

House Calls

Health or wellness or prevention information

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The Skinny on Sugar Substitutes

By Nichole Evans

As we get older, most of us try to avoid eating too much sugar. We limit our sugar intake for many reasons, including managing our weight and preventing or controlling diabetes. But what about those of us with a sweet tooth? Fortunately, we can enjoy dessert and reduce sugar from our diets because sugar substitutes have become more advanced and tastier.

You might be leery of sugar substitutes because of the bad reputation they had when they were first introduced. However, recent research shows there is little to worry about. In 1977, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) tried to ban saccharin (Sweet'N Low®) because research showed it caused cancer in animals. Saccharin remained on the market, with a warning label. In 2000, the National Institutes of Health removed saccharin from its list of substances known to cause cancer. Research could not find a link between cancer in people and saccharin. While another sugar substitute, aspartame, isn't safe for people with Phenylketonuria (PKU), a rare genetic disorder, and may cause headaches in some, there's little evidence sugar substitutes are dangerous for most people.

Until recently, sugar substitutes came from artificial compounds, but a few years ago, Truvia™, which comes from the stevia plant,

changed the industry. The manufacturers of this sweetener claim it is better for you because it comes from a natural source. However, no scientific evidence supports this.

Some foods also include sweeteners to add bulk and texture when baking. Early sugar substitutes didn't really work for baking, but Splenda® and Equal® now offer sugar blends that work better. Though these blends have fewer calories and carbohydrates than regular sugar, it's important to pay attention to the nutritional information so you don't go overboard.

Individual tastes vary, so you might have to try a few varieties of sugar substitutes before you find what works best for you. These better-for-you options can be a big help when you're craving something sweet. ■

Looking for new recipes that use sugar substitutes? Most sugar substitutes have recipes on their websites. Try visiting:

www.splenda.com

www.truvia.com

www.sweetnlow.com

www.equal.com

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HealthAlliance **MEDICARE**

Manage Stress and Your Blood Sugar

By Emily Harrington

Everyday stress worsens diabetes in two ways: stress-related hormones directly impact your blood sugar, and when you're stressed out, you're less likely to practice good self-care.

According to Livestrong.com, stress causes blood glucose to rise from two hormones, cortisol and adrenaline. These hormones increase glucose to help reduce stress.

Stress can cause an emotional reaction leading to binge eating. People turn to foods filled with sugar and carbohydrates for comfort. Eating these foods can result in high blood glucose, which can lead to diabetes.

To cope with stress and minimize its impact on your blood sugar levels, try these techniques.

- **Breathe deeply.** Practice breathing slowly and deeply, at least once a day, to calm yourself.
- **Move more.** Even simple exercises such as a quick walk or a dance around the living room can make you feel better.
- **Accentuate the positive.** Find something you enjoy that takes your mind off whatever is causing your stress.
- **Practice good self-care.** Eat right, exercise and get plenty of sleep.

Whether or not you have diabetes, it's important to regulate your blood sugar. The next time you find yourself stressed out—just breathe and realize these feelings will pass. ■

Know Your Goals

Blood Sugar	
Goal (Normal)	Below 150 mg/dL
Borderline (Pre-diabetic)	151-199 mg/dL
High (Diabetic)	200 mg/dL or above

Triglycerides	
Goal	Below 150 mg/dL
Borderline	151-199 mg/dL
High	200 mg/dL or above

Blood Pressure	
Goal	120/80 or below
Borderline	121-139/81-89
High	140/90 or above

Cholesterol	Total	LDL ("bad")	Total ("good")
Goal	Below 200 mg/dL	Below 100 mg/dL	Women: 50 mg/dL or higher Men: 40 mg/dL or higher
Borderline	200-239 mg/dL	100-159 mg/dL	Women: below 50 mg/dL Men: below 40 mg/dL
High	240 mg/dL or higher	160 mg/dL or higher	N/A

If you have coronary heart disease or diabetes, your goal levels may be different.

