Great Expectations®+ FOR HEALTH

WOMEN'S HEALTH NEWSLETTER

A BlueChoice HealthPlan newsletter for women.

Fall / Winter 2007

Don't Miss These Lifesavers

Regular Pap tests may prevent and/or detect cervical cancer. If it is detected early, cervical cancer is one of the most successfully treatable cancers.

Despite the recognized benefits of Pap test screening, not all American women take advantage of the exam. Between 60 percent and 80 percent of American women with newly diagnosed, invasive cervical cancer have not had a Pap smear in the past five years. Many of these women never had a Pap test.

Don't be a sad statistic. ***BlueChoice HealthPlan covers Pap tests after your regular office copayment***. This test is one of the easiest ways to ensure piece of mind with your health. Schedule a Pap test today!

A Lifesaving Picture

Sadly, in most cases, the early stages of breast cancer show no symptoms. That's why it is so important to perform self breast exams and to have a yearly mammogram. Mammograms can help you and your doctor detect problems that you or her may not be able to see or feel. This is important because when breast cancer is detected at a localized stage (meaning if it hasn't spread to the lymph nodes), the five-year survival rate is 98 percent according to the American Cancer Society (http://www.cancer.org).

A screening mammogram is an X-ray exam of the breast. The goal of a mammogram is to find cancer when it is still too small to be felt by a woman or her doctor. Finding small breast cancers early by a mammogram greatly improves a woman's chance for successful treatment.

A mammogram usually takes two X-ray pictures of each breast. For some patients, more pictures may be needed to include as much breast tissue as possible. And remember, with BlueChoice HealthPlan, most groups cover mammograms at 100 percent with no authorization necessary when you visit a contracting facility/unit. **Check your schedule of benefits for more information.** If you have questions about your benefits, please call Member Services at 1-800-868-2528.

Recommendations for Early Detection

According to the American Cancer Society, women age 40 and older should have a screening mammogram every year, and should continue to do so for as long as they are in good health.

- While mammograms will detect most breast cancers, a small percentage will be missed. However, mammograms, despite their limitations, remain the most effective and valuable tool for decreasing suffering and death from breast cancer.

- There is no fixed age at which women should stop getting mammograms. Mammograms for older women (over age 65) should be based on the woman's health and whether or not she has other serious illnesses. As long as a woman is in good health and would be a candidate for treatment, she should continue to have mammograms.

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Recognizing and Overcoming Depression

Answer "yes" or "no" to the two following questions:

During the past month, have you often been bothered by feeling down, depressed or hopeless?

During the past month, have you often been bothered by having little interest or pleasure in doing things?

If you answered "yes" to one or both questions, talk to your doctor about depression.

Overcoming Depression

- If therapy is recommended, stick with it. Therapy can help you overcome negative thoughts and feelings.
- If you're taking anti-depressant medication:
  - Don't stop taking your medication without first talking to your doctor. Most people need to stay on medication at least six months to prevent depression from returning. Symptoms typically improve within one to eight weeks.
  - Unpleasant side effects? Discuss them with your doctor, who may suggest a more suitable medication dose or dosage schedule. Want to stop taking medication? Always consult your doctor first.

Remember, if you ever feel like life isn't worth living or like suicide is the answer, call your doctor's office or go to the emergency room immediately.

Some final tips for your health:

- Regular exercise can prevent depression. It can also help people recover from depression faster.
- Eating certain foods may help prevent or improve symptoms of depression.
  - Complex carbohydrates like whole grain bread, pasta and rice
  - Omega 3 fatty acids found in salmon, tuna and mackerel
- Spending time with people you care about can strengthen your mental health.
- Relaxation techniques can also help reduce stress. See page four for stress reduction tips.

What to Expect When You Have a Mammogram

- Having a mammogram requires that you undress above the waist. A wrap will be provided by the facility for you to wear.
- A technologist will be present to position your breasts for the mammogram. Most technologists are women. You and the technologist are the only ones present during the mammogram.
- The whole procedure takes about 20 minutes. The actual breast compression only lasts a few seconds.
- You will feel some discomfort when your breasts are compressed, and for some women compression can be painful.
- Try not to schedule a mammogram when your breasts are likely to be tender, as they may be just before or during your period.

