



The Liker Health Report

Keeping People Focused on Staying Fit & Healthy

Summer 2008

The Liker Health Report is a quarterly publication intended to raise awareness of health-related issues and to encourage readers to take charge of their health and live healthier, more fulfilling lives.

The Heart of the Matter: RECREATIONAL WATER ILLNESSES

The occurrence of different illnesses changes with the seasons. The cold weather and indoor confinement of fall and winter are associated with colds and flu. The warm weather and outdoor activities of summer are associated with “recreational water illnesses”. RWIs are illnesses that are contracted by swallowing, breathing, or having skin contact with germs (typically parasites) in the water of swimming pools, spas, lakes, rivers, and oceans. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reported more RWIs in 2007 than any previous year and predicts that the incidence of RWIs will rise in the future.

Cryptosporidiosis (Crypto) is a chlorine-resistant parasite that is the most common RWI contracted from swimming pools and water parks. The *Cryptosporidium* parasite is transmitted through feces of an infected person or animal. Crypto causes watery diarrhea lasting from one to three weeks, stomach cramps, nausea, vomiting, fever, dehydration, and weight loss. Symptoms

begin two to ten days after becoming infected. Healthy individuals usually recover without treatment as the parasites pass through the intestinal tract. People with compromised immune systems are at risk of life-threatening complications.

Cercarial dermatitis (swimmer’s itch) is caused by a parasite found in the feces of birds, particularly ducks, geese, and seagulls. This RWI is contracted when the larvae come in contact with someone swimming in a lake or ocean and burrow under the skin. The parasite cannot live in humans but does cause an allergic reaction and rash. Symptoms appear within minutes or a few days afterwards and

Healthy Swimming Habits

- ▶ do not swallow the water
- ▶ take a shower before and after swimming
- ▶ avoid swimming if you have diarrhea
- ▶ wash your hands after using the toilet or changing diapers
- ▶ wash children’s bottoms with soap and water before swimming

include tingling, burning, and itching; small red pimples; or small blisters. Swimmer’s itch does not usually require medical treatment other than over-the-counter corticosteroid cream to relieve the itch. It is not contagious, but re-infection is possible. Swimmer’s itch becomes more intense with frequent exposure to contaminated water.

Healthy Swimming Habits

- ▶ do not swim in areas with signs posted warning of unsafe water
- ▶ do not swim or wade in shallow or marshy areas
- ▶ do not attract birds to areas where people are swimming
- ▶ shower immediately after swimming; towel dry if no shower is available

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Your Lifestyle: MANAGING JOB STRESS

Job stress can affect professional and personal relationships, job security, and one's health if not managed successfully. Prolonged or excessive stress will eventually take a huge psychological and physical toll. No one need fall victim to job burnout, so before the "Q" word enters your mind, take note of a few strategies to improve your outlook.

Coping with Stress

STEP #1 - Identify your stress triggers

This can be done by keeping a stress journal for one week. Make note of any situation or event that produces an unpleasant emotional, mental or physical response. Briefly describe the situation and answer the following questions:

- ▶ *What was the day and time of the stressful event?*
- ▶ *Where did the event take place?*
- ▶ *Who else was involved?*
- ▶ *What caused the stress?*
- ▶ *What was your reaction?*
- ▶ *What did you say / What action did you take?*
- ▶ *What were your physical symptoms?*
- ▶ *How did the situation make you feel?*
- ▶ *On a scale of 1 (not very intense) to 10 (very intense), how intense was your stress?*

Additionally, make a list of all the daily activities that require your time and energy. This includes responsibilities such as your job, school, shuttling your children to and from school, or caring for an elderly relative. On the same 10 point scale as above, rate each activity on the intensity of stress that it causes you.

After a week, examine your stress journal and review the events that you rated as very stressful (a 9 or 10). Select one specific time/energy demand that elicited a stressful response and examine it more closely for ways to implement a solution.