New Program Helps Members Get Back Home Safely

Health Alliance Medicare started a new program in January. SeniorMetrix makes sure members who spend time in a Skilled Nursing Facility (SNF), or nursing home, receive the care they need and deserve.

SeniorMetrix services start at the hospital (in some cases, before) where a SeniorMetrix nurse works with members and doctors to determine whether home health care or a SNF stay will best help with recovery. The nurse, working with the doctor, as well as standard guidelines, then develops a member-specific "LiveSafe"

tool. This tool outlines expected length of stay, level of care and type of caregiver assistance needed upon discharge. To ensure the SNF follows the recommendations of the tool, the nurse follows up with the member after he or she begins care.

This program comes at no additional cost to members. Health Alliance Medicare hopes this program will allow members to get home in the best way possible and reduce the number of return trips to the hospital or SNF. ■

Medicare Annual Enrollment Period is Earlier This Year

Look out. Here it comes. The Annual Enrollment Period (AEP), the time of year when Medicare beneficiaries can make changes to their Medicare Advantage coverage, starts October 15 this year. That's about four weeks earlier than last year. It also ends four weeks sooner, on December 7.

In September, you will receive information from Health Alliance Medicare about your benefits and any changes you might experience to your coverage in 2012. During the AEP, our representatives will be available to answer your questions from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. seven days a week.



Aging and Driving Don't Always Mix Well

By Patrick Harness

Unfortunately, our bad driving habits seem to worsen as we age.

Loss of mobility, reduced upper-body strength and failing eyesight all contribute to the challenges many of our Health Alliance Medicare members face. The onset of mental decline presents another hurdle for many senior drivers. The decision to stop driving is a momentous milestone in many people's lives.

Many aging drivers decide to limit their own driving by avoiding high-traffic areas, night driving and inclement weather. A trusted family member, spouse or physician can help recognize the need to limit driving. Compassionate offers of rides provide an option that lessens the chance of making our passengers feel like a burden. Helping aging drivers navigate public transportation, if available, and combining their errands with ours can also help ease the transition.

In the Champaign-Urbana area, resources are available for seniors who no longer provide their own transportation. The

Senior Resource Center at Family Service of Champaign County offers rides, sponsored by Carle, to doctor's appointments and quality-of-life rides, such as trips to the hair dresser, nursing home visits and personal shopping. Learn more about this program by calling 217-352-5100 or visiting www.famservcc.org/senior-transportation. The Provena Center for Healthy Aging and our local MTD also offer options.

If you're not in C-U, I suspect your community has similar programs. Check with your local senior center.

Although this is a complicated issue, resources are available to ease the awkwardness and anxiety. I understand I will eventually have to face the prospect of not driving, too. Fortunately for me, the only complaint I get about my driving now is that maybe I drive a little too slowly.

Patrick Harness is the Community Representative for Health Alliance Medical Plans, located at Lincoln Square Village in Urbana. ■

Medicare Completes DMEPOS Competitive Bid Process

The federal Medicare program recently completed a competitive bidding process for providers of certain Durable Medical Equipment, Prosthetics, Orthotics and Supplies (DMEPOS) in some areas of the country, for selected items, to make sure Medicare beneficiaries get fair pricing and access to quality services.

Rest assured, Medicare Advantage plan members can still receive DMEPOS items from out-of-network suppliers in the areas listed here that have met Original Medicare accreditation and are willing to supply the services.

