Surprising new cancer trend

Staying hopeful through a brain tumor diagnosis

Managing urinary incontinence

Eat Yourself Healthy

Doctor's orders: Getting good nutrition can make you feel better and help you dodge disease
Whether you’re vacationing, planning to study abroad, conducting business, volunteering or adopting, international travel means special health considerations. For example, do you know what types of vaccinations you or those traveling with you may need? Do you know when to get them? Do you need protection against malaria?

Those are the kinds of questions that the Johns Hopkins Travel Medicine Consultation and Immunizations service answers routinely during consultations. “We’re really about providing international travelers with preventive health counseling, prescription medications and immunizations to reduce the risk of illness while abroad,” explains medical director Noreen Hynes, M.D. “And we also evaluate and treat people who come back ill from their travels.”

A comprehensive 45-minute visit provides travelers with individual risk assessments based on their health, travel itineraries and anticipated activities.

“We also talk with them about destination-specific precautions, including information on food and water safety,” Hynes says.

It’s important, she adds, to schedule travel medicine consultations well in advance of your trip. Four to six weeks beforehand is a good idea. “That’s because some vaccines must be given in a series over several days or even weeks.”

Traveling abroad? Schedule an appointment to determine your health risk. Visit hopkinsmedicine.org/medicine/travel.
Stem Cell Treatment Not Ready for Prime Time

If you’ve seen the ads for stem cell treatments offered abroad for conditions ranging from Alzheimer’s disease to stroke, you’re not alone.

Neurologist Nicholas Maragakis, M.D., says not to get caught up in the claims. “This kind of advertised stem cell therapy just isn’t ready for prime time,” he explains.

Nearly all the ads are based on patient testimonials, not published results, Maragakis adds. Plus, they lack sound scientific explanations for how or why they should be working.

But Maragakis and his Johns Hopkins colleagues are making progress in stem cell therapy research for neurological conditions and brain cancer.

“Stem cell research is promising and exciting,” says neurosurgeon Alfredo Quiñones-Hinojosa, M.D., “but that’s not to say it’s anywhere near ready for clinical use.”

Uncover the truth. Learn more about stem cell therapy research taking place at Johns Hopkins. Visit hopkinsmedicine.org/stem_cell_research.

Your Migraine Could Be More Serious Than You Think

MIGRAINE HEADACHES ARE PAINFUL AND OFTEN DEBILITATING—and are associated with more than twice the risk of the most common stroke, according to a Johns Hopkins study last year.

Women, particularly, are at higher risk. And people who experience visual symptoms during a migraine such as auras, flashing lights, zigzag lines and blurred vision also are more susceptible to stroke.

“Identifying people at highest risk is crucial to preventing disabling strokes,” says study investigator and cardiologist Saman Nazarian, M.D. Nazarian adds that physicians should consider addressing stroke risk factors in people with histories or signs of light flashes and the blurry vision associated with severe headaches.

Prevention and treatment options for migraines include stopping smoking and taking blood pressure or blood-thinning medications. For women with migraines, Nazarian says that stopping use of oral contraceptives or discontinuing hormone replacement therapy may be recommended.

Discover more about the connection between migraines and strokes at hopkinsmedicine.org/heart.

GUYS: WANT TO PROTECT YOUR PROSTATE?

Men with lower cholesterol are less likely than those with higher levels to develop an aggressive form of high-grade prostate cancer, according to a recent Johns Hopkins collaborative study.

The study revealed that lower levels of heart-clogging fat may cut the risk by nearly 60 percent. “We know it’s good to have cholesterol levels within a normal range for many reasons,” says study author Elizabeth Platz, Sc.D. “Now we have more evidence of its benefits for lowering the risk of potentially deadly prostate cancers.”

High-grade cancers tend to grow and spread rapidly. Although it’s not clear why lower cholesterol decreases the risk, Platz says cholesterol may affect the survival of certain cancer cells.

“Eventually, targeting cholesterol metabolism may be one route to treating and preventing prostate cancer,” she says. “But this remains to be tested.”

Learn more about prostate cancer at hopkinsmedicine.org/urology.

