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Your Health: Eliminating unnecessary medical tests

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Medical tests

Eliminating unnecessary tests is seen as an important way to reduce health care costs.

But failure to order needed tests is also one of the leading causes of diagnostic errors.

Missed tests, failing to report results to patients and lack of follow-up on abnormal test findings were the leading types of diagnostic errors in a new survey.

The survey of nearly 300 physicians found the most commonly missed or delayed diagnoses included pulmonary embolism, drug overdoses or reactions, lung cancer, colorectal cancer, acute coronary syndrome including heart attack, breast cancer and stroke.

The survey was conducted by an arm of the U.S. Department Health and Human Services and published in the Archives of Internal Medicine. Autopsies suggest diagnostic errors occur in 10 percent to 15 percent of cases.

Good night pain

Nighttime is when many people with neck problems notice the pain. It's also a good time to do something about it.

Harvard Medical School offers the following advice:

- Sleep on your side or back when possible. Sleeping on your stomach is tough on your neck, because it's arched backward and bent to the side.
- Try a feather pillow, which should conform to the shape of the neck. Because feather pillows collapse over time, they're recommended for replacement every year or so. Or try a "memory foam" pillow.
- Avoid too high or stiff a pillow, which jams the neck and can cause pain and stiffness. On your side, use a pillow that keeps your spine straight, with a pillow that's higher under your neck than head.
- When traveling in a car or plane, use a horse-shoe-shaped pillow to support your head.

Allergies growing

Evidence of food allergies among children is growing.

A study in the journal Pediatrics found an 18 percent increase in self-reported food allergy.

Visits to walk-in facilities for food allergies also tripled from 1993-97 to 2003-2006, rising to 317,000.

Researchers also found that in 2005, 9 percent of children 1 to 17 had positive serum immunoglobulin E antibodies to peanuts.

Rates of allergies were similar between boys and girls, but food allergies increased the most among Hispanic children.

For the uninsured

For those who've lost a job or health insurance, "*The Healthcare Survival Guide*" offers advice on how to find low-cost health insurance and medical services.

Tips address whether to get insurance through COBRA, other government programs, comparison shopping for coverage, double-checking medical bills, and getting drugs at a discount.

The book, written by the co-founders of Health Advocate Inc., is available as a free download at healthcaresurvivalguide.com or for purchase at Amazon.com.

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