- Cincinnati – Middletown (Ohio, Kentucky and Indiana)
- Cleveland – Elyria, Mentor (Ohio)

- Charlotte – Gastonia, Concord (North Carolina and South Carolina)
- Dallas – Fort Worth, Arlington (Texas)
- Kansas City (Missouri and Kansas)
- Miami, Fort Lauderdale, Pompano Beach (Florida)
- Orlando (Florida)
- Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania)
- Riverside, San Bernardino, Ontario (California)

For more information, please visit www.medicare.gov. Click on the Resource Locator tab and choose Medical Equipment Suppliers. You will find a supplier directory and a link to learn more about DMEPOS products and services. ■

Brain Teaser

Questions

- 1) Some months have 31 days. How many have 28?
- 2) In baseball, how many outs are there in an inning?
- 3) Is it legal for a man in California to marry his widow's sister?
- 4) Divide 30 by half and add 10. What is the answer?
- 5) If there are three apples and you take away two how many do you have?
- 6) A doctor gives you three pills telling you to take one every half hour. How many minutes would they last?
- 7) A farmer has 17 sheep and all but nine die. How many are left?
- 8) How many animals of each species did Moses take on the ark?
- 9) How many two-cent stamps are there in a dozen?
- 10) What was the president's name in 1962?

See page 7 for answers.

Listen up Men: Ignoring Your Health Can Be Costly

Editor's Note

My grandfather was a proud man. He never admitted when he wasn't feeling well. He never had an annual exam. Truthfully, he seemed healthy. But he wasn't. By the time he finally saw a doctor, he was sick beyond the point of containing the problem. This is a common theme among men, an unwillingness to see a doctor. The reasons vary, from an ingrained belief that to do so would appear unmanly, to a fear that something serious is lurking beneath the surface, to simply thinking it is too much hassle.

The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) reports men are 24 percent less likely than women to have visited a doctor within the last year. Additionally, the report states men are 28 percent more likely than women to be hospitalized for congestive

heart failure. They are also 24 percent more likely than women to be admitted for pneumonia (which a simple immunization might have prevented).

It is important for men, even those who appear healthy, to see a doctor once a year. To make it easier, Health Alliance Medicare members receive free annual wellness exams. If it is still too hard to schedule an appointment, ask a spouse or friend to help. If you are married, maybe the two of you can schedule back-to-back wellness visits to lessen the hassle.

And don't worry about the stigma of being considered unmanly for going to the doctor. These days, living a long and healthy life is the way to go. ■

Resource: <http://www.ahrq.gov/healthymen/>

Go Green, and Your Wallet Will Thank You

By Melanie Schultz

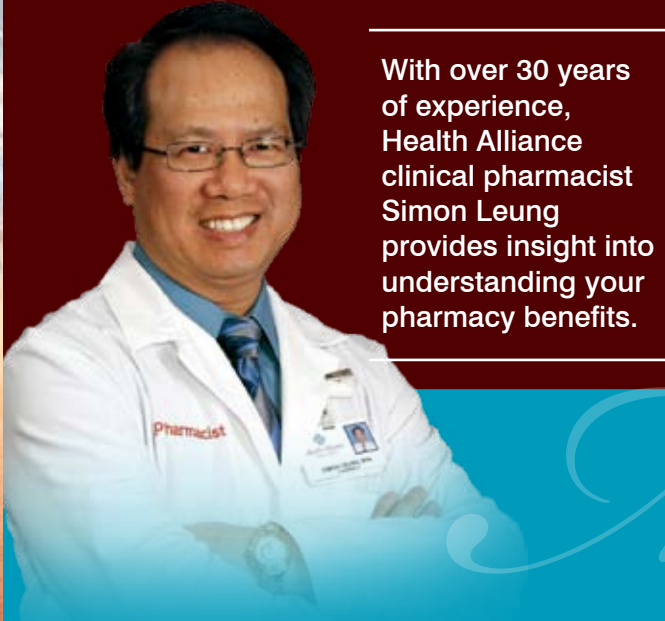
You don't have to drive a fancy hybrid car or buy new windows or energy-efficient appliances to be green.

Here are five simple things you can do that cost little but can pay off big.

