

# Health Connection

BROUGHT TO YOU BY MAT-SU REGIONAL MEDICAL CENTER

## Compassionate home care

Mat-Su Regional  
Homecare & Hospice  
opens

## Protect your heart this holiday season

## In case of emergency

Know when to go to  
the ER

## Get your zzzs!

Our Sleep  
Laboratory  
can help



**MAT-SU REGIONAL**  
MEDICAL CENTER

[www.matsuregional.com](http://www.matsuregional.com)

## CHRONIC PELVIC PAIN

# Causes and cures

**W**omen who suffer from chronic pelvic pain may feel that the discomfort is something they just have to live with—a “side effect” of being female. But they don’t have to suffer. Chronic pelvic pain, or CPP, is a real medical condition. And that means it can be treated.

### WHAT CAUSES PELVIC PAIN?

You may be suffering from CPP if you’ve had recurring pain in your lower abdomen and pelvic area for at least six months. The symptoms can vary. You may feel pain all the time or it may come and go. You may have a mild, dull ache or sharp, stabbing pain. In addition, you may have abnormally painful menstrual periods (*dysmenorrhea*), low backache, pain during intercourse, pain when going to the bathroom or rectal itching and burning.

The most common causes are gynecological:

- **Endometriosis.** In this condition, tissue from the uterine lining grows on other pelvic organs. When you have your period, this tissue swells and bleeds, causing pain and scarring.
- **Pelvic inflammatory disease.** This is an infection in the uterus, fallopian tubes and ovaries.
- **Fibroids.** These are benign (noncancerous) growths in the uterine wall.

### TESTING AND TREATMENT

Your physician will evaluate your pain by taking a detailed health history and performing a physical exam. He or she may also order some diagnostic tests, such as blood tests, urologic tests, X-rays or laparoscopy (a minimally invasive procedure in which the surgeon inserts a thin lighted tube through an incision in the abdomen to view your pelvic organs).

Treatment depends on the cause of your pain and includes the following options:

- stopping ovulation with birth control pills or injections
- using pain relievers such as ibuprofen or naproxen
- performing relaxation exercises, biofeedback and physical therapy
- taking antibiotics
- getting psychological counseling
- having surgery

## Stress incontinence: Help is available

It may be embarrassing, but stress urinary incontinence is a common problem among women. It’s also highly treatable. In fact, eight in 10 women who seek treatment see an improvement or are cured.

Stress incontinence occurs when any kind of pressure is put on the bladder, such as when you sneeze, laugh, lift, cough, exercise or even rise from a chair. Childbirth and weight gain are two common causes of incontinence because these conditions stretch the pelvic floor muscles. Hormone changes during menopause, some medications and other factors can also cause incontinence.

Your physician has many treatment options, including medication, strength exercises, biofeedback and, in extreme cases, surgery. So don’t let embarrassment keep you from asking for help.



# Put out the fire

## Heartburn can raise your risk for cancer

**N**early everyone has had an occasional bout of heartburn, or acid indigestion, after a spicy meal. But if you have chronic heartburn that occurs more than twice a week, you may be suffering from a more serious condition called gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD). If you think you may be suffering from GERD, don't ignore it—without treatment it may eventually lead to more serious health problems, including cancer.

### WHAT IS GERD?

Though it's commonly called heartburn, GERD is a digestive condition that has nothing to do with your heart. Food is carried from your mouth to your stomach through your esophagus tube, which is connected to the stomach by the sphincter muscle. The sphincter usually closes once food passes into the stomach, but if it doesn't close properly, digestive juices rise back up into your chest and throat. They cause the burning feeling near your heart—hence the name heartburn.

GERD can also cause a dry cough and swallowing difficulties, make asthma worse and disrupt sleep. Left untreated, it can damage the esophagus' lining and cause bleeding or ulcers.

### A MORE SERIOUS DEVELOPMENT

GERD can also result in a condition called Barrett's esophagus, in which stomach acids actually cause changes to cells in the esophagus. These damaged cells can lead to esophageal cancer.

Barrett's esophagus is diagnosed with an upper gastrointestinal endoscopy. In this outpatient procedure, the physician passes an endoscope—a small, lighted tube with a tiny camera at the end—into the throat. This lets the physician look for tissue abnormalities and take a tissue sample through the endoscope if needed.

### GETTING RELIEF

If you suffer from heartburn more than twice a week, see your physician. He or she may recommend lifestyle changes (*see "Don't go for the burn," below*) as well as over-the-counter or prescription drugs such as:

- antacids (brand names include Mylanta, Maalox, Alka-Seltzer, Rolaids)
- H2 blockers (Tagamet, Pepcid, Zantac)
- proton pump inhibitors (Nexium, Prilosec, Prevacid)

Some of these drugs can also help improve Barrett's esophagus. In rare circumstances, your physician may recommend surgery to repair the sphincter.

### Don't go for the burn

**O**ne key to soothing heartburn is to avoid the triggers that can lead to discomfort.

In general, the following lifestyle changes can help most people put out the fire:

- If you smoke, stop.
- Avoid foods and beverages that worsen symptoms, such as citrus fruits, chocolate, fried foods, tomato-based foods, spicy foods and drinks with caffeine or alcohol.
- Lose excess weight.
- Eat small, frequent meals.
- Wear loose-fitting clothes.
- Avoid lying down for three hours after a meal.



