

# HEALTHNET NEWS

A newsletter for public librarians and others interested in consumer health information services

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## NETNEWS

### *DE-STRESSING THE HOLIDAYS...*

Are there too many tasks to complete and too few hours to accomplish them... as the holidays rapidly approach? This familiar situation often occurs at a time of great year-end joy...and heightened stress.



Stress is actually a year round challenge in the United States, according to news about the American Psychological Association's recently released survey concerning Stress in America.

It affects children as well as adults. Many of the adults and teenagers surveyed reported an increase in personal stress over the past year. According to the American Psychological Association, stress can not only make daily life difficult, it can also "contribute to the development of major illnesses, such as heart disease, depression and obesity."

There are, however, options for reducing stress by "making positive lifestyle and behavioral changes."

Among the recommendations on the American Psychological Association website's Health and Emotional Wellness area at <http://www.apahelpcenter.org/articles/topic.php?id=3> are suggestions for dealing with the effect of stress on the body, facing financial challenges realistically, counteracting myths about stress, and adapting techniques for dealing with stress.

Additional recommendations for coping with holiday stress are available on the Mayo Clinic website ("Stress, depression and the holidays: 10 tips for coping") at <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/stress/MH00030/METHOD=print>, on the Medlineplus website ("Stress") at <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/stress.html> and on the Mental Health America website ("Holiday Depression and Stress") at <http://www.nmha.org/go/information/get-info/depression/holiday-depression-and-stress>

### *IS MY CHILD'S CAR SEAT SAFE?*

When your child's or grandchild's safety is at stake while she is traveling in a car, there is no room for error.

What is a current, reliable resource for recommendations about selecting and using a child's car safety seat?

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Healthnet: Connecticut Consumer Health Information Network  
Lyman Maynard Stowe Library ♦ University of Connecticut Health Center  
PO Box 4003 ♦ Farmington CT 06034-4003  
Telephone: 860/679-4055 ♦ email : [richetelle@nso.uhc.edu](mailto:richetelle@nso.uhc.edu)  
<http://library.uhc.edu/departm/hnet>

The American Academy of Pediatrics, national professional association of pediatricians, has published a detailed, online guide to car safety seats and their selection, especially for parents. **Car Safety Seats: A Guide for Families 2009** at <http://www.aap.org/family/carseatguide.htm> describes types of appropriate car seats by age and weight and includes photographs and diagrams. The recommendations are for children from infancy until thirteen years of age.

There are descriptions of each type of car seat, installation tips, and shopping recommendations (“Avoid used seats if you don’t know the seat’s history.” “Don’t decide by price alone. A higher price does not mean the seat is safer or easier to use.”)

The annual Guide incorporates details about specific car seats by manufacturer, including approximate costs. Manufacturers’ phone numbers and web addresses are included. There are questions from parents and experts’ responses interspersed in the text. (“Should my child ride in a car safety seat on an airplane?” “What if my baby weighs more than 20 pounds but is not yet 1 year old?”)

The Car Safety Seats Guide appears on the Parenting Corner of the association’s website at <http://www.healthychildren.org/English/Pages/default.aspx> .. The Parenting Corner also features information about childhood immunization, free or low-cost health insurance, Internet safety, and infant physical development.

Additional information for parents appears on “Your Child: A Health Resource Guide” published online by Healthnet: Connecticut Consumer Health Information Network at <http://uchc.libguides.com/content.php?pid=67331>

#### *HELP FOR CONNECTICUT CHILDREN WITH FOOD ALLERGIES.....*

Do you know a child who experiences food allergies?

It is probably not surprising if you are aware of one or more children who suffers from potentially serious or even life-threatening reactions to specific foods.