- 1. Get a clothesline.** Tumble dryers drain energy. By air drying your laundry, either outside or inside, you'll save on your utility bill and cut down carbon dioxide (CO²) emissions.
- 2. Switch lightbulbs.** You can save energy and money by switching to compact fluorescent light bulbs. They may cost a little more, but because they use less energy and last a lot longer than regular bulbs, they pay off in the long run.
- 3. Eat local.** Take advantage of your local farmers' market or co-op. The produce can be more affordable

than a grocery store, and it takes less transportation to get it there. Plus, the fruits and vegetables are fresh and in season, so they taste great. To save even more, try growing your own vegetables.

- 4. Watch water usage.** Small tweaks, like taking shorter showers and turning off the faucet while brushing your teeth, can go a long way in lowering your water bill and conserving water. For drinking water, get a water filter instead of buying bottled water.
- 5. Visit the library.** Do you own a bunch of books, magazines and movies that you don't use? Instead of buying more, check out the library and borrow materials. You'll help keep paper and plastic out of landfills and money in your pocket. ■



With over 30 years of experience, Health Alliance clinical pharmacist Simon Leung provides insight into understanding your pharmacy benefits.

Simon Says:

When Medications Cause Problems They're Supposed to Fix

Many of us reach for over-the-counter (OTC) medications when we have a headache or stuffy nose. We need to be careful. If used incorrectly, OTCs can actually make symptoms worse. This is called the rebound effect. Here's how to avoid it.

carefully. If you think you already have rebound headaches, talk to your doctor. Typically, you'll need to stop taking the medication, but your doctor may recommend another medication to lessen the discomfort.

Tier Change for Sanctura and Sanctura XR

The prescription drug Sanctura® and Sanctura XR® will no longer be covered at Tier 2 on our Part D formulary. Effective September 1, 2011, these drugs/this drug will be covered at Tier 3.

Our goal is to keep medications affordable for Medicare Advantage members. Because we have several other low-cost options available on our Part D Formulary, we found it necessary to change the tier for Sanctura® and Sanctura XR®.

For more information, please call our Pharmacy department at 1-800-851-3379, ext 8048.

Headache and Pain Medications

If you feel like your headache or migraine just won't go away no matter how much pain medication (both OTC and prescription) you take, you may be suffering from rebound headaches. If you think pain medicine might be to blame, keep track of how many days in a month you use it. If it's 15 or more, you're likely having rebound headaches. One theory doctors have about the cause is that taking too many painkillers can block the painkillers your body naturally produces. Another theory is that many painkillers can lower pain tolerance.

To avoid rebound headaches, make sure you're following listed dosing directions

Nasal Sprays

Rebound congestion is caused by incorrectly using OTC nasal spray containing oxymetazoline, the chemical that shrinks tiny blood vessels in your nasal passage, making it easier to breathe. If you use this kind of nasal spray for more than a few days, your blood vessels may not be able to tighten on their own. Then, when you don't use the spray, the blood vessels swell and make congestion worse.

To avoid rebound congestion, first try natural remedies like saline spray or a neti pot to see if they help. If you must use an oxymetazoline spray, make sure it's for no more than five days and that you follow the dosing instructions carefully. If you think you have rebound congestion, talk to your doctor. ■

Get to Know

Heather Miller, Member Services Representative

In the short time Heather Miller has been with Health Alliance Medicare, she has come to appreciate the members and the culture. When she's not helping our Medicare members, she's busy enjoying time with her young daughter, playing with her yellow lab, and, when she can, reading a good book. Heather answered a few questions about working for Health Alliance Medicare and why she enjoys what she does.

What inspires you? The sunny attitude of my 5-year-old daughter, the first buds of spring or the simple things like a good cup of coffee in the morning all inspire me to live life to the fullest and do my best to enjoy every moment of it.

How has working with members affected you? Working with Health Alliance Medicare

members has made me more sensitive to the problems and concerns our Medicare members face.

What is your favorite part of your job?

Our members. Knowing I can help them navigate some of those hurdles more easily makes me truly enjoy my job and feel I am making a difference.

Why do you like working for Health Alliance Medicare?

