



WRSG Newsletter

WOLVERHAMPTON RHEUMATOLOGY SUPPORT GROUP

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CARING IS SHARING

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WRSG Annual General Meeting

The WRSG AGM was held at the Holly Bush, Penn Road on the 10th September. The Minutes of the AGM, the Chair/Secretary's report and the Annual Accounts are included with this newsletter.

Carver Wolverhampton City Marathon

This event was on Sunday 2nd September. The presentation of the cheques to beneficiaries has been arranged for 10th December at 2.00p.m in the Mayors Parlour at the Civic Centre. I will let you know how much the group will receive as soon as we know.

Dr. Newton has been away from the Rheumatology Department and I have not been able to arrange the presentation from Chris Dodd who ran the Half Marathon on behalf of the group. I will let you know how much Chris raised in due course.

Christmas event at Shugborough Hall

Sheila Fardoe is arranging a Christmas Festivities visit to Shugborough Hall on the evening of Thursday 6th December. The cost is £12 per person which includes the coach and admission. We leave Falkland Street Coach Park at 4.00p.m and leave Shugborough at 9.00 p.m

Christmas Coffee Morning

Our Christmas coffee morning has been arranged for Monday, 10th December at the Holly Bush, Penn Road, Wolverhampton from 10.30 a.m. to 12.30 p.m.

We will provide Tea and coffee, squash and mince pies. There will be no charge for the event. We will hold a raffle. We will also have a "bring and buy" sales table but the aim of the coffee morning is the same as last year. We just want to meet and have a chat and hopefully a laugh.

Invitations are enclosed with this newsletter.

Please reply to me by 25th November. You may wish to stay for lunch because the Holly Bush has a very varied, reasonably priced menu.

Dorothy



Wonderful memories of T.I.

Come in hospital today,
Dr Newton would say,
We will soon have you feeling good,
The foods very good,
With lots of rice pud,
So answering I said I would.

Well after only three days,
My heads in a daze,
And I'm looking forward to home,
For some peace and quiet,
A much different diet,
And never again will I roam.

There are noisy loos,
And squeaky shoes,
And trolley's oh galore,
Look out here comes the cleaner,
Polishing up the floor

There are pills for this,
And a pill for that,
Oh pass me coat,
Me shoes and hat.
They want my body,
They want my blood,
Is there anything left
That's remotely good?

My temperatures a raising,
The telly's a blazing.
It's on most of the day,
I've watched Hollywood men,
The news at ten,
and repeats of home and away.

I've learned how to play darts,
And make Viennese tarts,
Through watching the breakfast show,
I've done numerous quizzes,
My minds in a tiz wiz,
I'm feeling a little bit low.
But I've answered a few,
Won a trip to Peru,
I go next week with a guy named Joe.

I've had bed pans a plenty,
Well at least over twenty,
It really isn't much fun,
I know the nurses all care,
But it's not really fair,
All I want is to lie in the sun.

So Dr Newton when you say
That I must go away,
And bedrest my poor aching form,
Just send me away,
On a nice holiday,
Caribbean, Greek Islands, Benedorm

Luv Bren

---oo0oo---

Autumn Days

Summer days are over, nights are drawing in
Autumn's misty mornings enfolding valleys between.
Trees are quickly shedding leaves of amber, red,
All the earth lies waiting for a bracing, frosty tread.
Berries bright light hedgerows, gold gorse glows on the heath,
Harvesting is over bonfire's smoke a curling wreath.
Time for recollection of days spent in the sun
I Time for looking forward to firesides when day is done.
Autumn days remind us nature's glories never die
Reborn again in springtime reaching towards the sky
Soft rains of autumn falling like tears of sad regrets
But the heart remembers as Thanksgiving so reflects.

By Joan Heybourn from CREATION SINGS (poetry booklet) £2 from HOUSEBOUND, 77 Rupert Avenue High Wycombe HP12 3NF

This poem was given to me by Kath Sankey

Surgery notes - with Dr Graham Easton
20 September 2007

Is it worth having a health MOT?

Your car has an MOT check every year, so why not do the same for your body? You don't have any symptoms at the moment, but who knows what might be festering under your bonnet?