STEP #2 - Improve your time management

There are only 24 hours in a day, seven to eight of which should be devoted to sleep. The other sixteen should be well organized to minimize your stress. While at work, follow these tips to maximize productivity, decrease stress, and enhance feelings of well-being and job satisfaction:

- ▶ *"De-clutter" your work environment.*
- ▶ *Set realistic expectations and deadlines.*
- ▶ *Each morning, create a prioritized list of the tasks to be done that day and periodically review the list to stay on track.*
- ▶ *To minimize distractions and interruptions, set a block of time when you close your office door and forward your phone calls to voice mail.*

STEP #3 - Improve your work relationships

Not everyone in the workplace sees eye to eye; in fact, it's normal when employees have the occasional difference of opinion with their manager or supervisor. Employees who have a healthy work relationship with their supervisor are typically happier and less stressed. Some tips to improving your relationship with your employer/boss include:

- ▶ *Show respect, even if you think he/she hasn't earned it.*
- ▶ *Put forth your best effort.*
- ▶ *Be honest and diplomatic; never try to hide a problem.*
- ▶ *Maintain a business-like relationship.*
- ▶ *Assert a positive attitude.*
- ▶ *Don't be afraid of him/her.*
- ▶ *Choose your battles wisely.*
- ▶ *If necessary, say "no" with a friendly but firm tone.*
- ▶ *Communicate displeasure or anger appropriately.*
- ▶ *Embrace your talents and face your shortcomings.*

Desk rage is the latest workplace hazard plaguing American companies. Displays of anger, from a grumpy co-worker to an insulting boss to a violent rampage by either, have become increasingly common. Surveys show that almost half of American workers have experienced yelling or verbal abuse while at work; ten percent reported physical violence and feared that their workplace was unsafe.

Experts say that this trend is the result of rising food and fuel costs, overwhelming personal debt, and job uncertainty. Long commutes give workers more time to dwell on their financial situations, and many arrive at work in a foul mood, ready to snap at the unknowing co-worker who says "Good morning" in the hallway. Less disposable income means less money to spend on after-hours and weekend recreational activities that help workers let off some steam.

Playing It Safe: Children & Water Safety

Approximately 300 American children under the age of five drown in swimming pools annually. Another 2,000 in the same age group are treated for near-drowning injuries. Every year as the weather warms up and the first drowning occurs, the media reiterates the grim statistics. Areas that have good weather all year are more prone to drownings and parents need to be vigilant at all times.

Children are naturally attracted to water and pool submersions occur quickly. Three of every four victims had only been out of someone's sight for five minutes or less. Children do not splash or call out if they are in trouble. For these reasons, it is imperative that an adult maintain eye contact with children at all times when they are pool-side.

Pool fences are not childproof but they do provide additional protection for children who stray from a supervising adult. Guidelines for fences and gates according to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission include:

- ▶ The fence or other barrier should be at least four feet high. It should have no foot or handholds that could help a young child to climb it.
- ▶ Vertical fence slats should be less than four inches apart to prevent a child from squeezing through.
- ▶ If the fence is chain link, then no part of the diamond-shaped opening should be larger than 1-3/4 inches.
- ▶ Fence gates should be self-closing and self-latching. The gate should be well maintained to close and latch easily. The latch should be out of a child's reach.
- ▶ For above-ground pools, steps and ladders leading from the ground to the pool should be secured and locked, or removed when the pool is not in use.

Remember, the weakest link in the strongest and tallest fence is a gate that does not close and latch securely.



SWIMMING POOL RULES

- #1 Learn to swim -- adults & children
- #2 Never leave a child unattended around water and never take your eyes off them. During social gatherings, designate an adult to supervise activity in and around the pool.
- #3 Never allow young children in the pool without an adult.
- #4 Learn CPR -- all adults, caretakers and babysitters.
- #5 Post CPR instructions and 9-1-1 information in the pool vicinity.
- #6 Install a phone near the pool or have a cordless phone nearby.
- #7 Keep rescue equipment (pole, rope, flotation device) by the pool
- #8 Enclose the pool with a self-locking, self-closing fence with vertical bars no more than four inches apart; fence should be at least four feet high.
- #9 Never leave furniture near a fence which could enable a child to climb over the fence.
- #10 Always completely remove a pool cover before use; a child could become stuck under a partially removed cover.
- #11 Remove toys from in and around the pool when it is not in use; toys can attract young children into the pool.
- #12 If a child is missing, check the pool first. Go to the edge of the pool and scan the entire pool, bottom, and surface. as well as the surrounding pool area.
- #13 Do not assume that a child who has had swimming lessons is "drown proof".
- #14 Pools not used during the winter should be drained and/or covered securely.