I love the feeling of teamwork here. Everyone works together and does the best they can to help one another and really be like a family. It makes coming to work every day a good experience, and I really think that feeling transfers to our members when they talk with us. ■

"And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same." -Nelson Mandela



Urinary Leakage, a Common and Treatable Issue

The National Association for Continence (www.nafc.org) reports that, on average, women wait six and a half years from their first urinary incontinence, or leakage, symptom until they get the courage to talk with a doctor about proper diagnosis and treatment. Even more striking, this common problem affects an estimated 25 million people in the United States.

With an issue this common, it is interesting it's such a touchy subject. It

doesn't have to be. These days, doctors are ready to help patients deal with incontinence. To get the conversation started, bring your answers to these four simple questions from Astellas Pharma US, Inc. to your next appointment.

1. In the past six months, have you accidentally leaked urine?
2. How much of a problem, if any, was the urine leakage?

3. Have you ever talked with your current doctor about your urine leakage problem?
4. If yes, did you receive any treatments for your urine leakage problem (bladder training, exercises, medication or surgery)?

Urinary incontinence is treatable. Rather than feel embarrassed, take control of it and put an end to worrying about when and where your next incident will occur. ■



Beat the Heat

A serious problem for seniors each summer is the heat. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), people age 65 and older are more susceptible to heat stress. As we get older, it is harder for our bodies to handle sudden changes in temperature. Also, medication and health issues can cause the body to react poorly to heat fluctuations. Because heat stress can lead to severe illness or even death, it is important to be prepared. The CDC gives these tips for avoiding heat stress.

- Drink cool, nonalcoholic beverages. (If your doctor generally limits the amount of fluid you drink or has you on water pills, ask how much you should drink when the weather is hot. Also, avoid extremely cold liquids because they can cause cramps.)
- Rest.
- Take a cool shower, bath or sponge bath.

- Seek an air-conditioned environment. (If you don't have air conditioning, consider visiting an air-conditioned shopping mall or public library to cool off.)
- Wear lightweight clothing.
- If possible, remain indoors in the heat of the day.
- Do not engage in strenuous activities.

If you see someone who is overheated, it's important to get the person out of the heat as quickly as possible. Request that someone call for medical assistance. In addition, try to cool the person down with a water hose, cool shower or other method. The goal is to get his or her temperature below 102° F as quickly as possible.

Have fun this summer, while paying attention to heat warnings, staying hydrated and making smart choices involving your daily activities. ■

Carle RxExpress Sold to Walgreens

Health Alliance members in East Central Illinois will see some changes this summer—Carle RxExpress has been sold to Walgreens. While some locations will be closing, most will remain open under the Walgreens name. If you're a current Carle RxExpress customer, your prescription information will be transferred to the nearest Walgreens.

ID Cards Now Online

You can now print a temporary ID card at www.healthalliance.org. It's easy! Simply log in (or register), click on Member Services and then "ID Card." You can request a new ID card, print a temporary card or both.

Two Additions to Our Website

1. You can now print a temporary ID card at www.healthalliance.org. It's easy! Simply log in (or register), click on Member services and then "ID Card." You can request a new ID card, print a temporary card or both.
2. While there, you can also view your Explanation of Benefits (EOB) for claims submitted since January 16, 2011.

Whooping Cough on the Rise

Pertussis, or whooping cough, is back. Many older people have never received a vaccine. They may pass it along to infants who are too young to receive the immunization. Health Alliance Medicare advocates preventive vaccines. If you have young grandchildren, you may want to speak with your doctor about a vaccine for whooping cough at your next visit.

Eye Disease is Common and Treatable

Cataracts, glaucoma, age-related macular degeneration and diabetic eye disease are the four most common eye diseases in seniors. These diseases can cause serious vision problems and blindness. Even though about a third of all people 65 and older have an eye disease, many don't know it.

To help understand these diseases and why it is important to maintain annual eye exams, here's a brief description of each.

