

# your health today

Spring 2009

• Your Guide to **Healthy Living** from **MCGHealth**

• [mcghealth.org](http://mcghealth.org)



The cancer-  
obesity  
connection

Put an end to  
springtime  
sneezing

Wake up to  
pre-diabetes

  
MCGHealth



# A shoulder to lean on

## MCGHealth support groups

### ALS Support Group

**WHEN:** Second Thursday of each month, 11 a.m.–2 p.m. Lunch is provided.

**WHERE:** MCGHealth Ambulatory Care Center, 1447 Harper St., 4th floor, Room 4306

**CALL:** The ALS Association of Georgia at 888-636-9940 for reservations

### Breast Cancer Support Group

**WHEN:** Second Thursday of each month, 5:30–7 p.m.

**WHERE:** MCGHealth Medical Center Breast Health Services, 1st floor

**CALL:** 706-721-4109 for more information

### Huntington Disease Support Group

**WHEN:** First Thursday of each month, 6:30 p.m. Dinner is provided.

**WHERE:** Marks Building, 1429 Harper St., Room 1122

**CALL:** 706-721-2798 for more information

### Infertility Support Group

**WHEN:** Second Tuesday of each month, 6:30 p.m.

**WHERE:** MCG Medical Associates, 618 Ponder Place, Suite 2, Evans

**CALL:** 706-210-0642 for more information

### Multiple Sclerosis Support Group

**WHEN:** Last Monday of the month, 6–7:30 p.m. Dinner is provided.

**WHERE:** MCGHealth Medical Center, 6th floor

**CALL:** 706-721-7239 for more information

### SPOHNC (Support for People with Oral, Head and Neck Cancer) Support Group

**WHEN:** First Tuesday of each month, 6–7:30 p.m.

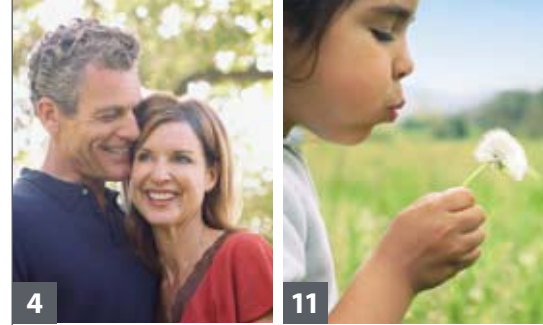
**WHERE:** MCGHealth Children's Medical Center Family Resource Center, 1446 Harper St., 1st floor

**CALL:** 706-721-6100 for more information

### Support Group for Families Who Have Lost a Baby During Pregnancy, Childbirth or Early Infancy

Provides a forum for discussion as well as resources for anyone who has been affected by the loss of a baby.

**CALL:** 706-721-8299 for times and location



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The material in *Your Health Today* is not intended for diagnosing or prescribing. Consult your physician before undertaking any form of medical treatment.

For more information, please call 800-736-CARE (2273) or visit our Web site at [mcghealth.org](http://mcghealth.org).

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# Tips for a safe and healthy spring



## Power up with produce

**L**ocal markets will soon be brimming with fruits and vegetables, making this a great time to begin increasing your intake of these important high-fiber foods. Each fruit or vegetable contains dozens of phytochemicals (chemicals produced by plants) that work together to strengthen the immune system and battle diseases. Doctors recommend five servings of fresh, frozen, dried or canned vegetables or light fruits every day (fresh and frozen are best). Supplements don't pack the same punch because they don't deliver the same fiber or phytochemical benefits as fruits and vegetables.



## "Shade" your eyes

**S**unglasses can protect your eyes from harmful ultraviolet (UV) rays that can lead to cataracts and other eye problems. But make sure the lenses have 99 to 100 percent UVA and UVB protection and block more than 80 percent of transmissible light. Dark lenses don't necessarily indicate protective eyewear, so look for UVA and UVB protection ratings. Make sure the glasses fit close to your face to reduce the amount of sunlight that reaches your eyes. For maximum protection, wear a hat with a brim.



## Prepare for emergencies

**W**arm weather and an increase in outdoor activities can lead to accidents that require home care. Be sure to keep well-stocked first-aid kits on hand at home, in the car and ready to go on family vacations. Choose roomy, durable containers that are easy to carry. Having the supplies you need in one place will let you handle an emergency at a moment's notice.



### Log on, learn more

For a list of items you should keep in your first-aid kits, visit [mcghealth.org/safekids](http://mcghealth.org/safekids).