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Chronic sinusitis is more than sniffles and stuffiness. For adults and kids, it can be a major headache.

What causes chronic sinusitis?

Respiratory tract infections—bacterial or viral—are major contributors to sinusitis. Other causes include allergies, immune system conditions or a deviated nasal septum. Chronic sinusitis also may result in the formation of nasal polyps. Otolaryngologist Jean Kim, M.D., says polyps are the most severe form of chronic sinusitis, making breathing through the nose nearly impossible. And it’s not subtle. You can spot folks with polyps from across a room—they breathe through their mouths, talk with nasal voices, are constantly sniffing and have swollen faces. Kim says no one is quite sure what causes the polyps, but that it could be because of recurrent sinus infections or it could be genetic. Though children and adults can get polyps, it’s more commonly seen in adults.

What is chronic sinusitis?

Chronic sinusitis is all about inflammation, says sinus and allergy specialist Sandra Lin, M.D. The cavities around the nasal passages inflame and swell, and that interferes with drainage, which then causes a buildup of nasal secretions. A lot of people get sinusitis—it’s one of the most commonly diagnosed conditions in the U.S., in kids and adults. But it’s chronic when it lasts more than 12 weeks or keeps returning.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of chronic sinusitis may vary from person to person, but the most common besides nasal congestion are thick, yellow or greenish discharge from the nose or down the back of the throat; coughing; pain, swelling or tenderness around the eyes, ears, nose or forehead; and upper-jaw achiness. You might also have sore throats, nausea or feel more fatigued than normal. Most concerning are other symptoms such as severe headache, swollen forehead, stiff neck and shortness of breath, which may be signs of a serious infection that require immediate attention from a doctor.

How is chronic sinusitis treated?

For children and adults—but especially children—most cases of chronic sinusitis can be managed medically with prescription drugs or antibiotics. Surgery may be necessary in severe cases when medical management isn’t helping. For patients with polyps, treatment may be more complicated, as polyps may return even after surgery. Kim recently identified a specific protein tied to nasal polyps, which may help in developing more successful treatments in the future. For all cases of chronic sinusitis, the goal is to get patients to a better quality of life.
Watch Your Neck

More young people today are facing head and neck cancer diagnoses. The reason may surprise you.

TEN YEARS AGO, the typical person with a head and neck cancer diagnosis was older—between ages 50 and 70—and had a history of smoking and alcohol use.

But today’s physicians are seeing an alarming trend of younger people without tobacco and alcohol history facing diagnoses.

The reason? HPV, or human papillomavirus, says otolaryngologist Wayne Koch, M.D. Although the often sexually transmitted HPV is typically associated with cervical cancer, 30 to 50 percent of head and neck cancer diagnoses today are HPV-related, Koch explains.

“We’re finding these cancers located in the tonsils and backs of tongues,” he says. “And we’re seeing lots of patients who are in their 30s and 40s.”

One of the problems, Koch says, is that most people don’t have symptoms. That means tumors aren’t being discovered until they’ve spread to lymph nodes in the neck. “At that point, you may feel a lump somewhere on your neck,” Koch says. “Then it’s a good idea to get it checked out by a doctor.”

The good news is that head and neck cancers related to HPV respond very well to radiation therapy. But it’s smart to think about safeguarding yourself or others in your family. Koch recommends the HPV vaccine—the same one given to young girls is also available for boys. “It won’t be effective if someone’s already been infected with the virus,” Koch says. “But if administered at a young enough age, you decrease that likelihood.”

Researchers are working on a treatment vaccine, one that could be given even if you have the virus. But that’s a little ways away, Koch says. Until then, it’s wise to understand how HPV is spread: through sexual or skin-to-skin contact in genital regions and through oral sex.

Are you at risk for head and neck cancers? Schedule a consultation today. Visit hopkinsmedicine.org/headneck or call 877-546-1872.