If you are a woman and age 40 or over, you should get a mammogram every year. Next time you have your yearly mammogram, schedule your next one while you're at the facility and/or request that they send you an annual reminder.

Spotlight on Colorectal Cancer

The nation's second largest cause of cancer deaths is one of the easiest cancers to detect and cure!

BlueChoice HealthPlan is committed to the fight against colorectal cancer. That's why we want to remind our members of the guidelines for colorectal screening. Regular colon screening and removal of polyps can provide a powerful weapon against colon cancer.

The American Cancer Society (www.cancer.org) estimates that 90 percent of all colorectal cancer cases and deaths could be prevented with two things - regular screening tests and changes in diet and exercise. These two activities could safe your life. If you're younger than 50, but have had polyps or inflammatory bowel syndrome, or someone in your family has had colorectal cancer, you should ask your doctor for a screening test before you reach that age.

At age 50, the American Cancer Society suggests you follow one of the following screening test options if you are at average risk for colon cancer:

- Fecal occult blood test (FOBT)* or fecal immunochemical test (FIT) every year
- Flexible sigmoidoscopy every five years
- Colonoscopy every 10 years
- Double-contrast barium enema every five years

*For FOBT or FIT, a take-home, multiple-sample kit should be used. A single FOBT test done in the doctor's office following digital rectal examination is not recommended.

Any of these options can help catch problems before they get too serious. BlueChoice HealthPlan covers screening for colorectal cancer. Check your schedule of benefits for more information. Please talk to your doctor today to determine the best screening option for you. If your regular doctor or primary care physician does not conduct the screening tests for you, make sure to share the results of these tests with him or her.

Why Immunize?

Vaccinations are an important tool for maintaining the health of your child – and the health of tomorrow's children. Here are some reasons why getting your child's immunizations are so important.

Diseases are becoming rare due to vaccinations.
It's true; some diseases (like polio and diphtheria) are becoming very rare in the U.S. Of course, they are becoming rare largely because we have been vaccinating against them.

Keep immunizing until disease is eliminated.
Unless we can eliminate the disease, it is important to keep immunizing. Even with rare diseases, if we take away the protection given by vaccination, more and more people will be infected. This means that the disease may return and start spreading again. By continuing to have our children vaccinated, the progress we have made over the years will not be in vain.

What if we stopped vaccinating?
Diseases that are almost unknown would stage a comeback. Before long, we may see epidemics of diseases that are nearly under control today. More children would get very sick and possibly die.

We vaccinate to protect our future.
We don't vaccinate just to protect our children. We also vaccinate to protect our grandchildren and their grandchildren. One disease (smallpox) has been eradicated (destroyed) thanks to vaccinations. Our children don't have to get smallpox shots any more because the disease no longer exists. If we keep vaccinating now, parents in the future may be able to trust that diseases like polio and meningitis won't infect, cripple or kill children. Vaccinations are one of the best ways to put an end to the serious effects of certain diseases.

BlueChoice HealthPlan covers childhood immunizations at **100 percent** after the regular office copayment. Be sure your child is up to date on his/her immunizations – check with your child's doctor today!

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Relaxation Techniques to Try at Home

Ever wonder how you can make your life less stressful? While these tips won't eliminate all the things in your life that cause you stress, they may help you lower your stress level.

- Belly breathing: Unlike children, most adults breathe shallowly, from their chests, reducing the amount of oxygen they take in. Belly breathing involves taking slow, deep breaths that fill up your lungs, expanding your chest and belly as you inhale.
- Progressive relaxation: Sometimes we are unaware of how tense we are. In this technique, you focus on each muscle in the body in turn, releasing tension and relaxing the muscles as you go. Sometimes people tense the muscle first and then relax it, noting the difference in feeling.
- Meditation or Meditative Prayer: Different religious and even secular practices follow a similar relaxation technique that involves quiet, deep concentration, often combined with slow, rhythmic breathing. Some people focus on a key word or prayer; others focus on their breath or a certain object. Typically people meditate in a seated position for 15 to 20 minutes at a time, but there is no wrong way to meditate.
- Yoga: Yoga involves stretching and holding the body in special poses, often in conjunction with a type of meditation and breathing. In addition to easing stress, yoga can increase flexibility and balance. There are many forms of yoga that vary in activity level.
- Massage Therapy: Massage therapy can lower stress hormone levels, improve sleep and calm restlessness.