

# Health Connection

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MAT-SU REGIONAL MEDICAL CENTER



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care for you!**

**Breathe easy  
with quality  
respiratory care**

**Growing to meet  
your needs**

**Is it appendicitis?**

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# The facts about fibroids

**Y**ou're constantly running to the restroom, your back hurts and your periods are particularly painful. What's going on? You might be dealing with uterine fibroids, noncancerous tumors that grow out of uterine tissue.

Physicians aren't sure why some women develop fibroids, but if you're overweight or African-American or an immediate family member has fibroids, you're at increased risk.

## WHAT DO FIBROIDS FEEL LIKE?

In most cases, you won't even know that you have fibroids. But consult your physician if you experience any of these signs:

- heavy or painful periods
- bleeding between periods
- constant pelvic pain
- a feeling of fullness in the lower abdomen
- an increased need to urinate
- pain during sex
- lower back pain
- reproductive problems, including infertility, multiple miscarriages or preterm labor

## WHAT'S NEXT?

Your physician will do a pelvic exam to see whether your uterus is enlarged or misshapen. If he or she spots abnormalities, an imaging exam, such as an ultrasound, can confirm the diagnosis.

Treatment depends on your symptoms' severity, the



fibroids' size and location, your age and whether you want children:

- If you don't have symptoms, treatment is usually unnecessary.
- If you're approaching menopause, you may be advised to do nothing, as fibroids tend to stop growing or even shrink when hormone levels drop.
- If you have occasional discomfort, try an over-the-counter pain reliever, such as ibuprofen or acetaminophen.
- If you're bleeding heavily, your physician may recommend hormonal treatments to lighten your flow or an iron supplement to prevent anemia.
- If your fibroids are large, your physician may suggest hormones to temporarily stop menstruation and shrink the growths. These hormones are sometimes prescribed before surgery to make it easier to remove the fibroids.
- If your fibroids are growing quickly or causing excessive blood loss, your physician may present several surgical options. Myomectomy (removing the fibroids while leaving the uterus intact) is the best option for women who wish to have children. Myolysis (freezing or using an electric current to destroy growths) and hysterectomy (removing the uterus) are other possible treatments.

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**W**e need your input! We'd like to know what you think about our publication so we can better serve your needs. Please take a few minutes to complete our online survey. Your responses will be used to improve our services to the community and to enhance our publication.

Filling out the online survey is easy: Simply go to [www.healthconnectionmag.com](http://www.healthconnectionmag.com) and complete the survey.

By completing our survey, you'll be automatically entered in a random drawing to win one of five gift cards.

All surveys must be completed online by June 1, 2009, to be eligible to win. One entry per person, please. Thank you for your time and assistance.

All responses will be kept strictly confidential. We do not sell, rent or give away your e-mail address.

# Gut check

## Could it be appendicitis?

**W**hat's tiny and useless but can cause a whole lot of pain if it's unhappy? Your appendix, a finger-shaped pouch attached to your lower intestine. And if your appendix ever becomes inflamed and fills with pus, you'll have a raging case of appendicitis, a potentially life-threatening illness.

### WHO'S AT RISK?

Though anyone can get appendicitis, it often strikes between ages 10 and 30. It usually happens when the appendix is blocked by fecal matter or a swollen lymph node following a digestive tract infection. A small number of people are diagnosed following traumatic abdominal injury, while others are genetically predisposed. In all, about 280,000 appendectomies are performed each year in the United States, according to the National Center for Health Statistics.

### NOT JUST A BELLYACHE

A hundred different ailments can cause stomach pain, but your appendix might be the culprit if you have:

- pain that starts around the belly button and moves to the lower right of the abdomen and gets worse when you move, take deep breaths, sneeze or cough
- abdominal swelling
- loss of appetite
- nausea and vomiting
- constipation or diarrhea
- an inability to pass gas
- a low-grade fever

### TIME TO TAKE IT OUT?

This isn't a wait-and-see kind of problem. Removal is the only effective treatment for appendicitis, so if you're having symptoms, head to the emergency room, stat. Once there, a physician will check for pain location and ten-



derness, run a blood test for infection and send you for a computed tomography (CT) scan to confirm the diagnosis. He or she will also look to rule out other possibilities for your symptoms, including ectopic pregnancy, ovarian cysts, kidney stones and Crohn's disease. If you *do* have appendicitis, your appendix will be surgically removed before it can rupture. It may be done laparoscopically (the surgeon makes a few small incisions in your abdomen) or with traditional open surgery (the surgeon makes one large incision). Since experts have been unable to pinpoint the appendix's function, it's unlikely that you'll suffer any long-term effects.

