People living with heart disease are more likely to have signs of depression, which leads to

worse health and a poorer quality of life.

- * Compared to the general population, heart attack survivors are three times more likely to develop depression.
- * After a heart attack, patients with depression have a poorer long-term outlook, with double the chances of suffering more chest pain, needing additional hospitalization or dying earlier than non-depressed patients.

The *Circulation* authors urge doctors to screen their heart patients for signs of depression, which is treatable with medication, exercise and counseling. Two key signs of depression are having little interest or pleasure in activities that used to be enjoyable, and feeling persistently sad, discouraged or hopeless.

If you are experiencing signs of depression, talk with your doctor right away. Many treatments are available that can help you. 🌸

Feast for the eyes

It's easy to take your eyes for granted when you don't have vision problems. But people of all ages are at risk for eye conditions that can cause vision loss and even blindness. The good news is, healthy habits affect and may protect your sight.

Eating certain foods, for example, can help prevent age-related eye problems. Feast your eyes on the

many good sources of nutrients that can help you preserve your vision for a lifetime.

- * **Vitamin C:** Citrus fruits, strawberries and tomatoes
- * **Vitamin E:** Safflower and corn oil, sunflower seeds, almonds and pecans
- * **Beta-carotene:** Carrots, sweet potatoes, peaches and cantaloupe

- * **Lutein and zeaxanthin:** Spinach, broccoli, green peas and kale
- * **Zinc:** Beef, eggs, milk, shellfish and whole grains
- * **Omega-3 fatty acids:** Fatty fish (salmon, herring, mackerel and sardines), walnuts, soybeans, flax seeds and vegetable oils (canola, soy and flax).



Van Dunn, M.D., MPH, Chief Medical Officer, MetroPlus Health Plan

Why an annual health examination is important

by Van Dunn, M.D., MPH, Chief Medical Officer, MetroPlus Health Plan

You should see your primary care provider (PCP) for a checkup once a year. The visit helps your doctor make sure that your health and self-care are on track and guide you if any problem turns up. In addition, your annual physical exam is “quality time” with your doctor. Yearly checkups help you and your doctor develop a relationship. A doctor who knows you when you are well is better prepared to care for you should you get sick.

At your visit, your PCP will check you out from the top of your head to your toes. The doctor listens to your lungs and the way your heart beats. Your height, weight and blood pressure are checked. Blood is taken to investigate your red blood cell count, platelets and other blood chemistry.

Remember to tell your PCP about every medicine you currently take, including vitamins, herbs, home remedies and over-the-counter drugs. If you smoke, talk with your doctor about quitting. Maybe you’ve been feeling “down” or an emotional problem is bothering you. If so, speak up. Your mental health is important to your physical well-being.

To stay healthy, see your PCP on a regular basis. Make your appointment for this year *now*.

Network Relations: Building strong relationships

The Network Relations Department builds strong relationships with members and providers. Under the leadership of Relationship Managers, the multidisciplinary team of Member Services Liaisons, Clinical Care Coordinators and Provider Relations Representatives work together to give each member the highest level of care.

Need help choosing a primary care provider? Have questions about your ID card? A Member Services Liaison at the facility can help.

Are you eligible for AsthmaPlus, DiabetesCARE or other

MetroPlus chronic disease management programs? Our Clinical Care Coordinators work with facility staff and case management to determine if one of these programs would be a good fit for you.

Relationship Managers manage the relationship between the plan, facility administrators and community providers to ensure continuity of care.

Educating providers is essential to quality care. That’s why Provider Relations Representatives make sure providers are up to speed on plan procedures, new products and plan resources that can help them expedite services.

They also review key performance goals with our doctors to make sure they provide quality care.

By working to strengthen communications and relationships between facilities and providers, and providing quality member services and health education, Network Relations helps our Gold members get effective and efficient care. 🌟



Front row (left to right): Associate Directors Bruce Waugaman and Kenya McCall. Back row: Associate Executive Director Michael Martellacci, Associate Directors David Schiffman and Reginald Legagneur.

How to contact MetroPlus Gold

At MetroPlus Gold, we want to ensure you get the information you need. Contact Customer Service:

Phone: **1-877-475-3795**

E-mail: mpgCustomerServices@nychhc.org

For more information about MetroPlus Gold, visit us online at www.metroplus.org and click on **MetroPlus Gold**.



Mari S. Gold
Editor

Lauren Small
Assistant Editor

Articles in this newsletter are written by professional journalists or physicians who strive to present reliable, up-to-date health information. But no publication can replace the care and advice of medical professionals, and readers are cautioned to seek such help for personal problems. Models used for illustrative purposes only. (10153M)

Why join MetroPlus Gold?

Join MetroPlus Gold, the health insurance program created just for employees of HHC.

MetroPlus Gold has more than 2,330 primary care providers (PCPs) in private offices, group practices, neighborhood family care sites and hospitals. You can choose where you receive care.

In addition to all of our HHC facilities and other network hospitals, the hospitals of Continuum Health Partners have joined the MetroPlus network. They include Beth Israel Medical

Center, St. Luke's-Roosevelt Hospital, Long Island College Hospital and New York Eye and Ear Infirmary.

During Open Enrollment, see your HR Director or Benefits Manager for more information and to sign up. Call MetroPlus anytime at **1-800-475-METRO (6387)**. Check out MetroPlus Gold on our Web site www.metroplus.org. 🌟

**Join the health plan where
we care for our own!**

metroplusgold

Is your spouse eligible for Medicare?

If you're an active HHC employee with family coverage and a spouse who may be eligible for Medicare soon, there's important information you need to know.

MetroPlus Gold isn't a Medicare HMO. Once a covered person becomes eligible for Medicare, he or she is no longer eligible to participate in MetroPlus Gold. Speak with your HR Benefits Manager to find out what healthcare options are available.