WARNING SIGNS

Although most HPV-related head and neck cancers aren’t diagnosed until the diseases are well advanced, there are some early-warning red flags, including:

- Chronic sore throats
- Pain radiating to one or both ears
- Change in tonsil size
Dynamic Duos

Food combinations, says nutritionist Lynda McIntyre, can pack a powerful antioxidant punch, offering protection and more efficient nutrient absorption. Consider these pairs:

- Broccoli and tomatoes
- Carrots and avocados (No avocados? Try olive oil)
- Apples and blueberries
- Spinach and strawberries (strange, but delicious)

Doctor’s orders:
Getting good nutrition can make you feel better and help you dodge disease

IN THE DAYS before medicine, food was medicine: a browned apple for an upset stomach, chicken soup for congestion, champagne for blood infections. Although no one could quite figure out cause and effect, generations of pantries held foods sworn to bind, purge, soothe and invigorate—in short, to make us feel well.

When modern science and medicine came along, nutrition was tossed into the compost heap. But the last decade has seen a huge shift in the role of food in health.

The catalyst? We just can’t seem to keep our mouths shut.

Looking at the Link
Sixty-four percent of U.S. adults are overweight or obese. Given the affect on cardiac-, vascular- and cancer-related illness, researchers are taking a much closer look at food and the many ways it enhances or disrupts our lives.

Eat yourself healthy
Watch and listen to cancer expert Bill Nelson, M.D., explain how food preparation can affect our chances of getting cancer. View “Cancer and Cuisine” at hopkinsmedicine.org/healthseminars.
What Is Inflammation?

Inflammation is a localized tissue reaction to injury, infection or irritation. When it happens at the cellular level in your body—especially over time—it can wreak havoc.

Junk food, foods high in fat, fast food and sugar contribute to inflammation and can lead to chronic conditions such as heart disease, diabetes and stroke.

“Part of that leap has come in just the last five years,” says oncologist Bill Nelson, M.D., director of the Johns Hopkins Kimmel Cancer Center, “and the discovery that chronic inflammation is slowly being linked to diseases, including cancer.”

We also know that certain foods—from cloves to walnuts—help reduce trouble-causing inflammation, adds Nelson, who is among the growing number of physicians and researchers who say food and nutrition are valuable tools in health.

Integrative gastroenterologist Gerard Mullin, M.D., another of those physicians, argues that food might even replace drugs as therapy for certain conditions. “The perfect example is ginger,” he says. “For people who have nausea, gastric dysfunction or other gastrointestinal problems, ginger is at the top of my list.”

Ginger works the same way that powerful antinausea drugs do, Mullin explains. “It works on the same receptor in the brain,” he says, “but a lot of doctors aren’t aware of it.”

Low-Cal Cancer Risk?

Nelson also is intrigued by the relationship between the amount of calories taken in—the so-called caloric budget—and cancer.

Nelson notes that caloric intake drops among the elderly, and yet their cancer rates rise. It may well be that taking in fewer calories—especially food with little to no nutritional value—leaves elders deprived of nutrients they need to stave off cancer.

“If you eat fewer calories, does it really increase the importance of what you eat?” he wonders. “Perhaps this is why nutrition as a factor shows up so much in solid cancer tumors, especially in elders.”

Mullin directs one of his culinary salvos at inflammation. Science has proved that many conditions in our guts are mediated through inflammation. Too much, however, and our systems go berserk. If it’s chronic, that’s even worse.

“We’re appreciating that now more than ever,” he says. “The question is, how do we help make ourselves better? Mullin says it goes back to the food-as-medicine approach. Studies abound, for example, about the anti-inflammatory benefits of blueberries and blackberries.

“Basically, you just have to realize that there are a number of ways to make yourself feel better,” he says. “And, more importantly, even prevent disease.”
To Supplement, or Not


The debate continues about eating whole foods versus relying on supplements. Taking supplements can help people who are nutritionally deficient, but others who are already at good baselines may not benefit at all.

In some cases, taking nutritional supplements can actually increase the risk of certain diseases. Consider the potential downside to these supplements:

- Taking vitamin E may put you at greater risk for heart disease.
- Vitamin A supplements can increase bone fractures in women.
- Smokers who take beta-carotene may increase their risk of lung cancer.

