

A publication for **AvMed** Members

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EMBRACE

Summer 2024

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You'd Know If You
Had High Blood
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EMBRACE

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OUR COMMITMENT TO YOU

Dear Valued Member:



Summer is here and now is a great time to prioritize you and your family's wellness. This issue of *Embrace* is full of information you can use while focusing on what really matters – improving your health every day.

Start your summer by scheduling an annual wellness visit and catching up on recommended vaccinations and immunizations. Nervous about getting vaccinated? We share advice for overcoming "injection anxiety."

Also in this issue, we tackle topics and provide tips for caring for kids with ADHD, managing high blood pressure, and ensuring our expecting Members are prepared if they are deemed a high-risk pregnancy. Lastly, you will find a quiz that tests your knowledge of the best place to go for care of various health issues and conditions.

I hope we inspire you to live a **WELLfluent** life and thank you for the privilege of serving you and your family.

Be well,

James M. Repp
President, AvMed
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Caring for Kids with ADHD: It's a Team Effort

There are several behavioral and medical treatment options to manage attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in children.

But what works best will depend on the individual child and family, and finding the best combination will require a team effort of parents working closely with others involved in their child's life, including healthcare Providers, therapists, teachers, coaches, and other family members.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has excellent resources to help parents and caregivers of children with ADHD. Here are just a few insights from the CDC to keep in mind when considering an ADHD treatment for your child:

Behavior therapy

Children with ADHD often show behaviors that can be very disruptive, impulsive, or at times, aggressive. ADHD affects not only a child's ability to pay attention or sit still at school, but it also affects relationships with family and other children. Behavior therapy is often recommended as soon as an ADHD diagnosis is made.

The goal of treating a child with ADHD through behavior therapy is to reduce and eliminate these problem behaviors while teaching or strengthening positive ones to replace them.

In addition to teaching the child skills that will continue to benefit them as they grow up, behavior therapy may also include "parent training," which involves training parents to interact differently with their child to elicit desirable behavior and discourage behavior that's causing them trouble.

Therapists and parents can also work with the child's teachers to develop and introduce behavioral interventions in the classroom to enhance the learning environment for the child, especially for those who attend early childhood programs.

Medications

Several types of medications are approved by the Federal Drug Administration to treat ADHD in children as young as six years of age:

- Stimulants are the best-known and most widely used ADHD medications. Between 70-80% of children with ADHD display fewer ADHD symptoms when taking these fast-acting medications.
- Nonstimulants were approved for the treatment of ADHD in 2003. They do not work as quickly as stimulants, but their effect can last up to 24 hours.

Medications can have side effects, such as decreased appetite or sleep problems, and affect each child differently.

One child may respond well to one medication, but not to another. Also, ADHD medications stop working once the child stops taking them.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that healthcare Providers observe and adjust the dose of medication to find the right balance between benefits and side effects.

It is important for parents to monitor the impacts they see in their children and share their observations with the Provider to assess if a new medication is warranted altogether.

For these reasons, it is very important for your child to see the prescribing doctor frequently, especially within the first 30 days after a new medication is prescribed.

Equally important is for your child to continue to see the prescribing doctor at least two or more times within nine months after starting a medication.

Wellness Visits: The Best Way to Stay Healthy

If you're like most people, you probably only think of going to the doctor when you feel sick or if you've been injured. But having routine preventive care visits and taking other practical steps to manage your health are just as important, if not more so, for staying as healthy as you can be.

An annual preventive care visit is recommended to ensure your doctor has an ongoing record of your health progress, which makes it easier to spot subtle signs of ailments or disease.

Plus, annual visits are helpful touchpoints for your doctor to give you the recommended health screenings and immunizations that can stave off illness.

Being proactive about your own health and wellness can help keep serious medical issues and healthcare costs to a minimum.

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It starts by completing your confidential Personal Health Assessment (PHA) using the AvMed Wellness Portal. Just visit [AvMed.org](https://www.avmed.org), scroll to the bottom of the home page and then click on "Take Your PHA."

To view a complete list of preventive services, visit [AvMed.org](https://www.avmed.org). Then contact your healthcare Provider to find out what services are recommended for you and schedule your virtual or in office visit so you can start enjoying a healthier you!



Do You Think You'd Know If You Had High Blood Pressure?

There's a reason that high blood pressure is talked about so frequently. This condition, also known as hypertension, can cause serious damage to your heart, brain, kidneys, and other vital organs. High blood pressure interferes with the smooth flow of blood through your arteries — the network that ferries oxygen and nutrients to your organs and tissues.

