Self-Care Guide

Day-to-day health decisions have a great influence on our long-term health. This means practicing positive health behaviors and making informed health decisions. This self-care guide is provided to assist you in those choices.
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SELF-CARE GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

The following document is an easy, one-stop reference for self-care. Information used is from the National Institutes of Health - Medline Plus Health Topics website unless otherwise noted. Vanderbilt specific resources are also included. Brief descriptions are given for each topic. For additional information on any of the topics, click the links provided. This information is provided for educational purposes only and should not be used as a substitute for evaluation and treatment by a healthcare provider.

WHAT IS SELF-CARE?

Self-care involves:

- Getting preventive exams and immunizations
- Learning how to care for common illnesses or injuries
- Knowing when to see a healthcare provider
- Knowing when to get emergency care
- Making healthy lifestyle choices
- Taking responsibility for your health

PREPARATION

1. Have a Healthcare Provider.

The first step in taking charge of your health is to have a healthcare provider. A healthcare provider is your partner for a variety of needs including prevention, routine care, and acute care. Valuable self-care skills include knowing how to communicate your health needs and becoming a partner with your healthcare provider to maintain good health. Vanderbilt employees and their families can find a Vanderbilt provider by calling 615-343-VUMD (8863) to set up an appointment with Vanderbilt Internal Medicine Group (Medical Center East, 100 Oaks, or Brentwood locations). Or you may click here to find a provider close to you within the Vanderbilt Health Affiliated Network who is on the health plan and covered at the highest benefit level. Finally, the Occupational Health Clinic and Health Plus can assist you in finding a health care provider to meet your needs.

2. Get Preventive Care Exams and Immunizations.

Getting preventive care exams is an important step in staying healthy. The Health & Wellness Information Portal provides a personal Health Advisor for Vanderbilt employees. The Health Advisor will show you what preventive exams and immunizations are recommended based on your age, gender, and race. These recommendations are based on the U. S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) guidelines. You can also learn about resources available at Vanderbilt to help you get these preventive services. If
you can’t access the portal, recommended USPSTF preventive services can be found at the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality.

3. Choose to live a healthy lifestyle.

Many factors affect your health. Some you cannot control, such as your genetic makeup or your age. But you can make changes to your lifestyle. By taking steps toward healthy living, you can help reduce your risk of heart disease, cancer, stroke, and other serious diseases. For example

- See your doctor for regular screenings, not just when you are sick
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Eat a variety of healthy foods and limit calories and saturated fat
- Be physically active
- Control your blood pressure and cholesterol
- Quit smoking
- Protect yourself from too much sun
COMMON ILLNESSES AND INJURIES

You can also learn to prevent, recognize, and manage many common illnesses and injuries.

ABDOMINAL PAIN

Your abdomen extends from below your chest to your groin. Some people call it the stomach, but your abdomen contains many other important organs. Pain in the abdomen can come from any one of them. The pain may start somewhere else, such as your chest. Severe pain doesn't always mean a serious problem, nor does mild pain mean a problem is not serious.

Call your healthcare provider if mild pain lasts a week or more or if you have pain with other symptoms. Get medical help immediately if

- You have abdominal pain that is sudden and sharp
- You also have pain in your chest, neck or shoulder
- You’re vomiting blood or have blood in your stool
- Your abdomen is stiff, hard and tender to touch
- You can’t move your bowels, especially if you’re also vomiting

ANIMAL BITES

Wild animals usually avoid people. They might attack, however, if they feel threatened, are sick, or are protecting their young or territory. Attacks by pets are more common. Animal bites rarely are life-threatening, but if they become infected, you can develop serious medical problems.

To prevent animal bites and complications from bites:

- Never pet, handle or feed unknown animals
- Leave snakes alone
- Watch your children closely around animals
- Vaccinate your cats, ferrets and dogs against rabies
- Spay or neuter your dog to make it less aggressive
- Get a tetanus booster if you have not had one in the past 5 years.
- Wear boots and long pants when you are in areas with venomous snakes

If an animal bites you, give the wound prompt attention and clean it well. Get medical attention if necessary.