On the face of it, there's an irresistible logic in trying to pick up health problems before you know you have them. The problem is they can also cause unnecessary worry, false reassurance, and lead to further tests and procedures you don't really need.

Whether on the NHS or paid for privately, you need to know what you're getting into before taking the plunge.

Do you really get a clean bill of health?

When actor and comedian Mike Reid died recently from a suspected heart attack, his agent said just two weeks earlier he'd had a full medical and his doctor had given him 'a clean bill of health'. This illustrates the first problem with health checks: there are no tests or even sets of tests I know of that can give you a genuine 'all clear'. Many of the common health tests are blunt instruments – the most they can do is suggest there's nothing dramatic wrong. If there was, you'd probably already know about it.

For example, a heart tracing, or ECG, can pick up some heart rhythm problems, evidence of a heart attack, or a heart under strain, but it won't tell you much about the state of your coronary arteries. Having an ECG while you exercise on a treadmill is a better way to spot furred-up coronaries, but even that isn't foolproof. There are no tests I know of that give you a genuine all clear. A chest x-ray is another example - it's a useful investigation, but you can't count on it spotting early lung cancers. It also involves quite a large dose of radiation. So you need to be clear about what a test can rule out. Even if there was a wonder test that really could give you the all clear ('full body scans' can't claim to do that), how often would you need to have one to make sure nothing nasty had developed since the last one?

Every year, every month would probably be safer. How much uncertainty can you live with? How many tests can you afford?

Is there really anything wrong?

The second problem with health tests in healthy people is they often suggest there's something wrong when there isn't. This can be worrying for you as the patient, but it also really bugs some NHS doctors because it creates more work trying to establish all is OK and reassuring the worried well. If you have enough blood tests, sooner or later they're likely to throw up a marginally abnormal result, usually of no significance. But your doctor will probably still need to repeat the test to make sure it's nothing to worry about.

Men only

Prostate-specific antigen (PSA) blood test - men requesting the test should be given clear and balanced information about its benefits, limitations and risks. Prostate cancer is rare in men under 50.

A blood test that makes you worry unnecessarily is one thing, but what if it leads to unnecessary invasive procedures, or even cancer treatments? That's a potential downside of the blood test for prostate cancer (the prostate-specific antigen, or PSA test). A raised PSA level may indicate you have prostate cancer, but it's not a specific test for prostate cancer. Roughly two out of every three men whose PSA test is high are later found not to have the disease. Finding out whether or not you have cancer can mean a prostate biopsy (a painful procedure) and, because even a biopsy isn't foolproof, sometimes more biopsies and even unnecessary treatments. So it's worth knowing what an 'abnormal' result would mean for you. There's no formal NHS screening programme yet because, at a population level, there's no evidence it does more good than harm.

So are there any checks worth having?

I think the key is tailoring any checks to your own medical needs. If you're a fit and healthy 20-year-old, with no family history of medical problems at an early age, you'd probably be wasting your time and/or money having any sort of regular check-up. On the other hand, if you're a 50-year-old man and your father died at 60 from a heart attack, it makes sense to get checked. Most of the tests you need should be available on the NHS.

Women only

Breast cancer screening is offered every three years to women aged 50-70. After 70 you can be screened on request.

Cervical cancer screening is offered every three years to women aged 25-64.

You're entitled to a health check when you first register with a new GP. beyond that, if you're fit and well and want a health check, ask at your surgery.

Some NHS GP surgeries hold 'well-person clinics'. These may include a height and weight check, plus blood pressure, cholesterol and urine tests to look for kidney disease or diabetes.

If you're over 75, you're eligible for free annual health and medication checks at your GP surgery. If you need a health check for insurance or other purposes you will usually have to pay.

If you're otherwise healthy, here are the checks I would say are worth considering, particularly if you're over 40 or have a family history of relevant problems.

Depending on what the tests find, your GP should let you know how often you need to repeat them.

Cholesterol - fasting blood test

NHS Direct suggests you should get your cholesterol checked if you're over the age of 40, or if you have a family history of cardiovascular disease or other risk factors for heart disease and stroke. It can be lowered through diet and lifestyle changes and/or medication.