According to an article in the December 2009 issue of the journal Pediatrics (volume 124, number 6, pages 1549-1555 at <http://tinyurl.com/yf387lb>), the number of children with food allergies has increased eighteen per cent from 1997 to 2007. Parents of nearly four per cent of children who were surveyed reported that their child had a food allergy. Three times as many children have received hospital emergency room treatment for food allergy reactions since 1993. The increase in the number of children treated may reflect an increased awareness as well as an actual increase in numbers of children affected.

Connecticut has implemented a new law, effective October 1, 2009, (“An Act Concerning the Use of Asthmatic Inhalers and Epinephrine Auto-Injectors While at School” at <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2009/BA/2009SB-00755-R000710-BA.htm> which “permits children to possess asthma inhalers and automatic prefilled cartridge injectors used to treat allergic reactions (commonly called “epipens”) in school if a health care provider certifies they need to use them.”

Links to information about allergies and asthma is available on the Healthnet website at <http://library.uchc.edu/departm/hnet/inters.html#allerg> The Medlineplus website, published for health consumers by the National Library of Medicine, includes many links to Food Allergy resources on its webpage at <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/foodallergy.html>

### *EXPANDED ACCESS TO RESEARCH DRUGS.....*



New drugs being investigated in clinical trials, before their approval by the Food and Drug Administration, are available to sick individuals only under very specific circumstances. Patients may become participants in a clinical research trial studying the drug if they meet the qualifications for participation.

For patients who do not receive successful treatment from currently available medications or experience serious side effects from their use, a clinical trial of a new medication may be a hopeful option.

These research studies test the safety and effectiveness of new medications, or new uses for approved drugs. Information about clinical trials currently being conducted and criteria for participation may be found online at the federal government website [www.clinicaltrials.gov](http://www.clinicaltrials.gov).

During the research study, a participant may receive either a new drug being tested or a current, standard medication so that the two medications may be compared. Neither participants nor researchers are aware of which drug the patient receives. This method assures that both will be “blind” to the influence of expecting either a new medication or a current treatment.

Patients considering participation in clinical trials may find Basic Questions and Answers about Clinical Trials, in Spanish and English, on the Food and Drug Administration website at <http://www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ByAudience/ForPatientAdvocates/HIVandAIDSActivities/ucm121345.htm>

*Expanded Access* is a new, additional option for patients who do not qualify for a research study testing a specific medication.

A description at <http://www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ByAudience/ForPatientAdvocates/AccessToInvestigationalDrugs/ucm176098.htm> explains that, in order to receive a new medication under the Expanded Access program, an individual must obtain the approval of both her doctor and the drug manufacturer.

In addition, in order to qualify for Expanded Access to an investigational drug, the patient “must have a serious or immediately life-threatening disease” for which “no comparable or satisfactory therapeutic alternatives” exist.

In order to determine which drugs being tested in clinical trials are available under the Expanded Access program, select the Advanced Search option on the Clinical Trials search page at <http://clinicaltrials.gov/ct2/search>. Then choose “Expanded Access Studies” under the “Study Type” pull-down menu. Selecting the “Search” command will yield the total number of drugs currently being studied in clinical trials that are available under the “Expanded Access” option and links to details about each of those clinical trials.

### *FOOD RECALL UPDATES....*

If you’re looking for a quick way to find information on the most recent food recalls, a feature on the federal government’s Food Safety website at <http://www.foodsafety.gov> can help.

Headlines about food recalls submitted by the FDA (Food and Drug Administration) and the USDA (U.S. Department of Agriculture) highlight the left column of the Food Safety website. Each headline links to a full article with details about the recall---an undeclared ingredient, identifying product codes, manufacturer’s phone numbers, etc.

The FDA’s new Reportable Food Registry is an electronic resource that food manufacturers are required to use in order to report, within twenty-four hours, the potential for “severe health problems or death to a person or an animal” from food they produce or process. Infant formula and dietary supplements are not covered by this requirement since other regulations apply to these products.