ANXIETY

Fear and anxiety are part of life. You may feel anxious before you take a test or walk down a dark street. This kind of anxiety is useful - it can make you more alert or careful. It usually ends soon after you are out of the situation that caused it. But for millions of people in the United States, the anxiety does not go away, and gets worse over time. They may have chest pains or nightmares. They may even be afraid to leave home. These people have anxiety disorders. Types include
- Panic disorder
- Obsessive-compulsive disorder
- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Phobias
- Generalized anxiety disorder

Treatment can involve medicines, counseling or both.

**BACK PAIN (Lower Back)**

If you've ever groaned, "Oh, my aching back!" you are not alone. Back pain is one of the most common medical problems, affecting 8 out of 10 people at some point during their lives. Back pain can range from a dull, constant ache to a sudden, sharp pain. Acute back pain comes on suddenly and usually lasts from a few days to a few weeks. Back pain is called chronic if it lasts for more than three months.

Most back pain goes away on its own, though it may take a while. Taking over-the-counter pain relievers and resting can help. However, staying in bed for more than 1 or 2 days can make it worse.

If your back pain is severe or doesn't improve after three days, you should call your healthcare provider. You should also get medical attention if you have back pain following an injury.

**COMMON COLD**

Sneezing, sore throat, a stuffy nose, coughing - everyone knows the symptoms of the common cold. It is probably the most common illness. In the course of a year, people in the United States suffer 1 billion colds.

You can get a cold by touching your eyes or nose after you touch surfaces with cold germs on them. You can also inhale the germs. Symptoms usually begin 2 or 3 days after infection and last 2 to 14 days. Washing your hands and staying away from people with colds will help you avoid colds.

There is no cure for the common cold. For relief, try

- Getting plenty of rest
- Drinking fluids
- Gargling with warm salt water
- Using cough drops or throat sprays
- Taking over-the-counter pain or cold medicines

However, do not give aspirin to children. And do not give cough medicine to children under four.

**CONSTIPATION**

Constipation means that a person has three or fewer bowel movements in a week. The stool can be hard and dry. Sometimes it is painful to pass. At one time or another, almost everyone gets constipated. In most cases, it lasts a short time and is not serious.
There are many things you can do to prevent constipation. They include

- Eating more fruits, vegetables and grains, which are high in fiber
- Drinking plenty of water and other liquids
- Getting enough exercise
- Taking time to have a bowel movement when you need to
- Using laxatives only if your doctor says you should
- Asking your doctor if medicines you take may cause constipation

It's not important that you have a bowel movement every day. If your bowel habits change, however, check with your healthcare provider.

COUGH

Coughing is a reflex that keeps your throat and airways clear. Although it can be annoying, coughing helps your body heal or protect itself. Coughs can be either acute or chronic. Acute coughs begin suddenly and usually last no more than 2 to 3 weeks. Acute coughs are the kind you most often get with a cold or flu. Chronic coughs last longer than 2 to 3 weeks. Causes of chronic cough include

- Asthma
- Allergies
- COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease)
- GERD (gastro esophageal reflux disease)
- Smoking
- Throat disorders, such as croup in young children
- Some medicines

Water can help ease your cough - whether you drink it or add it to the air with a steamy shower or vaporizer. Your doctor may recommend cough medicine if the cause of your cough is unknown and the cough causes a lot of discomfort. Cough medicines may harm children. If your child has a cough, talk with his or her doctor about how to treat it.

Call your healthcare provider if you are coughing up thick, greenish-yellow mucus, wheezing, are short of breath, or have a fever over 100 F.

CUTS, SCRAPES, SCRATCHES AND PUNCTURED SKIN

Wounds include cuts, scrapes, scratches and punctured skin. They often occur as a result of an accident or injury, but surgical incisions, sutures, and stitches also cause wounds. Minor wounds usually aren't serious, but even cuts and scrapes require care. To avoid infection and aid healing

- Apply pressure with a clean cloth to stop bleeding
- Clean the wound with water
- Use an antibiotic ointment to prevent infection
- Bandage the wound if it's in an area that might get dirty
- Watch for swelling and redness
- Get a tetanus booster if you haven’t had a dose in the last 10 years
Serious and infected wounds require medical attention. You should also seek attention if the wound is deep, if you cannot stop the bleeding or get the dirt out, or if it does not heal.