Cataracts—This is a clouding of the eye. It develops slowly over time. It's a bit like trying to see through frosted glass. The only treatment for cataracts is surgery. To lessen your risk of developing cataracts, wear eye protection when outside.

Glaucoma—This is often associated with increased eye pressure, though not in all cases. Another big sign of this disease is

loss of peripheral vision. This "silent thief of sight" progresses so slowly that by the time you notice a change in your vision, the disease has reached advanced stages.

Age-related macular degeneration—This comes in three forms—wet, dry and geographic atrophy. The most common is dry. Blindness is preventable with treatment, though there's no cure. Types of treatment include laser therapy, vitamins, drugs and surgery.

Diabetic eye disease—Diabetes affects all aspects of physical health, including eyesight. Monitoring the eyes after a diabetes diagnosis helps prevent blindness. ■

Resources: <http://www.agingeye.net/mainnews/agingeyediseases.php>; <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/>

Gadget Corner



Netbooks: A Simpler Computer

Have you heard about the latest computer technology, the netbook? Don't get confused by the title. This is not a portable e-reader. Rather it's a simplified version of a laptop computer.

If you've ever used a laptop, you know they can be cumbersome and often as complicated, if not more so, than a desktop computer. Plus, they are packed full of software programs that most people never use that may slow down the programs you do use. This is where the netbook comes in.

This smaller version of the laptop gives standard users the tools they need to

access the internet and email and use simple word-processing software (such as Microsoft Word). These machines aren't meant for large games or videos, but photos can be stored on them easily. They do not come with built in CD or DVD players. Many people combine their netbooks with a portable hard drive or USB flash drive for extra space.

Netbooks are fun, lightweight and easy to use. For the person who just wants to check her email, read up on the latest news and look at photos of her children and grandchildren on facebook.com, this is a smart way to go. ■

Brain Teaser

Answers

- 1) All of them
- 2) Six; three per team
- 3) No; for her to be a widow, he must be dead
- 4) 70; 30 divided in half is 15, but 30 divided by half is 60.
- 5) Two; remember it was you who took them
- 6) 60 minutes; Start with the first pill; 30 minutes later the second, then 30 minutes later the third; total minutes = 60
- 7) Nine; remember all but nine died
- 8) Moses took none; it was Noah
- 9) 12; No matter what it's made up of a dozen is a dozen
- 10) Same as it is today, Barack Obama; remember it did not ask WHO was president, but rather what the president's name was in 1962.

Blueberry Muffins, made with Splenda®

This recipe below reduces sugar by 25 grams compared to a Starbucks Blueberry Muffin; reduces calories by 200.

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- ¾ teaspoon salt
- ½ cup light margarine, softened
- 1 cup Splenda No Calorie Sweetener with Fiber, Granulated
- ¼ cup honey
- 2 large eggs
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- ½ cup 1% low-fat milk
- 1 cup fresh or frozen blueberries, thawed

DIRECTIONS

1. Place oven rack in top of oven.
2. Preheat oven to 400° F. Line 12 muffin cups with paper liners. Lightly spray liners with nonstick cooking spray.
3. Sift together flour, baking powder and salt. Set aside.
4. Beat margarine at medium speed with an electric mixer until creamy. Gradually add Splenda and honey, beating until light and fluffy. Add eggs one at a time, beating until blended after each addition. Stir in vanilla. Alternately add flour mixture and milk, beginning and ending with flour mixture. Beat at low speed until blended after each addition. Fold in blueberries.
5. Spoon batter evenly into paper-lined muffin cups. Bake 20 to 22 minutes or until golden. Remove from pan immediately and cool on wire rack.

NUTRITION FACTS

Servings Per Recipe: Makes 12

Amount Per Serving

Calories: 160	Sodium: 300mg
Calories from Fat: 40	Total Carbohydrates: 29g
Total Fat: 4.5g	Dietary Fiber: 5g
Saturated Fat: 1g	Sugars: 8g
Cholesterol: 35mg	Protein: 4g

Resource: www.splenda.com ■



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