SOURCE: American Red Cross



Did You Know?

Sunbelt states, Florida, Arizona and California have the highest swimming pool drowning rates in the nation.

The Inside Story: MACULAR DEGENERATION

What is macular degeneration?

Macular degeneration is an eye condition in which the macula deteriorates, leading to impaired vision. The macula is the center of the retina and it allows us to have detailed central vision for activities such as reading, driving, recognizing other people's faces, or threading a needle. When the macula begins to deteriorate, items in the central vision field, whether near or far, start looking blurry. Peripheral vision typically remains intact.

Macular degeneration seems to be part of the normal aging process, hence the term *age-related macular degeneration* (AMD). No specific cause of AMD has been identified, and people respond to treatment with varying degrees of success. It is important that vision be preserved as early as possible, and that means early detection. By age forty, everyone should have a detailed retinal exam and macular degeneration screening.

There are two types of AMD - "dry" and "wet". The dry form results from the thinning of the macular tissue and deposits of fatty particles (drusen) which eventually form scar tissue on the retina. Eighty-five percent of AMD cases are the dry form and vision loss is gradual. The less common wet form occurs when abnormal blood vessels under the retina start leaking fluid or blood. Vision loss can be severe and quick.

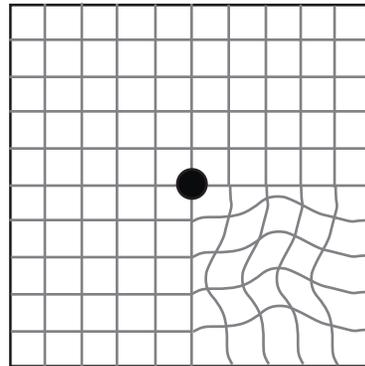
What are the symptoms?

The progression of AMD is different in different people. In the early stages, the vision changes may be so minimal and slow that it goes unnoticed for many years. Changes may occur in one eye and not the other, such that the unaffected eye compensates and no compromise in vision is detected. If both eyes are affected, however, the changes are significantly more noticeable. The obvious symptoms affecting central vision include:

- ▶ text on a page appears blurry
- ▶ empty or dark areas ("holes") appear in the center of the vision field
- ▶ straight lines appear wavy
- ▶ seeing in low light conditions is difficult

How is macular degeneration diagnosed?

Because macular degeneration causes straight lines to appear wavy, there is a simple test that can be used at home to detect problems. The Amsler Grid is a chart that looks like a piece of graph paper with a black dot in the center. (See *Amsler Grid at right*.) An abnormal test will look similar to the following; the wavy lines may appear in any quadrant.



An ophthalmologist will also examine the macula for abnormalities and/or take photographs of the retina. Dye is inserted into a vein which travels to the eye and the abnormal blood vessels absorb the dye, thus becoming more visible.

How is macular degeneration treated?

Wet AMD is treated with photodynamic therapy which utilizes a cool laser to cauterize the leaking blood vessels. This is a successful but temporary solution since it only treats the existing blood vessels. As newly formed blood vessels become abnormal, they require cauterization. Laser treatment may be required annually or as often as once every six weeks.

Newly approved medications, Macugen® and Lucentis®, have shown promise in that they prevent new blood vessels from forming.



Recommended Frequency of Eye Exams*

AGE	CAUCASIAN	AFRICAN-AMERICAN
20-39	every 3-5 years	every 2-4 years
40-64	every 2-4 years	every 2-4 years
65+	every 1-2 years	every 1-2 years

*guidelines for people without symptoms or risk factors

Dry AMD cannot be reversed, but researchers are looking at whether a low intensity laser can be used to destroy the drusen particles in the retina. One early study showed promising results; sixty percent of patients who underwent laser therapy had no progression of their condition for at least two years.