DEPRESSION

Depression is a serious medical illness. It's more than just a feeling of being "down in the dumps" or "blue" for a few days. If you are one of the more than 20 million people in the United States who have depression, the feelings do not go away. They persist and interfere with your everyday life. Symptoms can include

- Sadness
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities you used to enjoy
- Change in weight
- Difficulty sleeping or oversleeping
- Energy loss
- Feelings of worthlessness
- Thoughts of death or suicide

Depression is a disorder of the brain. There are a variety of causes, including genetic, environmental, psychological, and biochemical factors. Depression usually starts between the ages of 15 and 30, and is much more common in women. Women can also get postpartum depression after the birth of a baby. Some people get seasonal affective disorder in the winter. Depression is one part of bipolar disorder.

There are effective treatments for depression, including antidepressants and counseling. Most people do best by using both.

Call your healthcare provider if symptoms of depression last for 2 weeks or longer. Get emergency help or call 911 if you think you may hurt yourself or attempt suicide.

DIARRHEA

Diarrhea means that you have loose, watery stools more than three times in one day. You may also have cramps, bloating, nausea and an urgent need to have a bowel movement.

Causes of diarrhea include bacteria, viruses or parasites, certain medicines, food intolerances and diseases that affect the stomach, small intestine or colon. In many cases, no cause can be found.

Most diarrhea gets better on its own in a few days. To help cope, drink plenty of clear liquids. Add solid food back gradually. Try soda crackers, toast, eggs, rice, or chicken.

Although usually not harmful, diarrhea can become dangerous or signal a more serious problem. You should talk to your healthcare provider if you have a strong pain in your abdomen or rectum, a fever, blood in your stools, severe diarrhea for more than three days or symptoms of dehydration. If your child has diarrhea, do not hesitate to call your healthcare provider for advice. Diarrhea can be dangerous in children.
EAR DISORDERS

Your ear has three main parts: outer, middle and inner. You use all of them in hearing. Sound waves come in through your outer ear. They reach your middle ear, where they make your eardrum vibrate. The vibrations are transmitted through three tiny bones, called ossicles, in your middle ear. The vibrations travel to your inner ear, a snail-shaped organ. The inner ear makes the nerve impulses that are sent to the brain. Your brain recognizes them as sounds. The inner ear also controls balance.

A variety of conditions may affect your hearing or balance. Ear infections are the most common illness in infants and young children. Tinnitus, a ringing in your ears, can be the result of loud noises, medicines or a variety of other causes. Meniere's disease may be the result of fluid problems in your inner ear; its symptoms include tinnitus and dizziness. Some ear disorders can result in hearing disorders and deafness.

Call your healthcare provider if hearing problems are interfering with your daily life.

FAINTING

If you've ever fainted, you are not alone - at least one third of people faint sometime in their lives. Fainting is a temporary loss of consciousness. You lose muscle control at the same time, and may fall down. Most people recover quickly and completely.

Fainting usually happens when your blood pressure drops suddenly, causing a decrease in blood flow to your brain. This is more common in older people. Some causes of fainting include:

- Heat or dehydration
- Emotional distress
- Standing up too quickly
- Certain medicines
- Drop in blood sugar
- Heart problems

Fainting is usually nothing to worry about, but it can sometimes be a sign of a serious problem. If you faint, it's important to see your healthcare provider and find out why it happened.

FEVER

A fever is a body temperature that is higher than normal. It is not an illness. It is part of your body's defense against infection. Most bacteria and viruses that cause infections do well at the body's normal temperature (98.6 F). A slight fever can make it harder for them to survive. Fever also activates your body's immune system.

Infections cause most fevers. There can be many other causes, including:

- Medicines
- Heat exhaustion
- Cancers
• Autoimmune diseases

Treatment depends on the cause of your fever. Your healthcare provider may recommend using over-the-counter medicines such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen to lower a very high fever. Adults can also take aspirin, but children with fevers should not take aspirin. It is also important to drink enough liquids to prevent dehydration.

Call your healthcare provider if your temperature is more than 103 F, you’ve had a fever for more than 2 days, or if you have other symptoms or conditions that may need to be treated.

FLU

Flu is a respiratory infection caused by a number of viruses. The viruses pass through the air in droplets when a person with the infection coughs or sneezes and enter your body through your nose or mouth. You can also pick up the germs from an object and transfer them to your nose or mouth. Between 5% and 20% of people in the U.S. get the flu each year. The flu can be serious or even deadly for elderly people, newborn babies and people with certain chronic illnesses.