## Greetings!

**W**e're at the beginning of flurries—not only snow, but also the flurry of injuries from ice-related accidents. Please take extra caution while we all get used to the roads being slick again. Whether we're caring for your seasonal injuries or helping you welcome your new baby, Mat-Su Regional Medical Center is proud to be your trusted healthcare partner. We're committed to doing what it takes to continue being a great place for patients to receive strong clinical care, advanced technology and comprehensive service for generations to come.

### DEDICATED TO MEETING YOUR NEEDS

Based on your feedback, we recently won a national healthcare excellence award from HealthStream Research, a provider of independent healthcare research for more than 1,100 facilities nationwide. Mat-Su Regional was given the highest ratings in community perception of quality among rural hospitals, a win for both the hospital and community. It shows we're on the right track and reinforces our commitment to providing quality service for you and your family.

We're dedicated to meeting your healthcare needs and to being an important part of the Mat-Su Valley. If you have questions or concerns, be sure to let us know. Thank you for choosing Mat-Su Regional as your healthcare provider. Best wishes for a happy, healthy and safe holiday season.

Regards,



**NORMAN STEPHENS**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Mat-Su Regional Medical Center



# Get off the diabetes track



**A** condition of elevated blood glucose that precedes diabetes, pre-diabetes is serious and the stakes are high—diabetes can lead to complications such as blindness, nerve damage, amputations and premature death from heart disease, stroke and kidney failure. Studies show that even with pre-diabetes, damage to the heart and blood vessels may already be under way. Making lifestyle changes can bring your blood glucose level to the normal range and even turn back the clock on the disease's progression. People with pre-diabetes should:

- **Move!** And get at least 30 minutes a day of moderate physical activity.
- **Lose weight.** Even a modest loss of 5 percent to 10 percent of body weight makes a difference.
- **Eat a low-fat, low-calorie diet.** Include plenty of fruits, vegetables and whole grains.
- **Take heart-smart measures.** Quit smoking, control blood pressure and reduce cholesterol.

### ! Are you at risk?

**T**alk with your physician about your risk factors.  
Or visit [www.matsuregional.com](http://www.matsuregional.com) to find more health resources related to diabetes.

# Compassionate care

## at Mat-Su Regional Homecare & Hospice

**G**uiding someone through the last stages of life is difficult. However, taking a prepared approach can make that time easier, and Mat-Su Regional Homecare & Hospice can help you make caring and informed choices to prepare for the road ahead.

### WHAT MAKES US SPECIAL?

We offer a number of unique benefits to our hospice patients, their caregivers and families:

- **Experience.** Our staff is fully qualified and has met professional, state and federal standards. We give sound healthcare advice to families that's tailor-made to patients' wishes, focusing on caring—not curing.
- **Compassionate approach.** As the time for hospice care arrives, so does your need to learn about our compassion-

ate care. Our approach involves a team of professionals who plan, carry out and monitor the desired level of hospice care determined by both the family and care team.

Together with your family's personal physician, our care team will work toward one common goal: To provide a dignified environment that promotes the highest possible quality of life. Our care team includes:

- registered nurses
- a medical director
- hospice aides
- social workers
- clergy and other counselors
- volunteers

Members of the care team make regular home visits to assess the patient's status and provide additional on-call care, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

### THE SERVICES YOU NEED

Your care team will collaborate to deliver all needed services, including:

- pain management
- emotional and spiritual support
- medications, supplies and equipment
- caregiving coaching for families
- bereavement care and counseling

### SKILLED HOMECARE

If you need homecare services, Mat-Su Regional's team of healthcare professionals will develop an individualized plan of care for you or your loved one, under the direction of your physician. The plan will be reevaluated and updated regularly as you or your loved one progresses in recovery.

Whether it's homecare or hospice, we're available to help you to make your decisions easier.

**!** There's no place like home!

**B**egin making plans today for a more reassuring tomorrow. Call Mat-Su Regional Homecare & Hospice at (907) 352-4800.



## HEALTHWISE QUIZ

### How much do you know about stroke?

Take this quiz to find out.

**1** A stroke occurs when blood flow is interrupted to your:

- a. heart
- b. lungs
- c. brain
- d. kidneys

**2** Someone in the United States has a stroke:

- a. every 45 seconds
- b. every 4 minutes
- c. every 45 minutes
- d. every 4 hours

**3** Which of the following are major risk factors for stroke?

- a. smoking
- b. high blood pressure
- c. high cholesterol
- d. all of the above

**4** Which of the following is usually not a symptom of stroke?

- a. sudden numbness, weakness or paralysis of your face, arm or leg—usually on one side of your body
- b. sudden difficulty speaking or understanding speech
- c. sudden blurred, double or decreased vision
- d. sudden shortness of breath

**5** How quickly must clot-busting drugs be given after the onset of a stroke to be effective?

- a. within 1 hour
- b. within 2 hours
- c. within 3 hours
- d. within 4 hours

ANSWERS: 1. C; 2. A; 3. D; 4. D; 5. C



## Holiday health alert PROTECT YOUR HEART

The holidays are supposed to be a happy time of year. But for many people, they can end up being a particularly *unhealthy* time of year. Heavy meals, excessive alcohol, smoking, stress—they all can take a toll. Your heart is especially vulnerable. But knowing which dangers lurk can help you take control of your heart health this season.