Does nutrition play a role?

Research suggests that nutritional supplements may help people with either wet or dry macular degeneration. Although, not a cure, high-dose nutritional supplements may help people with a high risk for AMD maintain their current vision status without further progression. About thirty-percent of participants in an NIH study benefitted from a combination of beta carotene (WARNING: beta carotene supplements should not be taken by smokers), vitamin C, vitamin E, zinc and copper. Other studies suggest that taking lutein and omega-3 fatty acids (found in fish and flaxseed oil) is beneficial. Supplements are necessary as it would be virtually impossible to consume the required quantities from food alone. Some manufacturers are now making supplements specifically designed for eye health. However, fruits and vegetables are always a good source of natural antioxidants.

Food Sources of Vitamins & Minerals

BETA CAROTENE - carrots, sweet potatoes, spinach, dark green leafy vegetables, cantaloupes, and apricots

VITAMIN C - citrus fruits, melons, berries, peppers, potatoes, cabbage, broccoli, and tomatoes

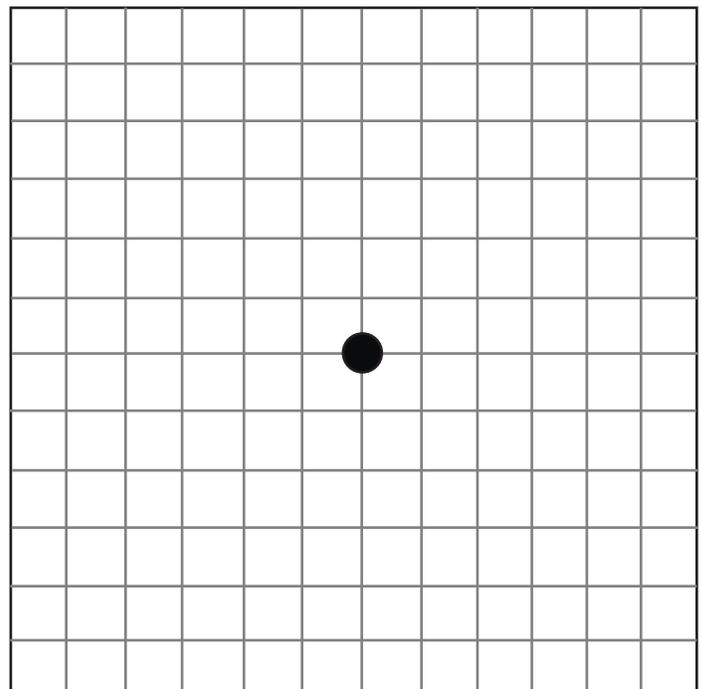
VITAMIN E - nuts, whole grains, wheat germ, vegetable oil, and green leafy vegetables

ZINC - meat, liver, seafood, eggs, and fortified cereals

LUTEIN - kale, spinach, collard greens, swiss chard, red peppers, and guava

**SELF CHECK FOR MACULAR DEGENERATION
Amsler Grid**

1. Sit or stand in good light.
2. Wear your regular reading glasses (if you wear glasses).
3. Hold the grid 12 to 15 inches away from your face.
4. Cover your right eye and look directly at the dot in the center with your left eye.
5. Make note of all lines in the grid -- are they all straight, or are any wavy, blurred, or dark?
6. Repeat with the other eye.
7. If any of the lines are anything other than straight in either eye, notify your ophthalmologist immediately.



Did You Know?

Age-related macular degeneration is the leading cause of blindness in people over age 65.

Personal Health: ALOPECIA (part 2)

If you experience sudden hair loss, patchy hair loss, or notice that a more than normal amount of hair is falling out, check with your primary care physician to rule out any underlying medical condition. He/she will evaluate your family history, medical history, and do a physical examination of the scalp. Since certain medical conditions (thyroid disease, lupus, or diabetes) and medications (used to treat gout, arthritis, hypertension, or depression) can cause hair loss, those should be ruled out. If all these don't yield an apparent cause, additional tests may be performed, including:

Pull Test - Your physician gently pulls your hair to see how many hairs come out. This test helps to diagnose or rule out *telogen effluvium* (overall hair thinning caused by an abrupt change in the normal hair growth/resting cycle).

