

YOUR HEALTH QUESTIONS ANSWERED BY OUR EXPERTS.

**Q My doctor tells me I have high blood pressure and wants me to take medication. Do I have to?**



Many people assume they can reduce their blood pressure through diet and exercise, but unless this results in significant change, medication often is needed. Additionally, if it is not causing you symptoms, you may feel that you can go without treatment. However, your doctor's concern is that, as the years pass, if your blood pressure remains high, it will most likely cause damage.

Specifically, untreated high blood pressure often results in blood vessel damage throughout the body and thickens the walls of your heart. This increases your risk for cardiovascular disease: having a heart attack, a stroke or

developing heart failure. This is the reason your blood pressure is checked every time you see a physician.

The last thing you want to do is ignore high blood pressure, especially since today's medications are so effective. Even small decreases in blood pressure with medication can significantly cut the risk of future cardiovascular disease. And if the first medication causes a side effect, there is always another medication we can try.

**KATHERINE LYNCH, MD**

Emerson Primary Care Associates of Bedford

**Q I am having occasional episodes where I can't control my bladder. Is there something I can do about it?**



Yes, there are many things you can do to improve your situation. We begin with an evaluation and review your health history. You may have either "stress incontinence," which can be caused by coughing, sneezing or laughing, or "urge incontinence," a sudden, intense urge to urinate, or both.

Several things can be effective that do not involve medication or surgery. I suggest that people avoid caffeinated, acidic and alcoholic beverages, which can irritate the bladder lining. Pelvic floor exercises, which you can learn from a skilled physical therapist, often have an impact, as does bladder retraining/timed voiding, where

you keep a diary and follow a schedule of going to the bathroom. The problem can be due to constipation, which can compress the bladder. This is common in both adults and children.

Individuals who are or who have been smokers, or been exposed to chemicals, may develop bladder problems that are very serious, such as bladder cancer. It is imperative that they be assessed if they are having bladder symptoms, such as microscopic blood in the urine.

**JACQUELINE BRECHT, MD**

Emerson Urology Associates

**Q I have been told that my teenage daughter should receive the HPV vaccine. What do I need to know?**



The human papilloma virus (HPV) is the most common sexually transmitted infection in the U.S. and, in most cases, is harmless. But the more aggressive forms of HPV cause cervical cancer, as well as most cancers of the vagina, anus, penis and throat. The vaccine protects against the aggressive forms of infection.

Because the vaccine is most effective when given before the individual becomes sexually active, the recommendation is that boys and girls receive the HPV vaccine at age 11 or 12—even as young as age 9, when other childhood vaccines are being given.

The HPV vaccine is given up to age 26 in women and 21 in men. While it is highly effective—rates of cervical cancer decrease in populations where the rate of vaccination has increased—women still need to have pap smears performed as part of their preventive health care. It may be difficult to acknowledge that our teenage sons and daughters are sexually active, but parents need to protect their kids by seeing that they receive the HPV vaccine.

**MEENA GARG, MD**

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