Symptoms of the flu come on suddenly and are worse than those of the common cold. They may include

• Body or muscle aches
• Chills
• Cough
• Fever
• Headache
• Sore throat

Is it a cold or the flu? Colds rarely cause a fever or headaches. Flu almost never causes an upset stomach. And "stomach flu" isn’t really flu at all, but gastroenteritis.

The main way to keep from getting the flu is to get a yearly flu vaccine. In addition, wash your hands frequently and contain your coughs and sneezes. If you get the flu, drink plenty of fluids and rest. Your healthcare provider may prescribe medicine to help your body fight the infection and lessen symptoms.

HAY FEVER AND SEASONAL ALLERGY

Each spring, summer, and fall, trees, weeds and grasses release tiny pollen grains into the air. Some of the pollen ends up in your nose and throat. This can trigger a type of allergy called hay fever.

Symptoms can include

• Sneezing, often with a runny or clogged nose
• Coughing and postnasal drip
• Itching eyes, nose and throat
• Dark circles under the eyes
Taking medicines, using nasal sprays and rinsing out your nose can relieve symptoms. Allergy shots can help make you less sensitive to pollen and provide long-term relief.

**HEADACHE**

Oh my aching head! Nearly everyone has had a headache. The most common type of headache is a tension headache. Tension headaches are due to tight muscles in your shoulders, neck, scalp and jaw. They are often related to stress, depression or anxiety. You are more likely to get tension headaches if you work too much, don't get enough sleep, miss meals or use alcohol.

Other common types of headaches include **migraines**, cluster headaches and sinus headaches. Most people can feel much better by making lifestyle changes, learning ways to relax and taking **pain relievers**.

Headaches can have many causes, but serious causes of headaches are rare. Sometimes headaches warn of a more serious disorder. Let your healthcare provider know if you have sudden, severe headaches. Get medical help right away if you have a headache after a blow to your head, or if you have a headache along with a stiff neck, fever, confusion, loss of consciousness or pain in the eye or ear.

**NAUSEA AND VOMITING**

Nausea is an uneasy or unsettled feeling in the stomach together with an urge to vomit. Nausea and vomiting, or throwing up, are not diseases. They can be symptoms of many different conditions. These include morning sickness during pregnancy, infections, migraine headaches, motion sickness, food poisoning, cancer chemotherapy or other medicines.

For vomiting in children and adults, avoid solid foods until vomiting has stopped for at least six hours. Then work back to a normal diet. Drink small amounts of clear liquids to avoid dehydration.

Nausea and vomiting are common. Usually, they are not serious. You should see a doctor immediately if you suspect poisoning or if you have

- Vomited for longer than 24 hours
- Blood in the vomit
- Severe abdominal pain
- Headache and stiff neck
- Signs of dehydration, such as dry mouth, infrequent urination or dark urine

**RASHES**

A rash is an area of irritated or swollen skin. It might be red and itchy, bumpy, scaly, crusty or blistered. Rashes are a symptom of many different medical conditions. Things that can cause a rash include other diseases, irritating substances, allergies and your genetic makeup.

Contact dermatitis is a common cause of rashes. It causes redness, itching and burning where you have touched an irritant, such as a chemical, or something you are allergic to, like **poison ivy**.
Some rashes develop immediately. Others form over several days. If you scratch your rash, it might take longer to heal. The treatment for a rash usually depends on its cause. Options include moisturizers, lotions, baths, cortisone creams that relieve swelling, and antihistamines, which relieve itching.

Contact your healthcare provider if you have

- Joint pain, fever, or sore throat
- Symptoms of an infection like red streaks, swelling or tenderness
- A tick bite
- Started a new medication
- A rash that gets worse

SINUSITIS

Sinusitis means your sinuses are infected or inflamed. Your sinuses are hollow air spaces within the bones surrounding the nose. They produce mucus, which drains into the nose. If your nose is swollen, this can block the sinuses and cause pain and infection.

Sinusitis can be acute, lasting for less than four weeks, or chronic, lasting much longer. Acute sinusitis often starts as a cold, which then turns into an infection. Allergies, pollutants, nasal problems and certain diseases can also cause sinusitis.