Skin Scrapings - Your physician scrapes the scalp or plucks a few hairs which are analyzed for an infection.

Punch Biopsy - Your physician uses a specialized tool to remove a sample of the deeper skin layers. This is commonly used to confirm or rule out alopecia areata (an autoimmune disease with no known cause in which healthy people lose their hair).

Your primary care physician may refer you to a dermatologist for diagnosis confirmation and treatment. The two medical treatment options for alopecia are medications and surgery (hair transplantation and scalp reduction). The success of medications depends on the cause of the hair loss, the extent of the hair loss when treatment is initiated, and the patient's response to the drug(s).

Propecia® (see *Medicine Cabinet*) is a prescription medication approved for men. It works by preventing the conversion of testosterone into dihydrotestosterone which otherwise shrinks hair follicles and causes male hair loss. It may take several months before there is a slowing of the hair loss; some men experience new hair growth. Propecia® must be taken daily and the benefits cease if you stop taking it.

Monthly corticosteroid injections into the scalp may produce new hair growth in men and women with alopecia areata. The new hair typically appears within four weeks of the injection.

Over-the-counter minoxidil (Rogaine®) is approved to treat both alopecia areata and androgenic alopecia (permanent hair loss due to genetic factors) in men and women. People generally experience a slowed rate of hair loss and/or moderate hair regrowth, sufficient to hide bald spots. Minoxidil is a liquid that is rubbed into the scalp twice daily, and like Finasteride, must be used continuously, or results will cease.

Hair transplant surgery performed by a plastic surgeon is used to treat androgenic alopecia. Small strips of healthy hair-bearing scalp ("plugs") are removed from the back or sides of the scalp and implanted into the bald areas. After a month, the transplanted hair falls out but re-grows after another two months. The hair continues to grow at a normal rate, and after six months it looks like one's natural hair.

Scalp reduction is another surgical alternative which may be performed alone or in combination with hair transplantation. During this procedure, several inches of bald scalp are removed and the edges (with hair) are sutured together. In some cases, about 3-4 weeks prior to surgery, tissue expanders are inserted under the hair-bearing scalp to increase the hair-covered surface area; this is similar to a skin graft procedure. The drawbacks to surgery are the expense, pain, and possible scarring or infection.

Hair restoration is generally a lengthy procedure but the results can be rewarding. Depending on how extensive the baldness is, scalp reduction in combination with hair transplantation may eliminate the baldness entirely. Be sure to only employ a board-certified dermatologist or plastic surgeon if you chose surgical treatment for baldness.

EYE HEALTH *continued from page 5*

Free radicals are the likely “suspect” in macular degeneration as well as other eye conditions. Pollution, pesticides and cigarette smoke create free radicals in the retina as does exposure to blue light (non-ultraviolet) when it passes through the lens and into the retina. Some research suggests that lutein acts like sunglasses and protects the macula by filtering out both non-UV and UV light. Lutein accumulates in the center of the retina to form a barrier. This barrier gets used up as the unfiltered sunlight reaches it.

To preserve the lutein, two factors are important -- consuming enough dietary lutein and wearing sunglasses. First, the amount of lutein in the diet is related to the density of the barrier on the retina. The goal is to take in more lutein than what is used up. Second, sunglasses that protect against UV rays should be worn whenever you are outdoors whether in direct or indirect sunlight. Not all sunglasses on the market will protect against UV light so it is important to verify with your optician that your pair offers maximum protection. Amber, yellow, and orange tinted glasses screen out non-UV light.