## Eating out the heart-healthy way

**D**ining out can be a challenge for people who want to eat right, so dietitians and physicians at MCGHealth Cardiovascular Center have partnered with local restaurants to make heart-healthy menu items available in our community. Look for our Heart Healthy Dining Program<sup>SM</sup> symbol at the following restaurants:

- Beamie's at the River
- Bee's Knees
- Boll Weevil Café & Sweetery
- French Market Grille
- Roly Poly
- My Friend's Place
- Takosushi
- Walton Way Deli

# Robotic-assisted surgeries for women

## Smaller incisions, shorter hospital stays

**M**CGHealth has some good news for women who have gynecologic (GYN) conditions or cancers that require surgery: Using the most advanced da Vinci Surgical System on the market today, a select group of specially trained surgeons at MCGHealth

offer minimally invasive robotic-assisted surgeries for complex GYN procedures. This group includes Sean Francis, MD, a gynecologist and urogynecologist with MCGHealth Women’s Services. He and other MCGHealth da Vinci surgeons perform the most robotic-assisted surgeries in the Augusta area.

### The area’s most experienced robotic GYN surgeons



**Sean Francis, MD**  
Gynecologist and Urogynecologist

Sean Francis, MD, completed a fellowship in gynecology, urogynecology and pelvic reconstructive surgery at the Mayo Clinic in Scottsdale, Arizona, and is the only fellowship-trained urogynecologist in the Augusta area. Dr. Francis has performed more robotic-assisted urogynecological surgeries than any other local physician.



**Sharad Ghamande, MD**  
Gynecological Oncologist

Sharad Ghamande, MD, is one of only two GYN oncologists in the Augusta area and one of only three physicians who perform robotic-assisted hysterectomies in Georgia. He has performed more than 50 robotic-assisted gynecological procedures on patients who have cancer and other conditions, making him one of the most experienced surgeons using robotic technology in the Southeast.

### Understanding robotic-assisted surgery

When people hear “robotic-assisted surgery,” they often think a robot is in control, but that’s not true. “The system operates with the surgeon firmly in control,” Dr. Francis says. “The advanced robotic technology allows surgeons to perform minimally invasive surgeries for complex procedures like hysterectomy, myomectomy for uterine fibroids and surgery for pelvic organ prolapse that once required open surgery.”

The system includes:

- a patient-side cart
- a surgeon’s console
- an advanced vision system with a high-resolution 3-D endoscopic camera
- robotic endo-wrist instruments with flexible joints to expand the human hand’s natural range of motion, reduce tremors and refine surgeons’ movements.



**The da Vinci system seamlessly translates hand movements into precise real-time movements of the surgical instruments.**



### How it works

The surgeon places the robotic instruments and endoscope, or tiny camera, located on the patient-side cart, inside the patient's body through a series of small incisions. Sitting upright at the console, the surgeon relies on the advanced vision system to provide a clear, detailed picture of the surgical field.

As the surgeon maneuvers the robotic arms that hold the instruments and endoscope, the system seamlessly translates his or her hand movements into precise real-time movements of the surgical instruments. "Sitting up instead of bending over the patient during these sometimes lengthy procedures reduces fatigue," says Dr. Francis. "And long endo-wrist instruments make the da Vinci system particularly helpful with patients who are overweight or obese."

### Benefits of the technology

The system provides surgeons with the range of motion, fine tissue manipulation and 3-D view characteristic of open surgery, yet allows them to work

## Robotics increase prostate surgery precision

**P**rostate cancer may require the removal of the prostate gland, a surgery known as radical prostatectomy. Just a few years ago, that required a 4-inch to 6-inch incision, often resulting in substantial blood loss and occasionally a lengthy recovery.

But MCGHealth now offers robotic-assisted prostate surgery, allowing the surgeon to see vital anatomical structures more clearly and perform more precise procedures. This is important for prostate surgery because the prostate gland is surrounded by nerves that affect urinary control and sexual function. The da Vinci System may enhance both recovery and clinical outcomes by sparing these surrounding nerves.



### James Brown, MD Urologist

James Brown, MD, a urologist at MCGHealth, is highly experienced in robotic-assisted prostate surgery. He completed his residency in urology at Mayo Graduate School of Medicine at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn.