A blood pressure reading that is consistently 130/80 or higher means you're more likely to have a heart attack or stroke, according to the American Heart Association (AHA).

As a reminder, readings less than 120/80 are considered normal, while readings between 120/80 and 130/80 are considered "elevated" and should be closely watched.

But for all the disruption it can cause, high blood pressure tends to be inconspicuous. In fact, about 1 in 3 adults with the condition aren't even aware that they have it, reports the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. That's why it's often called a "silent killer."

High blood pressure does not typically cause noticeable symptoms until it has reached an advanced stage (140/90 or higher), according to the AHA. What's more, when symptoms do crop up, they can be vague and are often attributed to other causes.

Everything from your age to your lifestyle to your family history plays a role in whether you develop high blood pressure. Read on to learn the factors and daily habits that put you at risk — and the top strategies that can help you change them.



High blood pressure risk factors **YOU** can control. Making a few strategic tweaks to your daily routine can go a long way toward keeping your blood pressure in check.

Here are some of the top daily habits to focus on:

Get a good night's sleep.

Tossing and turning at night or regularly sleeping fewer than seven hours can have a negative effect on blood pressure readings. Blood pressure naturally goes down when you sleep, so any disruption means that your blood pressure stays higher for a longer period of time. Adults should aim for seven to nine hours a night, according to the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

If you have trouble sleeping, talk to your doctor. They can rule out an underlying health problem that may be disrupting your sleep patterns and recommend strategies to help you get better shut eye.

Watch your intake of salt, fat, ultra-processed foods, and alcohol.

Regularly eating foods that are high in salt or saturated fat, or that are highly processed (think packaged snacks and frozen dinners) increase your risk of developing high blood pressure. Drinking too much alcohol can also raise blood pressure.

Making big dietary changes isn't always easy. That's why it's smart to meet with a registered dietitian. They can set you up with an eating plan that allows for your favorite foods and flavors but helps to bring your blood pressure into a healthy range.

Move more.

You've heard it before, regular exercise and sitting less are two of the best things you can do for your overall heart health and your blood pressure.

Adults should aim to get 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic exercise each week, according to government guidelines. That's only 2.5 hours a week, which breaks down to about 30 minutes a day, five days a week.

So, the good news is that you can hit that 150-minute goal any way that works for you, for example:

- Take a brisk 10-minute walk after every meal.
- Do one 60-minute group fitness class that you enjoy each week, and sprinkle in shorter bursts of activity on the other days of the week.
- Do a 30-minute gym workout three days a week; go for short, brisk walks on alternate days.

And remember, many active household chores — such as weeding the garden or pushing a vacuum or lawn mower — count toward your 150-minute exercise target.

Quit smoking.

Add high blood pressure to the list of health problems connected to smoking. Your doctor can help you find resources to quit. You can also find free tools and steps to create your own quit plan at [SmokeFree.gov](https://www.smokefree.gov).

Manage stress.

The hormones your body releases when you're faced with a stressful situation make the heartbeat faster and cause your blood vessels to constrict. It's known as the fight-or-flight response, and it passes when you're out of the danger zone. The trouble for your blood pressure arises if you're constantly stressed and not taking steps to decompress.

There's no avoiding stress, but there are healthier ways to handle it.

Regular exercise is one way to help your mind reset, but it's certainly not the only way.

Many people find mindfulness practices — such as journaling, deep breathing exercises, and meditation — to be helpful for keeping stress at bay. For others it can be as simple as turning off your phone or computer for an hour every day, reading a good page-turner, or calling a friend.

The bottom line is that several of the health problems tied to high blood pressure can be avoided by staying on top of your regular checkups and making a few simple lifestyle changes. Making even just one small change each day can add up to better heart health.

Overcoming Injection Anxiety

Whether it's for a vaccine or a blood test, getting stuck with a needle is never fun. But for some, the mere idea of a shot in the arm can cause serious anxiety, making the process nearly impossible to get through.

While most children have needle anxiety, they tend to grow out of it. By young adulthood, only 20% to 30% are still afraid. Still, needle fear — which can run the gamut from a vague sense of unease to a full-blown panic attack — remains a deterrent for many. Some 16% of adults avoid their yearly flu vaccine because of it.

Pain, or fear of pain, is often the main motivation behind people's dread of needles. Others have a needle phobia, known as trypanophobia, that causes them to worry about having panic symptoms, such as dizziness and fainting.