Blood pressure check - every five years after the age of 40. Closely linked to risk of heart disease and stroke, it can be lowered through diet and lifestyle changes and/or medication.

Urine test - can detect kidney disease and diabetes.

Glucose (sugar) - fasting blood test
Definitive test for diabetes, which can be treated with diet and lifestyle changes and/or medication

Bowel cancer screening - the NHS Bowel Cancer Screening Programme will cover the whole of the UK by 2009 and will be offered every two years to men and women aged 60 to 69. People over 70 can request a screening kit by calling a free phone helpline when the programme reaches their area.

Eye check - as advised by your optician, for glaucoma and cataracts.

Dental check - as advised by your dentist.
Private health checks

Many doctors are against health checks, particularly in the private sector. They point to the problems I've outlined, and suggest health checks are really about commercial companies preying on the most anxious and vulnerable for financial gain. I think people should be able to choose how they look after their health.

My feeling is that most health checks worth having are available on the NHS anyway, but – and I have done a few private health checks myself – I think people should be able to choose how they look after their health.

If they're given clear information about the tests they're having, and what they can and can't rule out, it's up to them if they want to pay for peace of mind and a flexible appointment time.

Prevention's better than cure

Health checks and screening tests can be valuable tools in staying healthy, but you need to use them wisely if you want them to do you more benefit than harm. They should never be seen as a substitute for a healthy lifestyle. Losing weight or quitting smoking is likely to do you far more good than any number of health checks.

Dr Graham Easton works in a London GP practice with around 10,000 patients. It has three GP partners, three salaried doctors and fully computerised medical records. His medical training was at The Royal London Hospital. He's also an experienced medical journalist who has worked for BBC Radio Science and the British Medical Journal.

Tests!

Thought I'd let my doctor check me
Cause I didn't feel quite right,
All the aches and pains annoyed me
And I couldn't sleep at night.

He could find no real disorder
But wouldn't let it rest,
What with Medicare and Blue Cross,
He could do a couple of tests.

To the hospital he sent me,
Though I didn't feel that bad
He arranged for them to give me
Every test that could be had

I was fluoroscoped and cytoscoped,
My aging frame displayed,
Stripped on an ice cold table
Whilst my gizzards were x-rayed

I was checked for worms and parasites,
For fungus and the crud,
While they pierced me with long needles,
Taking samples of my blood.

Doctors came to check me over,
Probed, pushed and poked around,
And to make sure I was living
They wired me for sound.

They have finally concluded,
Their results have filled a page,
What I have will someday kill me,
My affliction is OLD AGE.

Cut the Risk of Falling

I mentioned in the October newsletter that I had contacted the Falls Prevention Service at West Park Hospital.

I have now received a letter saying that my name has been put down for the next Balanced for Life programme in my area. I also received an information pack.

If you are interested in this scheme the number to contact is 01902 444502

Creation

On the first day, God created the dog and said, "Sit all day by the door of your house and bark at anyone who comes in or walks past. For this, I will give you a life span of twenty years." The dog said, "That's a long time to be barking. How about only ten years and I'll give you back the other ten?" So God agreed.

On the second day, God created the monkey and said, "Entertain people, do tricks and make them laugh. For this, I'll give you a twenty-year life span." The monkey said, "Monkey tricks for twenty years? That's a pretty long time to perform. How about I give you back ten like the dog did?" And God agreed.

On the third day, God created the cow and said, "You must go into the field with the farmer all day long and suffer under the sun, have calves and give milk to support the farmer's family. For this I will give you a life span of sixty years." The cow said, "That's kind of a tough life you want me to live for sixty years. How about twenty and I'll give you back the other forty?" And God agreed again.

On the fourth day, God created man and said, "Eat, sleep, play, marry and enjoy your life. For this, I'll give you twenty years." But man said, "Only twenty years? Could you possibly give me my twenty, the forty the cow gave back, the ten the monkey gave back and the ten the dog gave back?"

"Okay," said God, "You asked for it." So that is why for our first twenty years we eat, sleep, play and enjoy ourselves.
For the next forty years we slave in the sun to support our family.
For the next ten years we do monkey tricks to entertain the grandchildren.
And for the last ten years we sit on the front porch and bark at everyone.