As “Gateway to Federal Food Safety Information,” the website also offers a variety of resources about food-borne illnesses, minimum cooking temperatures, produce safety, storage times for food in refrigerators and freezers, and food safety during emergencies.



There are instructions about how to “Ask the Experts” online, via email, or by phone as well as links to podcasts and videos. The website contains a chart that guides consumers in reporting a problem with “a food [that] is contaminated or has made you or someone that you know sick.”

The website information is available in Spanish as well as English.

The Connecticut Department of Health’s Food Protection Program webpage at <http://tinyurl.com/ygb6alr> offers information about filing food service complaints, regulations for Connecticut food stores, and a guide to regulations for temporary food service events.

Additional food safety resources are described in Healthnet’s Fall 2007 newsletter at <http://library.uchc.edu/departm/hnet/fall07.pdf> The entire issue focuses on food safety.

#### *PREGNANCY RISKLINE.....*

Pregnant women encounter many frightening warnings about the effects of specific medications on the health of their babies. They may worry about the risks of a medication they used during early stages of their pregnancy.

For women who take life-sustaining medications or medications for health conditions such as asthma, epilepsy, and depression, their continuing use of medication during pregnancy or while breastfeeding their child presents a dilemma.

A December 2009 article in the journal *BJOG: An International Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology* (“Prescriptions filled during pregnancy for drugs with the potential of fetal harm,” Kulaga, S. et. al., volume 116, issue 3, pages 1788-1795) discusses a Canadian study about the use of medications by pregnant women and possible consequences. Of more than 100,000 women studied, “56% filled at least one prescription for a medication during pregnancy; 6.3% filled at least one prescription for a drug known to pose a risk to the fetus. “

To help pregnant women who have concerns about the effects on their unborn child of medications or potentially dangerous environmental or occupational substances, there is a free Connecticut-based information source. The Connecticut Pregnancy Exposure Information Service, available by phone state-wide at **800-325-5391**, offers a “free telephone counseling service.” A round-the-clock answering service allows callers to leave messages when the office is closed.

Depending on the nature of their medication exposure or their medical condition, some callers are advised to seek one-on-one counseling with a physician or genetic counselor, which will require a fee.

Based at the University of Connecticut Health Center, the service is available Monday to Thursday 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. The Service is a member of OTIS, the nonprofit Organization of Teratology Information Specialists.

The OTIS website at <http://www.otispregnancy.org/hm/inside.php?id=41> offers free, online Fact Sheets about medication exposures during pregnancy, directed to health consumers. Many Fact Sheets are available in French and Spanish as well as English. They discuss the potential safety or danger of medications such as Acetaminophen (Tylenol®), Ibuprofen, and Metformin (Glucophage®), methylmercury from fish consumption, vaccine administration, and herbal products such as Echinacea.

An online question and answer article from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control at <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/meds/faqs.htm> discusses concerns about “Medication Exposures During Pregnancy and Breastfeeding.” It answers questions such as “How are medications monitored for their effects in pregnancy after they are available to the public? Are new drugs tested for their effects in pregnancy before they are available to the public? Is it safe to take herbals and other dietary supplements during pregnancy?”



## FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

The following titles are recommended to public libraries and other libraries providing consumer health information services. They are not part of the UConn Health Center Library collection.

**Mayo Clinic Guide to Living with a Spinal Cord Injury.** Mayo Clinic. demosHealth Press, 2009. (ISBN 1-932603-77-8 paperback) \$17. 95.

The consequences of living with a spinal cord injury are emotional, financial, social, and personal, as well as physical. These consequences can be devastating to the injured person's family as well to herself. "Life is changed when one sustains a spinal cord injury..."(Paul J. Tobin, President, United Spinal Association)

Shorter hospital stays after spinal cord injuries, imposed by insurance coverage limitations, present a challenge to health care personnel trying to transmit important post-hospitalization educational information to patients and their families.