Luckily, there are ways to cope. Whether needles cause you minor jitters or high anxiety, these tips can help you get through the process.

Before

You can prepare yourself to have a positive experience before rolling up your sleeve:

• Numb the injection area.

An over-the-counter topical anesthetic, such as an ointment containing lidocaine, can block pain signals to your skin. These pain-relieving creams take time to work, so ask your Provider or pharmacist how long before a shot you should rub it on. Another option is a cooling spray, or vapocoolant, which can reduce the sensitivity of nerve endings. Apply it to the injection site immediately before your shot.

• Practice mindfulness meditation.

When you're worried about something, the tendency is to hyperfocus on it, which can intensify negative feelings. Mindfulness meditation helps redirect your attention to the here and now — and away from that future shot. Many hospital systems offer mindfulness-based stress reduction, or MBSR. This eight-week course has been shown to reduce anxiety, depression, and chronic pain. Ask your Provider if such a program might be available to you. Or get started now by downloading a free mindfulness meditation app, such as Insight Timer or Smiling Mind.

Whichever method you choose, understand that for mindfulness meditation to be effective, you should practice it on a regular basis.

• Tell your healthcare professional.

Letting the doctor, nurse, or pharmacist know about your needle fears helps them help you. They can use a smaller needle or a numbing agent, for example.

During Administering the needle itself takes only a few seconds, but setting up for it may take longer. To avoid having your fears get the best of you at that moment:

- Distract yourself. There are lots of ways to keep your mind occupied while you wait. Listen to your favorite music (preferably something soothing), cue up an engaging podcast or a funny video on your smartphone. Or play mind games — count backward from 100, recite the alphabet in reverse, or think of a fruit or vegetable that starts with each letter of the alphabet.
- Don't look at the needle. For some, it helps to not know when the shot goes in.
- Take deep, slow breaths. Deep, belly breathing has been shown to lessen feelings of anxiety.
- Relax your muscles. This can make the shot less painful. After It's not uncommon for a vaccination to have mild side effects at the point of injection. Here are some post-procedure recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:
- Move your arm around gently. This can help reduce pain or swelling in the vaccine arm.
- Put a cool, wet washcloth on the injection site. This can help reduce soreness.
- Take an over-the-counter non-aspirin pain reliever. Some vaccines may cause soreness at the injection site, or general muscle aches. Ask your Provider or pharmacist if it's all right to take a nonprescription pain reliever, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol).

By following these tips, you'll be on your way to getting comfortable getting the shots you need.

What is a High-Risk Pregnancy?

The words "high-risk" are not words you want to hear when you're pregnant. Whether due to an underlying condition, such as diabetes, being on the older side, or even carrying twins, these and other high-risk factors have one thing in common: you, or your baby, have a higher-than-normal chance of complications during pregnancy and delivery.

But just because a pregnancy is considered high risk does not mean you'll definitely have problems. So, take a deep breath. You may need some extra care during your pregnancy — and your Provider has a plan for doing just that while keeping a close eye on you and your baby's health.

Here's what you need to know about high-risk pregnancies, and how to remain calm and healthy.

Factors that can make a pregnancy high-risk

Every pregnancy is different, but there are some baseline conditions that might prompt your doctor to keep a closer watch during your pregnancy. Here are some of the more common "high-risk" factors:

- You have a pre-existing health condition like diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity or an autoimmune disorder

- You're 35 or older
- You're carrying multiples
- You had a previous pre-term baby

What to expect from your Provider if your pregnancy is high-risk

Get ready for your doctor to be highly involved in your pregnancy. What that means for you:

More visits.

For the first 20 weeks, you'll go about once a month, same as other pregnant women. But after week 20, expect two visits per month, so that your doctor can keep an eye on your baby's growth. During the third trimester (around week 27), you'll probably go once a week.

More tests and ultrasounds.

One way your Provider will check on your baby's growth is to perform more ultrasounds. You'll probably have an ultrasound every four weeks in the second and third trimester, especially with multiples. You'll also have more nonstress tests. That's when the doctor straps a monitor around your belly to measure your baby's heart rate and reaction to movement to make sure they're healthy and getting enough oxygen.

More attention on what you eat.

Your doctor will especially want to monitor your diet if you have pre-existing diabetes, in which case you might have to work with a nutritionist to discuss how to watch your carb intake. Otherwise, your Provider will urge you to stick with a well-balanced diet as much as possible to avoid gestational diabetes and other pregnancy complications.

More focus on exercise.