Symptoms of sinusitis can include fever, weakness, fatigue, cough and congestion. There may also be mucus drainage in the back of the throat, called postnasal drip. Treatments can include antibiotics, decongestants or pain relievers. Using heat pads on the inflamed area, saline nasal sprays and vaporizers, and drinking plenty of fluids can also help.

Contact your healthcare provider if you have symptoms that don’t improve after a few days or a persistent fever.

SORE THROAT

Information from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

A sore throat often makes it painful to swallow. A sore throat can also feel dry and scratchy. A sore throat is a frequent symptom of the common cold or other acute respiratory tract infections. In some cases, a lab test will need to be done to determine if you need antibiotics.

Most sore throats are caused by viruses, like ones that cause a cold or the flu. Some sore throats, like strep throat, are caused by bacteria. Other causes include

- Allergies
- Dry air
- Pollution (airborne chemicals or irritants)
- Smoking or exposure to second hand smoke
To feel better, try the following

- Soothe a sore throat with ice chips, sore throat spray, or lozenges.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Drink plenty of fluids.
- Use a clean humidifier or cool mist vaporizer.
- Avoid smoking, second-hand smoke, and other pollutants (airborne chemicals or irritants).
- Take acetaminophen, ibuprofen, or naproxen to relieve pain or fever.

See a healthcare provider if you have

- A sore throat that lasts longer than 1 week
- Difficulty swallowing or breathing
- Temperature higher than 100.4° F
- Pus on the back of the throat
- Rash
- Hoarseness lasting longer than 2 weeks
- Blood in saliva or phlegm
- Symptoms of dehydration (dry, sticky mouth, sleepiness or tiredness, thirst, decreased urination, few or no tears when crying, muscle weakness, headache, dizziness or lightheadedness)
- Contact with someone with strep throat
- Recurring sore throats

Your healthcare provider can determine the cause of a sore throat and if treatment is needed.

**SPRAINS AND STRAINS**

A sprain is a stretched or torn ligament. Ligaments are tissues that connect bones at a joint. Falling, twisting, or getting hit can all cause a sprain. Ankle and wrist sprains are common. Symptoms include pain, swelling, bruising and being unable to move your joint. You might feel a pop or tear when the injury happens.

A strain is a stretched or torn muscle or tendon. Tendons are tissues that connect muscle to bone. Twisting or pulling these tissues can cause a strain. Strains can happen suddenly or develop over time. Back and hamstring muscle strains are common. Many people get strains playing sports. Symptoms include pain, muscle spasms, swelling and trouble moving the muscle.

At first, treatment of both sprains and strains usually involves resting the injured area, icing it, wearing a bandage or device that compresses the area, elevating it above the level of the heart, and medicines. Later treatment might include exercise and physical therapy.

See your healthcare provider if

- Swelling has not improved after 2 days
- You have symptoms of infection including fever over 100 F, redness, warmth and pain in the area
• Pain that continues after several weeks.

**STINGS AND INSECT BITES**

Most insect bites are harmless, though they feel unpleasant. Bee, wasp, and hornet stings and fire ant bites usually hurt. Mosquito, flea and mite bites usually itch. Insects can also transmit diseases, such as yellow fever and *malaria*. These diseases mainly are a risk for travelers outside the United States.

To prevent insect bites and their complications

• Don’t bother insects
• Use insect repellant
• Wear protective clothing
• Be careful when you eat outside because food attracts insects
• If you know you have severe allergic reactions to insect bites, carry an emergency epinephrine kit

Signs and symptoms of a severe reaction include difficulty breathing, difficulty swallowing, hives, facial swelling, abdominal pain, nausea, or fainting. Call 911.

For mild reactions

• Remove the stinger
• Wash with soap and water
• Apply a cold pack
• If needed, apply a cream or take an antihistamine to relieve itching

**URINARY TRACT INFECTIONS**

The urinary system consists of the kidneys, ureters, bladder and urethra. Infections of the urinary tract (UTIs) are the second most common type of infection in the body. You may have a UTI if you notice

• Pain or burning when you use the bathroom
• Fever, tiredness or shakiness
• An urge to use the bathroom often
• Pressure in your lower belly
• Urine that smells bad or looks cloudy or reddish
• Less frequently, nausea or back pain

If you think you have a UTI, it is important to see your doctor. Your doctor can tell if you have a UTI by testing a sample of your urine. Treatment with medicines to kill the infection will make it better, often in one or two days.
EMERGENCIES

EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES

If you get very sick or badly hurt and need help right away, you should use emergency medical services. These services use specially trained people and specially equipped facilities.