### Considering surgery?

For more information about robotic-assisted surgery, visit [mcghealth.org/robotics](https://mcghealth.org/robotics). To schedule an appointment with an experienced da Vinci surgeon, call **706-721-CARE (2273)** and speak to a member of our CARE team.

through tiny incisions. As a result, patients generally experience:

- significantly less pain
- less blood loss
- less scarring
- shorter recoveries
- a faster return to normal activities
- better clinical outcomes in many cases ■

# Obesity and cancer

## A big issue

**M**ost people know that obesity increases your diabetes and heart disease risk, but many people don't know that it also increases your cancer risk. One-third of the 550,000 American deaths caused by cancer each year are linked to poor diet, physical inactivity and excess weight. "Except for giving up cigarettes, the best way to reduce your cancer risk is to maintain a healthy weight by making wise food choices

and being physically active," says Thomas Samuel, MD, an oncologist with MCGHealth Cancer Center.



**Being overweight or obese increases the risk of cancers of the breast ... and other organs.**

— Thomas Samuel, MD

growth. "Being overweight or obese increases the risk of cancers of the breast, colon, endometrium, esophagus, kidneys and other organs," says Dr. Samuel.

### What is a healthy weight?

One of the best ways to find out if you're at a healthy weight is to check your body mass index (BMI), a score based on the relationship between your height and weight. If your BMI is 25 or greater, it's time to get serious about weight loss. ■



## A new era in cancer care

**P**eople battling cancer need easy access to coordinated state-of-the-art care, resources and support. MCGHealth's new 57,000-square-foot outpatient cancer center will offer all that and more. Opening early in 2010, it will feature:

- 30 exam rooms
- 30 chemotherapy infusion stations overlooking a garden
- six private treatment rooms
- multidisciplinary treatment teams
- patient navigators to coordinate care
- a family resource library
- a community room for events
- an attached 158-space multi-story parking garage
- a boutique featuring a variety of items for cancer patients
- easy access to clinical trials

To take a virtual tour of the center, visit [mcghealth.org/cancer](http://mcghealth.org/cancer).



### Log on, learn more

Want an easy way to calculate your BMI? Visit [mcghealth.org/cancer](http://mcghealth.org/cancer) and click "Cancer Health Information."

# The truth about tanning beds

## They're not a safe alternative to sun

**T**anning beds are popular, and many people believe they're safe. But according to Daniel Sheehan, MD, a dermatologist at MCGHealth, that's not true. "Tanning exposes the skin to damaging amounts of ultraviolet (UV) radiation, whether it comes from the sun or a tanning bed," Dr. Sheehan says. The degree of damage people experience from either depends on the cumulative amount of exposure during a lifetime, the intensity of the radiation and the predominant type of UV light (UVA or UVB).

### Beware of UVA and UVB

Overexposure to UV light, particularly UVB, causes sunburns, while repeated exposure to UVA may lead to



## Sun sense

**T**o prevent skin cancer, the American Cancer Society recommends you:

- avoid the sun between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.
- wear a sunscreen with an SPF of 15 or higher year round (apply sunscreen 20 to 30 minutes before going outdoors and every two hours after swimming or sweating)
- wear a wide-brimmed hat, protective clothing and sunglasses that shade the eyes
- be aware of sun-sensitizing medications
- seek the shade



### Log on, learn more

How much do you know about skin cancer? To find out, take a quick and easy quiz at [mcghealth.org/cancer](https://mcghealth.org/cancer) and click "Cancer Health Information."

tanning. The UV source in tanning beds give off up to three times as much UVA as sunlight. This stimulates the pigment cells and causes tanning.

But UVA can also damage the skin's immune system, weakening its ability to prevent skin cancer. "UVA rays may be even more harmful than previously believed because they penetrate into deeper basal layers of the epidermis where skin cancer begins," Dr. Sheehan says.

### Protect yourself

"The American Academy of Dermatology advises against using tanning beds due to concerns about skin cancer and premature skin aging. Sunbathing and tanning beds are especially risky for people with fair skin," Dr. Sheehan says. "Unfortunately, there's no such thing as a safe tan. If you want a subtle glow, consider tanning lotions." ■

# Pre-diabetes

## Don't ignore this wake-up call

**T**ype 2 diabetes can lead to heart disease, stroke, blindness, kidney problems and other conditions. Despite these dangerous consequences, rates of the disease have doubled over the last decade and are especially high in the South, where obesity is most common.