This Guide incorporates detailed, practical information about day-to-day living with a spinal cord injury. The information is derived from a variety of health professionals who comprise the Mayo Clinic Spinal Cord Injury Program.

The authors discuss "internal organ functions," such as digestion and elimination, sexuality and fertility, care of skin, muscles, and bone, maintaining nutrition and good health, effective communication with a personal care aide, vocational rehabilitation, return to work, dealing with emotional stress, travel, and reestablishing social networks. Illustrations enhance the explanations. There is a glossary and a resource guide at the conclusion of the book.

**Your Brain after Chemo : A Practical Guide to Lifting the Fog and Getting Back Your Focus.** Daniel Silverman and Idelle Davidson. Da Capo Press, 2009. (ISBN 978-0-7382-1259-3 hardcover) \$25.00

A University of California at Los Angeles researcher and physician, and a health journalist who has experienced the after effects of chemotherapy following her cancer diagnosis and treatment, present a physician's and a patient's perspectives. They offer realistic information on the cognitive lapses and emotional stress that may result after chemotherapy treatment. Depression, anxiety, fatigue, difficulties with concentration, and lapses in verbal and nonverbal memory may occur. This experience is sometimes disparagingly referred to as "chemo brain."

In conversational, patient-friendly language, Dr. Silverman and Ms. Davidson discuss the effects of these cognitive lapses on daily living, its scientific explanation, and treatments for depression and insomnia. They include descriptions of behavior modification techniques such as exercise, acupuncture, yoga, and meditation. They also describe effective ways to organize daily life and recommendations and cautions about foods and dietary supplements.

Anecdotal stories from patients who experienced post-chemotherapy cognitive changes enhance the book. An especially helpful feature is a chapter of specific, educated questions to ask your doctor about the possible effects of chemotherapy, and responses from Dr. Silverman. There are chapter-by-chapter references to medical journal article citations related to the topics.

**Raising Twins. From Pregnancy to Preschool.** Shelly Vaziri Flais. American Academy of Pediatrics, 2010. (ISBN 978-1-58110-344-1 paperback) \$14. 95.

Since one baby or toddler can be a handful for any mother or father, how does a parent manage to care for two very young children at the same time? Twins certainly sound challenging, even for an especially energetic parent.

Dr. Shelly Vaziri Flais, a pediatrician and mother of four, including identical twin boys, uses both her medical and parenting experiences to offer encouragement and guidance to new parents of twins from pregnancy (expect an earlier than predicted delivery and plan accordingly, attend meetings of parents-of- twins clubs for suggestions and encouragement, line up help for after the babies' arrival) ....through preschool years.

The book includes many practical recommendations.

Dr. Flais offers suggestions for teaching babies to fall asleep without a parent holding the child or being present in the child's room. She advises parents of twins to "keep the babies on the same schedule" (Yes, when one hungry baby cries for a feeding, wake up the still soundly sleeping baby so both can feed at the same time!) She suggests dressing identical, same-gender twins in different, consistent theme colors. (It makes it easier to identify them in family photos many years later.) If one twin is warned not to misbehave, the second twin who overheard the warning is responsible for following the direction as well, without having the warning repeated.

She asserts that there is no need to purchase two of every item for the twins. Sharing is a good lesson.

She wisely states that it's "never too early to read to your babies." She advises parents to "get into the routine of visiting your local library frequently."

Most importantly, she reminds parents to remember to focus on "each twin's unique personality" and to continue to "shower" a great deal of "positive attention" on older siblings.

Despite the challenges of sleep deprivation and the great amount of hands-on care that two babies require, the author reminds parents of the benefits for their children of growing up with a twin as they become "more socially savvy" and learn "patience and sharing."



*Healthnet News is written by Alberta L. Richetelle and Judith Kronick.  
If you have questions about anything in the newsletter or about Healthnet services for Connecticut public libraries,  
please call 860/679-4055; e-mail address: richetelle@nso.uhc.edu*

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