Delay treatment and your appendix will likely rupture. If that happens, chances are good that you'll develop an infection of the abdominal cavity called peritonitis and then pain will take over and your entire abdomen will swell. Fever, thirst and low urine output will likely follow. This infection can cause organ failure, infertility and even death if not adequately contained with an abdominal cavity cleaning and intravenous (IV) antibiotics.

### Where does it hurt?

**A**fter migrating from your navel, pain from appendicitis nearly always settles at a place on your abdomen called **McBurney's Point**, named after the 19th century surgeon Charles McBurney, an authority on appendicitis. **Find it by drawing an imaginary line from your belly button to your right hip bone; you'll feel tenderness about halfway between the two points.**

# Growing to meet your needs

**T**he true measure of Mat-Su Regional Medical Center's success is in how we meet the needs of our patients and their families, improve the quality of healthcare in our communities and increase medical service access.

## ENHANCED MEDICAL CARE

Mat-Su Regional currently receives patient referrals from more than 130 credentialed medical professionals and specialists, including 85 active staff members, of which eight are hospitalists. The hospitalist program is staffed on-site by board-certified internists and intensivists who specialize in taking care of acutely ill or injured patients within the hospital setting. Hospitalists work as a team with patients and their personal physician to monitor care and coordinate treatment. Studies demonstrate that patients cared for within a hospitalist framework tend to heal more quickly and be discharged from the hospital sooner—a huge benefit for our community!

Continued commitment to staff training and advanced diagnostic tools enable experienced surgeons to expand into more specialized procedures, such as neurospine, thoracic, vascular and hand surgeries.

## THE NUMBERS TELL THE STORY

By the end of 2008, Mat-Su Regional employed more than 650 dedicated full- and part-time employees, who supported the delivery of more than 700 babies, admitted more than 4,500 inpatients and treated 24,700 patients through the emergency department and 22,800 patients in the urgent care clinic. Nearly 4,000 surgeries and more than 1,700 cardiac catheterization lab procedures were performed.

You don't have to take our word about Mat-Su Regional's advanced services and quality. You can now access our quality scores as compared to similar hospitals across the nation. Visit Hospital Compare ([www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov](http://www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov)), a consumer-oriented Web site that provides information on how well hospitals provide patient care.



## The specialties you need

**M**at-Su Regional receives patient referrals from more than 130 credentialed medical professionals and specialists, 85 of whom hold active medical staff privileges and represent specialties including:

- anatomic and clinical pathology
- anesthesiology
- cardiology
- critical care medicine
- diagnostic radiology
- emergency medicine
- endocrinology
- family medicine
- general surgery
- gynecology
- internal medicine
- medical oncology
- neurological surgery
- obstetrics
- oral and maxillofacial surgery
- orthopedic surgery
- orthopedic trauma
- otolaryngology
- pediatrics
- plastic surgery
- podiatry
- radiological physics
- radiology
- thoracic surgery
- urology

## Financial community benefits

**M**at-Su Regional's financial commitment to our community includes:

- \$22,280 in donations to local organizations
- \$7,009,686 in charity or indigent care
- \$2,446,269 in self-pay discounts
- \$1,302,518 in property and sales or use tax
- \$50,637,855 in salaries, wages and benefits
- \$12,682,550 in local vendor purchases

## ! How can we help you?

**C**all Mat-Su Regional Director of Public Relations Kerry Aguirre at (907) 861-6849 with any questions about our staff or services.

# THANK YOU, volunteers!

**H**ealthcare volunteers wear many hats at Mat-Su Regional Medical Center. Some volunteer in settings or departments similar to those they worked in during their careers, some serve in their own way to say thank you for care they or a loved one received, and some simply enjoy helping others in whatever capacity is needed. No matter where you find a Mat-Su Regional volunteer, you'll find a compassionate and devoted professional with a heart for others.

National Volunteer Week, April 19 to 25, is the perfect opportunity to recognize and commend more than 80 Mat-Su Regional volunteers—ranging from age 15 to 85—for their heartfelt work and kindness to visitors, medical staff members, patients and families. We thank them for their smiles, kindness, mentoring, encouragement and tenacity.