### STRESS INDUCERS

Three main triggers tend to cause holiday stress, says the Mayo Clinic:

- 1. Relationships.** Family tensions often increase during the holidays. What's more, those facing the holidays away from loved ones may feel lonely or sad.
- 2. Finances.** Spending too much on gifts, travel, food and entertainment can increase stress.
- 3. Physical health.** All that shopping, socializing, cooking, eating and drinking can be exhausting, especially for those already suffering from an illness.

### STRESS REDUCERS

To avoid holiday stress and health problems:

- Exercise and get enough sleep. Both fight off stress and fatigue.
- Watch what you eat. Go ahead and have your favorite holiday treats, but do so in moderation.
- Find time for yourself—do things *you* like to do.
- Seek help. If the holidays overwhelm you with sadness, anxiety or physical problems, talk with your physician. You may be suffering from depression, which needs to be treated.

# Healthy eating

## 7 winning ways to weight-loss success

The upcoming holidays present considerable challenges to eating healthfully. But with some careful planning and these helpful tips, you can stick with your weight-loss plan and enjoy a healthier lifestyle all year long.

- 1 **Work with your physician.** He or she can help you plan for and meet your goals.
- 2 **Set reasonable expectations.** Don't try to lose weight during the holidays. Simply maintaining your current weight will be a real accomplishment.
- 3 **Eat a variety of foods.** If you know you'll be having high-fat foods at dinner, focus on lots of fruits and vegetables for breakfast and lunch.
- 4 **Stay active.** Find 30 minutes a day to walk. If you're too busy—and who isn't?—break it up into three 10-minute walks.
- 5 **Eat breakfast every day.** Studies show that people who eat breakfast are less likely to overeat the rest of the day.



- 6 **Ask for a doggy bag.** When eating at a restaurant, eat half of your meal and bring the rest home for later.
- 7 **Reduce stress.** Stressful times can cause many to overeat. Find healthier ways to cut stress. Exercise, get plenty of sleep and spend time with people whose company you enjoy.

## When the ER should be your only option

How do you know when to treat a medical problem yourself, go to the emergency room (ER) or wait it out? For the following three situations, knowing how to react can mean the difference between life and death.

**Chest pain.** Chest pain that often comes with certain activities and then goes away easily is called stable angina. More than likely, if you've had this kind of angina for some time, you know how to treat it yourself.

Angina that comes on unpredictably or changes over time is called unstable angina. It may be the first sign of a heart attack. Get emergency treatment.

**Asthma attack.** Your asthma action plan tells you how to react to an asthma attack. But sometimes, even when you follow your plan, the attack may become severe. Go to the ER if:

- Your asthma medicine doesn't help.



- You feel a little better after taking your medicine, but serious symptoms come back quickly.
  - Your lips and fingernails are bluish or grayish.
  - You have trouble talking or walking.
- Insect bite.** Bug bites usually cause mild reactions—some swelling, minor pain, itching—that go away in a day or two. You can treat them with an icepack for the pain and an antihistamine to reduce swelling.

A severe reaction, however, can be life threatening. If you notice difficulty breathing, swelling of the lips or throat, dizziness, con-

fusion, a rapid heartbeat or nausea, cramps and vomiting, get to the ER.

In an emergency, don't drive yourself to the ER. Have someone drive you or, better yet, call for emergency medical assistance. The equipment and expertise on an ambulance can give you lifesaving first aid on the spot.

# Trouble getting your zzzs?

## Mat-Su Regional's Sleep Laboratory can help

If you're one of the more than 40 million Americans suffering from sleep disorders each night, you'll be glad to know that help is now close to home. Mat-Su Regional Medical Center recently opened its Sleep Laboratory.

Characterized by difficulty sleeping, common sleep disorders include sleep apnea, insomnia, narcolepsy and periodic limb movement. People with sleep disorders don't get the proper rest to wake up refreshed and reenergized. This often results in a lower quality of life and, if untreated, increases the risk of fatigue, high blood pressure, heart attack and stroke.

The lab conducts sleep studies designed to diagnose patients suffering from sleep disorders. Ordered by a physician, the sleep study is performed by a technician who monitors the patient as he or she sleeps. A sleep specialist interprets the study and makes treatment recommendations.

### ! Sleep well!

To learn more about sleep disorders, talk with your physician or call Mat-Su Regional's Sleep Laboratory at (907) 861-6516.



## Symptoms of sleep disorders

The most common signs that you may have a sleep disorder are:

- snoring
- excessive daytime sleepiness
- irritability
- itchy, tingly sensations in your legs while resting
- morning headaches
- inability to concentrate
- forgetfulness
- loss of energy
- mood or behavior changes
- nighttime heartburn

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FALL 2008

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