"Studies show that it's whole foods that provide the best protection," says nutritionist Lynda McIntyre.

Eat the Rainbow

That's often easier said than done when you're busy and not sure where to begin. But translating the science of food as medicine into tasty, healthy snacks and meals is where nutritionists like Lynda McIntyre excel. Part of her goal is to bust some of the myths behind what it is about food that links to conditions such as cancer.

"Many times people think I'm talking about pesticides or additives in food, when I'm not," she says. In fact, less than 2 percent of all cancers can be directly related to additives in food. Up to 70 percent can be related to what we're not eating, McIntyre explains—as in enough fruits and vegetables.

But she gives that familiar message a new twist, suggesting that shoppers take a colorful approach to solving their qualms about which produce have the greatest overall benefits.

Healthy Options Abound

As for the idea that healthy eating is restrictive, forget it. Nearly every food family—nut, fruit, spice, fish, grain or bean—has plenty of nutritional opportunity. And, from the molecular level to the kitchen table, research is continuing to unlock the power of certain foods to keep us healthier, longer.

And because individual “foodprints” that would tell us what foods enhance our personal health are a ways off, the best approach is eating a well-rounded, well-informed diet. That’s just good medicine.

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“Eat the rainbow,” McIntyre says. “The brighter the food, the richer the color, the higher the antioxidant count.” And don’t snub the frozen fruits and veggies, either. Both can work. Though fresh is ideal, growing seasons can be short. From a nutritional perspective, frozen fruits and vegetables can be just as healthy since they’re picked at the peak of ripeness and keep nutritional content intact.

Dripping With Danger

The fat dripping down a deep-grilled steak might taste delicious, but it’s potentially deadly—especially for men.

The culprit, says oncologist Bill Nelson, M.D., is something called a polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbon carcinogen. It also escapes from the fat in chicken skin.

“The liver just can’t metabolize all these charred meat carcinogens,” he explains. “It passes them to the prostate, putting men with a particular DNA mutation at higher risk for developing prostate cancer.”

If you’re going to eat meat, Nelson says, stick to lower-fat cuts, remove the skin from chicken before cooking, and look at alternatives such as broiling and poaching.

Download a podcast to hear gastroenterologist and nutrition expert Gerard Mullin, M.D., explain his perspective on the role of food as medicine. Visit hopkins-gi.org.
It was the lower-back pain, then the severe headaches that were keeping me up at night. I thought for sure I had a pinched nerve. I put it off for a while, but when I finally went to the doctor’s office, they X-rayed my back and told me I was fine.

The only thing I really worried about at that point was getting some sleep. Never in my wildest thoughts did I imagine anything close to cancer. That’s what happened, though. The pain never did go away, and I eventually went to see a neurologist.

That changed my world. Turns out I had a brain tumor—an astrocytoma. I was referred immediately to Johns Hopkins and neurosurgeon Alessandro Olivi, M.D. It was complicated because of how large and how deeply in my brain the tumor was. I was dumbfounded, scared and in complete denial. All my life, I’ve been the rock of my family. Now it was my turn to depend on others.

Dr. Olivi and his team were class acts—gentle, caring, thorough and prepared. They became a part of my family and together turned what could’ve been a horrible experience into a beautiful one.

The idea of brain surgery was overwhelming, but it was completely successful. I was back home in six days, and my recovery was phenomenal. Five weeks after surgery I walked the entire Race for Hope 5K in Washington, D.C.

I think so much of this success was about how I was treated and cared for at Johns Hopkins—it’s all genuine, all the time.
You can overcome incontinence. This prevalent condition has effective treatment options. Go to hopkinsbayview.org/pelvicfloor or call 877-546-1872 to explore solutions.
We’re here for you

We are pleased to offer you Johns Hopkins USA, a convenient link to Johns Hopkins’ expertise—no matter where you live. With one call, a caring, knowledgeable coordinator will guide you through the best medical care in a way that is tailored to your needs. And to ensure your trip to Baltimore is smooth and comfortable, we’ll help you:

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- Make travel, lodging and transportation arrangements
- Know what to bring and what to expect

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