You may need care in the hospital emergency room (ER). Doctors and nurses there treat emergencies, such as heart attacks and injuries. For some emergencies, you need help where you are. Emergency medical technicians, or EMTs, do specific rescue jobs. They answer emergency calls, drive ambulances and give basic medical care. Some EMTs are paramedics - they have training to do medical procedures on site. They usually drive you to the ER for more care.

If you or someone you know needs emergency care, go to your hospital's emergency room. If you think the problem is life threatening, call 911.

CARDIOPULMONARY RESUSCITATION-CPR

If you were with someone who had a heart attack or almost drowned, would you know what to do? When blood flow or breathing stops, seconds count. Permanent brain damage or death can happen quickly. If you know how to perform cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), you could save a life. CPR is an emergency procedure for a person whose heart has stopped or is no longer breathing. CPR can maintain circulation and breathing until emergency medical help arrives.

Even if you haven't had training, you can do "hands-only" CPR for a person whose heart has stopped beating. "Hands-only" CPR uses chest compressions to keep blood circulating until emergency help arrives. If you've had training, you can use chest compressions and rescue breathing. Rescue breathing helps get oxygen to the lungs for a person who has stopped breathing. To keep your skills up, you should repeat the training every two years.

The Vanderbilt Resuscitation Program is an authorized American Heart Association training center and provides courses to Vanderbilt employees and students.

FIRST AID

Accidents happen. Someone chokes on an ice cube or gets stung by a bee. It is important to know when to call 911 -- it is for life-threatening emergencies. While waiting for help to arrive, you may be able to save someone's life. Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) is for people whose hearts or breathing has stopped and the Heimlich maneuver is for people who are choking. CPR should only be done if you have had the training.

You can also learn to handle common injuries and wounds. Cuts and scrapes, for example, should be rinsed with cool water. To stop bleeding, apply firm but gentle pressure, using gauze. If blood soaks through, add more gauze, keeping the first layer in place. Continue to apply pressure.
It is important to have a first aid kit available. Keep one at home and one in your car. It should include a first-aid guide. Read the guide to learn how to use the items, so you are ready in case an emergency happens.

**BROKEN BONE**

A fracture is a break, usually in a bone. If the broken bone punctures the skin, it is called an open or compound fracture. Fractures commonly happen because of car accidents, falls or sports injuries. Other causes are low bone density and osteoporosis, which cause weakening of the bones. Overuse can cause stress fractures, which are very small cracks in the bone.

Symptoms of a fracture are

- Out-of-place or misshapen limb or joint
- Swelling, bruising or bleeding
- Intense pain
- Numbness and tingling
- Limited mobility or inability to move a limb

You need to get medical care right away for any fracture. You may need to wear a cast or splint. Sometimes you need surgery to put in plates, pins or screws to keep the bone in place.

**CHOKING**

Food or small objects can cause choking if they get caught in your throat and block your airway. This keeps oxygen from getting to your lungs and brain. If your brain goes without oxygen for more than four minutes, you could have brain damage or die.

Young children are at an especially high risk of choking. They can choke on foods like hot dogs, nuts and grapes, and on small objects like toy pieces and coins. Keep hazards out of their reach and supervise them when they eat.

When someone is choking, quick action can be lifesaving. Learn how to do the Heimlich maneuver - on others and yourself - and CPR.

**HEART ATTACK**

*Information from National Heart Lung and Blood Institute People Science Health*

A heart attack occurs if the flow of oxygen-rich blood to a section of heart muscle suddenly becomes blocked. If blood flow isn't restored quickly, the section of heart muscle begins to die.