Your Provider will want you to do some physical activity every day, such as a 30-minute walk, even if you weren't that active before. If you're carrying multiples, you can still do low-impact workouts such as swimming, prenatal yoga, or a stroll. Talk to your doctor about what's right for you.

Lots of support and updates.

Your doctor knows that a high-risk pregnancy can be stressful, so they'll make a point of keeping you up to date on your health, even if nothing's changed, so you can feel reassured of your condition at every stage.



QUIZ:

Where Should You Go For Care?



When you're not feeling well, there are many places you can turn to for care. Your primary care Provider (PCP) is often the best first choice. They know your health history and can provide more personalized care.

If you can't get an appointment with your PCP, or you have an injury or illness that needs to be addressed urgently, you can also turn to an urgent care center or your local emergency room (ER). ERs are the go-to option for life-threatening emergencies like a heart attack, or a severe injury.

Urgent care centers are a great option for problems that are in between a minor illness and a life-threatening emergency. These stand-alone clinics – open nights, weekends and in some cases, 24-hours – are staffed by doctors, physician's assistants, nurses and nurse practitioners, and other healthcare professionals that are trained to treat a variety of injuries and illnesses. Urgent care centers also typically have shorter wait times and are less expensive than an ER visit.

So, where should you go for care when you're not feeling well? Making the right choice can

save you time and possibly money. Take our quiz below to see if you know where to go in different situations.

1. You've had a cold and fever for about a week. Where should you go?

- A. Primary Care Provider
- B. Urgent Care
- C. Emergency Room

2. You've spotted a strange freckle, but the dermatologist's office can't schedule you for six months. Where should you go?

- A. Primary Care Provider
- B. Urgent Care
- C. Emergency Room

3. Mild nausea turned into a full day of diarrhea. The primary care Provider's office is closed. Where should you go?

- A. Primary Care Provider
- B. Urgent Care
- C. Emergency Room

4. You've been bitten by a dog or another animal and you're bleeding and in pain. Where should you go?

- A. Primary Care Provider
- B. Urgent Care
- C. Emergency Room

5. The wind blew something into your eye. It's painful and watery—even after rinsing. Where should you go?

- A. Primary Care Provider
- B. Urgent Care
- C. Emergency Room

6. You're sweaty, nauseous, short of breath, and having chest pain. Where should you go?

- A. Primary Care Provider
- B. Urgent Care
- C. Emergency Room

7. You've slipped on a wet floor and fallen on your arm. It's now painful and swollen, and your fingers are feeling numb. You worry your wrist is broken. Where should you go?

- A. Primary Care Provider
- B. Urgent Care
- C. Emergency Room

One more option to consider is telehealth. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, more and more clinics are offering appointments with practitioners via phone or video call. This can be a great first step if you're still not sure where to go for care.

Answers:

1. A. Call your PCP's office to see if you can get an appointment. If no appointments are available soon, they can advise you on what to do next. Telehealth may also be an option in this scenario. A Provider can assess your symptoms by phone or video call. They may be able to diagnose the problem and prescribe medicine.
2. A. Your PCP can assess whether the mark is problematic. If needed, they can refer you to a dermatologist. A telehealth appointment may also be an option. A Provider can assess the mark over a video call.
3. B. Practitioners at your local urgent care center can determine if you've contracted food poisoning or a stomach bug and treat you accordingly. They can also prescribe medicine to help you stop your vomiting, if need be, and treat dehydration with IV fluids.
4. B. Wounds can be cleaned and treated by a practitioner at an urgent care center. They can also check for damage to nerves or tendons, provide stitches if necessary, prescribe antibiotics, and advise whether a rabies shot is necessary.
5. B. Your cornea may be scratched. If so, the practitioners at an urgent care facility will be able to tell. They can also remove foreign objects from the eye.
6. C. Always assume that chest pain could be a heart attack! Call 9-1-1 immediately if you experience any of the symptoms listed above.
7. B. Most urgent care centers are equipped with X-ray machines to determine if your wrist is sprained or broken. If it's broken, you can be fitted with a cast on site. A sprain usually only requires a sling or bandage. Practitioners can also prescribe prescription medication for pain, if needed.

Help Us Do Even Better!

It is our top priority to continuously improve your Member experience and benefits to help you stay healthy. In the next few weeks, you may receive an independent survey in the mail from the Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems or CAHPS program. By filling out this survey, we can learn more about your AvMed experience to improve our services and better meet your needs. This tool plays an important role in your healthcare and ensures we continue delivering quality services and the best healthcare experience possible.

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