Happy National Volunteer Week—you set a higher standard for us all!

## ! Make a difference!

**If you're interested in becoming a volunteer at Mat-Su Regional, call Kerry Aguirre, director of public relations, at (907) 861-6849 to learn more about this rewarding pastime.**



## FROM US TO YOU

### Mat-Su cares for you

**N**o season stirs emotion or sets our expectations like spring in the magnificent Mat-Su Valley! Many of us can hardly wait to open our windows to the welcome sunshine or simply stand outdoors and take in a long, deep breath. What a privilege it is to live in a place of such unique beauty.

Even more so is Mat-Su Regional Medical Center's privilege to provide medical care to you as friends, family and neighbors. In January 2006, we realized a long-term community goal: to build a new and larger advanced hospital to provide quality care for the Mat-Su borough and surrounding region. Through the commitment of talented and compassionate healthcare professionals, Mat-Su Regional has attracted specialists and secured technology common only in larger metropolitan areas. Mat-Su Regional and affiliated clinics benefit from the expertise of 85 active medical staff members and an additional consulting staff of more than 50. Together, we've developed programs to support prevention, maximize treatment and speed patient recovery. We're proud of our growth and what that means in quality healthcare near your home.

I hope you enjoy this issue of *Health Connection*, designed to alert you to the benefits of a healthy lifestyle and the care available to you and your family here at Mat-Su Regional.

Regards,

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



**Norman Stephens**  
Chief Executive Officer

## HEALTHWISE QUIZ

How much do you know about **allergies**?

Take this quiz to find out.

**1** Approximately how many people suffer from allergies?

- a. 50 million
- b. 35 million
- c. 27 million
- d. 18 million

**2** You're more likely to develop allergies if you:

- a. eat shellfish
- b. have a family member who has allergies
- c. had pets as a child
- d. regularly garden

**3** Which does *not* aggravate allergies?

- a. cigarette smoke
- b. cockroach droppings
- c. pet saliva
- d. they all can trigger allergies

**4** Where does pollen first appear in the spring?

- a. weeds
- b. trees
- c. grass
- d. mold

**5** What reduces pollen allergies in the spring?

- a. not drying laundry outside on a clothesline
- b. removing your shoes before coming indoors
- c. not going outside before 10 a.m.
- d. all of the above

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

# Get your blood pressure under control

**H**igh blood pressure truly is sinister: You can have it but not know it until you suffer a heart attack, stroke or another serious health complication.

Hence, its nickname: the silent killer. Seeing your physician regularly is the best way to determine whether you have high blood pressure—or hypertension. He or she will measure the force of blood in your arteries by looking at your systolic (the higher number) and diastolic (lower number) pressure. Elevated levels (140/90 mm Hg or more) indicate hypertension,



while numbers ranging from 120/80 to 139/89 point to prehypertension, a condition that puts you at risk for high blood pressure in the future. Normal blood pressure is under 120/80. Although hypertension has no cure, you can take steps to control it and protect your health:

- **Eat a healthy diet.**

High-fat and sugary foods contribute to high blood pressure,

so reach for foods from the DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) diet. They include whole grains, fish and poultry, nuts, fruits and vegetables and low-fat and low-sodium foods.

- **Get moving.** Aim for 30 minutes of cardiovascular activity most days of the week. If you're short on time, break up your workout into three 10-minute segments over the course of the day. Take a walk around the block, dance to your favorite CD or work out to an exercise DVD.

- **Take your meds.** Sometimes medication is the only way to lower your blood pressure. Because hypertension drugs work only when they're regularly in your system, you should never miss a dose or stop taking them.



## HOW DOES WATER GET CONTAMINATED?

When it comes to swimming pools, water parks and play fountains, most disease comes from fecal matter on the bodies of sick splashers. If chlorine and pH levels aren't carefully calibrated, other swimmers could swallow live bacteria. In hot tubs, naturally occurring germs can cause rashes and respiratory problems, ranging from the common cold to pneumonia. Large bodies of water—from rivers to the ocean—can be contaminated by sewage, animal waste, swimmers' feces and even parasites.