Life has now been explained to you

Are you one of those people who get ill in the winter? Do you deal with the problem when it arrives, dashing to your local health food store for supplements, or do you take time to prepare for the colder seasons? Esther Mills looks at formulas for the winter!

Colds

We've all had them at some time or another – aching joints, headaches, a runny nose and sneezing. There is nothing quite as annoying as a common cold. But why are people prone to colds as the winter arrives? Firstly, most people's diets change dramatically when cold weather comes in. People eat far less fruit and fresh vegetables, so their intake of antioxidant nutrients, such as vitamins C and minerals, decreases and with this goes some degree of protection against infection. People spend less time outdoors, increasing the chances of coming into contact with people with illness, and the warm indoors is the perfect breeding ground for any bacteria. So, what supplements can you start to take now which will help keep colds at bay?

Vitamin C: To help build a strong immune system to ward off infection, and to decrease the duration of the common cold. Try 3000mg daily.

Zinc, selenium and other minerals: To help build a strong immune system making the body more able to fight the common cold
Choose a strong antioxidant formula.

Echinacea: A very popular herb, which helps to increase the body's resistance to infection and makes it more able to deal with a cold efficiently. Liquid formulas are well absorbed – take 15 drops (0.6ml), three times daily, or around 600mg in tablet form.

Garlic: Again helps to strengthen the immune system and maintain healthy immune function. Take around 6mg garlic oil, or around 600mg aged garlic.

Coughs

These often accompany a cold, although they don't always have to (some coughs can be caused by sensitivities to dust or mites, so look at how you can reduce these in your home). If you do have a cough caused by infection then follow the supplement advice for colds, as these will help your cough too by making your immune system as strong as possible. In addition to this, you may like to try some soothing herbal cough medicines.

Cold hands and feet

To those with severe circulation problems the winter brings with it times of pain, frustration and, often, a constant battle with their body which is abnormally cold. Bad circulation can be caused by conditions such as Raynaud's Disease, by heart problems, by genetic factors, or even lack of enough exercise. But for those whose feet and hands are freezing, there are supplements which may help to maintain healthy circulation.

Ginkgo biloba: This herb has been traditionally used to help maintain healthy circulation for hundreds of years, and is backed by modern research. Ginkgo is especially useful for people whose hands, feet and sometimes head get very cold. Tinctures are well absorbed – take 15 drops (0.6ml) three times a day before meals, or try a supplement of extract at about 100-150mg daily.

Ginger: Another herb which helps to increase circulation (as well as this, it tastes warming and soothing!). Some people try to increase circulation by drinking ginger root drinks or by eating crystallised ginger, but these will have little effect as they are weak. Tinctures or extracts are much more effective. As these tinctures and extracts are strong, make sure you take them with some food!

Vitamin E: This helps to maintain a healthy heart and to thin the blood. Take 200i.u. daily and work up gradually to 800i.u..

The Winter Blues

There's no denying it. Some people do feel down once the nights draw in and daylight hours decrease. The exact cause of Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) is still unknown, but there are a few theories. It is known that genetics play a part – simply, some people are more prone to SAD than others. Other scientists say that we are not functioning as our ancestors would (being in the open) and this has decreased the amount of time that we spend in the sun. Whatever the reason, the main cause of SAD is lack of enough light, which decreases the production of "feel good" chemical serotonin in the brain. Many people have found that light boxes help, but there are also supplements which may be useful:

St John's Wort: A highly popular herb that has been on centre-stage where research is concerned for the past two years. So successful is this herb for conditions where people feel anxious, or depressed, that GPs are increasingly recommending this for a whole range of conditions. Take 15 drops (0.6ml) of tincture two to three times a day or around 900mg extract daily, in two to three split intakes.
Check with a practitioner if you are taking any other medication.

Vitamin D: Often taken as a combination of vitamins A and D. Vitamin D is usually produced in the body by the action of sunlight on the skin, so when daylight hours are limited, vitamin D production in the body falls. Low vitamin D production has also been linked to lack of serotonin in the brain (another theory about how SAD results). Take 20 μ g daily for three months (from October to January) then 10 μ g daily for six months after this.