Heart attacks are a leading killer of both men and women in the United States. The good news is that excellent treatments are available for heart attacks. These treatments can save lives and prevent disabilities.
Symptoms

Heart attack symptoms include

- Chest pain or discomfort. This involves uncomfortable pressure, squeezing, fullness, or pain in the center or left side of the chest that can be mild or strong. This discomfort or pain often lasts more than a few minutes or goes away and comes back
- Upper body discomfort in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw, or upper part of the stomach
- Shortness of breath, which may occur with or before chest discomfort
- Nausea (feeling sick to your stomach), vomiting, light-headedness or sudden dizziness, or breaking out in a cold sweat
- Symptoms also may include sleep problems, fatigue (tiredness), and lack of energy

Call 911 right away if you think you or someone else may be having a heart attack. Do not drive to the hospital or let someone else drive you. Call an ambulance so that medical personnel can begin life-saving treatment on the way to the emergency room. Take a nitroglycerin pill if your doctor has prescribed this type of treatment.

POISONING

A poison is any substance that is harmful to your body. You might swallow it, inhale it, inject it, or absorb it through your skin. Poisons can include

- Prescription or over-the-counter medicines taken in doses that are too high
- Overdoses of illegal drugs
- Carbon monoxide from gas appliances
- Household products, such as laundry powder or furniture polish
- Pesticides
- Indoor or outdoor plants
- Metals such as lead and mercury

The dangers of poisoning range from short-term illness to brain damage, coma and death. To prevent poisoning it is important to use and store products exactly as their labels say. Keep dangerous products where children can't get to them. Treatment for poisoning depends on the type of poison. If you suspect someone has been poisoned, call your local poison control center right away.

Tennessee Poison Control 1-800-222-1222

STROKE

A stroke is a medical emergency. Strokes happen when blood flow to your brain stops. Within minutes, brain cells begin to die. There are two kinds of stroke. The more common kind, called ischemic stroke, is caused by a blood clot that blocks or plugs a blood vessel in the brain. The other kind, called hemorrhagic stroke, is caused by a blood vessel that breaks and bleeds into the brain. "Mini-strokes" or transient ischemic attacks (TIAs) occur when the blood supply to the brain is briefly interrupted.

Symptoms of stroke are
• Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg (especially on one side of the body)
• Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding speech
• Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes, often described as a shade being pulled down over the eye
• Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination
• Sudden severe headache with no known cause

If you have any of these symptoms, you must get to a hospital quickly to begin treatment. Acute stroke therapies try to stop a stroke while it is happening by quickly dissolving the blood clot or by stopping the bleeding. Post-stroke rehabilitation helps individuals overcome disabilities that result from stroke damage. Drug therapy with blood thinners is the most common treatment for stroke.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

MEDICATIONS

Over-the-counter (OTC) medicines are drugs you can buy without a prescription. Some OTC medicines relieve aches, pains and itches. Some prevent or cure diseases, like tooth decay and athlete's foot. Others help manage recurring problems, like migraines.

In the United States, the Food and Drug Administration decides whether a medicine is safe enough to sell over-the-counter. Taking OTC medicines still has risks. Some interact with other medicines, supplements, foods or drinks. Others cause problems for people with certain medical conditions. If you’re pregnant, talk to your healthcare provider before taking any medicines.

It is important to take medicines correctly, and be careful when giving them to children. More medicine does not necessarily mean better. You should never take OTC medicines longer or in higher doses than the label recommends. If your symptoms don’t go away, it’s a clear signal that it’s time to see your healthcare provider.

SUMMARY

Practicing positive health behaviors and making informed health decisions have a great influence on our long-term health. Vanderbilt offers a wealth of resources to help you be as healthy as possible. The following are some resources that are available to you.

VANDERBILT RESOURCES

• Health & Wellness Information Portal
• Express Care
• Vanderbilt Health Plans
• My Health at Vanderbilt
• Work/Life Connections
• Occupational Health Clinic
• Child and Family Center
• Health Plus
• Poison Control 1-800-222-1222
• Vanderbilt Resuscitation Program

SOURCES

• National Institutes of Health- Medline Plus Health Topics
• Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
• National Heart Lung and Blood Institute People Science Health
• Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality

This document is an easy, one-stop reference for self-care. Information used is from the National Institutes of Health- Medline Plus Health Topics website unless otherwise noted. Vanderbilt specific resources are also included. Brief descriptions are given for each topic. For additional information on any of the topics, click the links provided. This information is provided for adults and is for educational purposes only. It should not be used as a substitute for evaluation and treatment by a healthcare provider.