## HOW CAN I AVOID CONTRACTING RWI?

Take these precautions to stay healthy when you swim, dive or just splash around:

- Avoid pools with murky or chemical-smelling water (properly chlorinated pools don't have an odor).
- Don't share towels, kickboards or toys.
- Keep water out of your mouth and never swallow it.
- Stay on dry land if you have open sores.
- Skip bodies of freshwater on very hot days, since bacteria flourish in warm water.
- Plug your nose when swimming in freshwater to keep parasites out.
- Shower before and after swimming and wash your hands after using the toilet or changing diapers.
- Take children on frequent bathroom breaks and change diapers in the bathroom, not poolside.

# Warding off water illness

**A**s the weather warms up, we all look forward to swimming laps in the pool; splashing in the ocean, stream or river; or lounging in a hot tub. But those waters may mask something ominous: Contaminated water can lead to recreational water illness (RWI). Touching or swallowing water in pools, lakes, spas, rivers and oceans can lead to gastrointestinal, outer ear, eye, skin, respiratory and neurologic infections—and children, pregnant women and people with compromised immune systems are at greatest risk.

## Be a fruit-and-veggie role model

**W**hether you're driving the car or stepping into high heels, your little ones want to be just like you. So why not use your power for good?

Follow these tips, and the eating habits your children copy will positively influence their health—and yours—for years to come:

**1 Restock the pantry.** Keep healthy snacks around. Say goodbye to cookies loaded with high-fructose corn syrup and bright orange cheese puffs and hello to baked veggie chips and sugar-free applesauce.

**2 Drink right.** Switch out your super-acidic, high-sugar soda for water and 100 percent juice—little teeth and waistlines will thank you.

**3 Start the day right.** No time to sit down to breakfast? Send your kids off with a banana and a baggie filled with dry whole-grain cereal. Studies show that breakfast eaters boast improved math grades, less incidence of hyperactivity and better school attendance. And teen-

agers who eat first thing tend to weigh less, exercise more and generally have a healthier diet than their breakfast-skipping pals.

**4 Turn off the tube.** People who eat in front of the television are more likely to eat unhealthy foods.

**5 Eat together.** Children who dine with their parents tend to consume more fruits and veggies and fewer unhealthy snacks.

**6 Pack a lunch for everyone.** You'll save cash while making sure the whole family is eating well. Be sure to include a lean protein, low-fat dairy, grains, a vegetable and a piece of fruit (try sliced turkey and low-fat cheese on whole-wheat bread with carrot sticks and an apple).



*Health Connection* is published as a community service of Mat-Su Regional Medical Center. There is no fee to subscribe.

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70MSR

# Breathe easier!

## Mat-Su earns respiratory care recognition

**M**at-Su Regional Medical Center has earned Quality Respiratory Care Recognition (QRCR) under a national program aimed at helping patients and families make informed decisions about the quality of hospital respiratory care services. About 700 hospitals in the United States have received this award.

### RESPIRATORY THERAPISTS

Respiratory therapists are specially trained healthcare professionals who work under physicians' orders to provide a wide range of breathing treatments and other services to people with asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, cystic fibrosis, lung cancer, AIDS and other lung or lung-related conditions. They also care for premature infants and are key members of lifesaving response teams charged with handling medical emergencies.

### QUALITY CARE

"We're part of the integrated team that strives to provide the best possible care and personal service to our patients and the community," says Dave Gilbert, Mat-Su Regional's director of respiratory services. "This national recognition distinguishes the special healthcare services provided by this elite group. Many of us have 15 to 20 years of experience and a few of us have more than 30 years in the practice of respiratory and cardiac care."

"We're pleased to have earned this recognition for our respiratory therapy services and our commitment to quality care," says Norman Stephens, Mat-Su Regional



chief executive officer. "Receiving the QRCR designation is another indication of our dedication to patient safety by using qualified respiratory therapists and adhering to a strict set of respiratory care services criteria."

## New urgent care hours

**M**at-Su Regional Outpatient Center's Urgent Care Clinic provides minor emergency and outpatient care, imaging and on-site laboratory services. No appointment is necessary.

**When:** Monday to Thursday, 9 a.m.–7 p.m.

Friday to Sunday, 9 a.m.–5 p.m.

**Where:** 950 E. Bogard Road, Wasilla

**Call:** (907) 352-2880

## ! Clear the air!

**I**f you need respiratory treatment, you'll find what you need at Mat-Su Regional. Call (907) 861-6000 to learn more.