Arthritis

In the winter, when we become less active and the weather becomes cold and damp, it is easy to see why people with bad joints may often feel the strain. As well as maintaining intakes of calcium and vitamin D (to maintain healthy bones), why not try a soothing, warming massage oil such as Dog Oil or an anti-inflammatory gel such as Arnica Gel.

Glucosamine sulphate: to help thicken the fluid in between joints, helping the joints to stay mobile. Take 1500mg three times daily for at least 6 months; then reduce to twice daily after this. You may also like to try fish oil supplements. Take three 1000mg tablets daily for at least six months.

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Introduction

As people experience a relationship for a number of years they often develop a rather uncanny ability to tune in to what the other is going to say before the words are actually spoken. While this might initially be a little annoying, this capacity can become very useful as the memory begins to fade.

Conjugal Telepathy

Have you ever noticed when you're talking with your spouse?

No matter if you're out with friends or wandering round the house,
That when you have a thought you think is worthy to express,
You've scarcely uttered half of it before your thoughts digress,
And you have quite forgotten what it was you wished to say,
But there is no need to panic for your spouse will save the day,
And without the need for prompting, and indeed without a pause,
Your partial thought's completed, with an extra thoughtful clause.

My friends to whom I've spoken, and I've spoken to a few,
Have noticed this phenomenon, and so perhaps it's true,
That when you live together an extended length of time,
The need for speech reduces and there's more accent on mime.

So perhaps there is no worry when your mind begins to go,
For even out in company, no one really needs to know.

There is a great incentive to always keep your cool,
When your spouse's intervention stops you looking like a fool,
For even if the utterance is not what you would say,
It is best to grin and bear it and pretend so anyway.

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MALTA

Twenty Five of us set off for our holiday in Malta on Tuesday 2nd October.

The Airport assistance at Birmingham for those who needed it was excellent but left a little to be desired at Malta. We had a very pleasant three hour flight. We arrived at our hotel in the evening and it took a while to sort out our rooms. We were soon settled and the hotel itself was lovely. The staff was really friendly and helpful.

The quality and choice of food at breakfast and in the evening was excellent and no one could complain of feeling hungry!

Joyce had organized some trips but we were able to decide what we wanted to do with no pressure. Most of us spent the first day, Wednesday relaxing by the pool and then enjoying our evening meal and the entertainment in the hotel.

On Thursday some of us visited St. Paul's Bay and had a pleasant lunch and a look at the local shops. There was also a trip over the water to Gozo.

A cruise round the island was arranged for the next day which was Friday and most of us chose to go on that. It was an all day outing with a meal on board the Captain Morgan. The lunch was served in two sessions with one half leaving the boat while the others dined. During the time off the boat many of our more adventurous members went off on a speed boat round the caves of the Blue Lagoon. We then traveled back on the coach to our hotel for our evening meal and entertainment.

On Saturday some of us went to a nearby beach and relaxed on a sun bed for hours. On Sunday several members went to church and then on to other parts of the island but it really was a please yourself holiday.

Monday was a trip to Valletta the Capital of Malta. We visited St. John's Cathedral which I thought was very impressive inside. There was an entry charge but you had a hand held speaker for the commentary in each of the rooms. We had lunch and then went to the gardens which overlooked a beautiful bay.

The friendship in the group on this holiday was lovely. People didn't stay with whoever they had come on holiday with. Everyone mingled and if you met someone round the pool and you were on your own at that time we would say shall we go and have a bite to eat, etc. It really was a happy atmosphere.

The more able members of our party were very willing to help the ones who needed assistance and they didn't need to be asked! This was very much appreciated.

I haven't done much traveling but being in Malta didn't feel like being abroad. I got the hang of the currency on the first day. I knew the English value of what I was spending in Maltese lira. They mainly speak English. They drive on the same side of the road as us and every sign is in English. The main difference was that it was HOT!

I must thank Joyce for organising the holiday. At breakfast on the last morning before getting on the coach for the airport I could hear everyone planning where we should go next!

We had a collection for Joyce for organising the holiday. When we returned home we presented her with a beautiful flower arrangement and Joyce has asked me to say thank you through the newsletter for the kind thought.

Dorothy



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