Island Kale and Sweet Potato Soup*

2 tablespoons cooking oil
 1 onion, chopped
 2 cloves garlic, minced
 1 jalapeno pepper, seeds and ribs removed, sliced thin
 3/4 pound kale, tough stems removed, washed and shredded
 1 1/2 pounds peeled sweet potatoes, cut into 3/4-inch cubes
 1 1/2 quarts canned low-sodium chicken broth or stock
 1 1/2 teaspoons salt
 1 cup canned unsweetened coconut milk
 1 cup long-grain rice

In a large saucepan, heat the oil over moderately low heat. Add the onion and cook, stirring occasionally, until translucent, about 5 minutes. Stir in the garlic and jalapeno and cook, stirring, until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Stir in the kale, sweet potatoes, broth, and salt and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat and simmer, partially covered, until the potatoes are tender, about 20 minutes. Add the coconut milk and just heat through. Meanwhile, bring a medium pot of salted water to a boil. Stir in the rice and boil until just done, 10 to 12 minutes. Drain. Put a mound of rice in the center of each bowl. Ladle the soup around the rice.

*www.foodandwine.com



The Medicine Cabinet

Propecia® Treatment of Male Baldness

Trade Name: Finasteride (fi nas' teer ide)

Drug Classification: 5-alpha reductase inhibitor

Purpose: treats some types of male pattern baldness on the top of the head and middle front of the head. Finasteride is not approved for use in female pattern baldness.

Action: decreases DHT by preventing the conversion of testosterone into dihydrotestosterone.

Dispensing Method: oral tablet taken once daily.

Major Precautions: Women who are pregnant or may become pregnant should not handle finasteride pills, as it may cause abnormalities to a male fetus' developing sex organs.

Side Effects: decreased desire for sexual activity; difficulty in achieving an erection; and decreased semen production. If any of the above side effects do not go away or become severe, or if you have any unusual problems, notify your doctor. **SERIOUS:** breast tenderness, enlargement, or lumps; nipple discharge; pain in the testicles; rash, itching, hives; swelling of the lips and face -- call the doctor immediately.

Other Uses: Finasteride is also used to treat benign prostatic hypertrophy (BPH) - enlargement of the prostate gland; it is sold under the brand name Proscar®

As with any medication, always follow your doctor's instructions, and if you have any problems, side effects, or questions, follow up with your doctor or pharmacist.



Did You Know?

People with blue or light colored eyes have a greater risk of age-related macular degeneration.

What's the Message?

FOR YOUR WATER ILLNESS AWARENESS:

Recreational water illnesses are on the rise and chlorine-resistant parasites pose a significant health risk.

Follow swimming precautions to minimize the risk of illness.

FOR YOUR JOB STRESS AWARENESS:

With twenty-five percent of workers reporting that their job is the major source of stress in their lives, it's important to find effective ways to manage it.

There are many job situations that you have no control over; however, you can always control your reactions to those situations.

FOR YOUR WATER SAFETY AWARENESS:

Children swimming in a pool or any body of water require adult supervision at all times.

Plan for the unexpected drowning and the chances for a happy outcome are much greater.

FOR YOUR MACULAR DEGENERATION AWARENESS:

A daily self-check for macular degeneration and regular eye exams can delay blindness in the central vision field.

UV blocking sunglasses help protect against degenerative eye conditions.

FOR YOUR ALOPECIA AWARENESS:

Over-the-counter and prescription medications are viable options for some cases of thinning hair.

Discuss the surgical treatment options with a board certified dermatologist or cosmetic surgeon.

Keeping Stress in Check

Exercise regularly, eat a well-balanced diet, and get plenty of sleep.

Dear Dr. Liker... How common are "silent" strokes in otherwise healthy, middle-aged people?

A recent study suggests that about ten percent of middle-aged people have experienced a stroke without having any symptoms. Using an MRI brain scan, researchers were able to detect the silent cerebral infarction (SCI), the brain injury resulting from a blood clot that interrupts blood flow to the brain. The researchers also discovered that people who had an irregular heartbeat (atrial fibrillation) were twice as likely to experience SCI. SCIs are associated with an increased risk of future detectable stroke, cognitive impairment, and memory loss.

Other risk factors for SCI include high levels of blood homocysteine, carotid artery disease, and high blood pressure. Early detection and treatment of risk factors in mid-life are important for stroke prevention. The warning signs of a stroke include slurred speech, partial vision loss, weakness on one side of the body, severe headache, numbness in the face or limbs, and/or loss of balance. Call 9-1-1 immediately if you experience any of these symptoms.

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