But before developing diabetes, most people have pre-diabetes, a condition in which blood glucose levels are higher than normal but not high enough for a diabetes diagnosis. When this occurs, it's time to take action. "With early intervention, many people who have pre-

diabetes can return their glucose levels to normal and prevent diabetes with lifestyle changes such as reducing their weight by 5 to 10 percent and exercising at least 30 minutes a day," says David Brown, a physician's assistant with MCGHealth Diabetes Services.

### Should you be tested?

Pre-diabetes causes no symptoms, so people are usually unaware of the condition. Millions of people even have full-blown diabetes and don't know it.

If you're overweight and age 45 or older, you should be checked for pre-diabetes. If your weight is normal and you're age 45 or older, ask your physician about testing. "Adults younger than age 45 who are overweight and have other risk factors may also need testing," Mr. Brown says.

### Management is key

MCGHealth Diabetes Center's team of physicians, physician assistants, nurse educators and dietitians deliver comprehensive care for patients with pre-diabetes and diabetes. They rely on a program based on a 10-year national study of diabetes, which includes educating patients in self-management skills. To schedule an appointment to have your blood glucose levels checked or to help manage diabetes, call **706-721-2273 (CARE)** now. ■



## Diabetes: By the numbers

**A**ccording to the American Diabetes Association:

- 23.6 million Americans have diabetes.
- 5.7 million of that number—nearly one-fourth—are unaware they have diabetes.
- 25 percent of children in 30 states suffered from childhood obesity in 2007.



### Log on, learn more

What's your risk for diabetes? To find out, take the American Diabetes Association's Risk Assessment Test by logging onto **[mcghealth.org/diabetes](http://mcghealth.org/diabetes)**.



# Ask the doctor

## Triglycerides and your health

Shilpa P. Brown, MD, an internal medicine physician with MCGHealth, answers your questions about triglycerides.

### **Q:** What are triglycerides?

**A:** Triglycerides are the most common type of fat in the body and a major source of energy. Although they're healthy at certain levels, elevated triglycerides increase your risk of stroke, heart attack and heart disease.

### **Q:** Are elevated triglyceride levels a more significant heart disease risk factor for women than for men?

**A:** Yes. And having both high triglyceride levels and low levels of "good" cholesterol, or high density lipoprotein (HDL), can be especially dangerous for women. Everyone should try to achieve triglyceride levels of 150 mg/dL or less.

### **Q:** What causes triglycerides to become elevated?

**A:** People who regularly eat more calories than they burn are at risk of having high triglycerides. Men and women who have diabetes, are overweight, eat too many sweets or drink alcohol in excess often have high levels.

### **Q:** How can you know your triglyceride levels?

**A:** Triglyceride levels are measured in a test called a lipid profile that measures cholesterol and other types of fat in your blood. Ask your doctor if and when you should have this test performed.

### **5** tips to control your triglycerides

- 1 Maintain a healthy body weight and cut back on calories if needed.
- 2 Decrease the amount of saturated fat in your diet.
- 3 Limit sugary foods and drinks.
- 4 Limit your alcohol intake.
- 5 Get at least 30 minutes of physical activity every day.

### Depend on The Area's Only Accredited Chest Pain Center

Speeding treatment during the critical early stages of heart attacks is critical to surviving and maintaining heart function. MCGHealth Chest Pain Center has demonstrated its ability to do that by becoming the only center in the Augusta area to earn accreditation by the Society of Chest Pain Centers. The center's staff:

- Communicates and integrates care with emergency responders to speed the treatment process
- Puts a team of specially trained cardiac professionals at your bedside, 24/7. Every member of the emergency staff is trained to expedite care and communications.
- Diagnoses and treats patients quickly
- Understands women's heart health issues
- Follows protocols to prevent premature releases or unnecessary hospitalizations



#### Get screened

For more information or to schedule an appointment, call **706-721-2273 (CARE)** or visit **[mcghealth.org/cardio](http://mcghealth.org/cardio)**.





# High blood pressure and the adrenal glands

## What's the link?

**I**f you suffer from hard-to-control high blood pressure, you may have hyperaldosteronism, a condition that occurs when the adrenal glands produce too much of the hormone aldosterone. Excess aldosterone can cause sodium retention, potassium loss and high blood pressure that may lead to heart failure, kidney failure and stroke.

According to Michael Edwards, MD, a minimally-invasive surgeon at MCGHealth, doctors once considered primary hyperaldosteronism rare but now realize it's a common cause of high blood pressure in certain groups of patients, including:

- patients taking three or more medications to control blood pressure
- patients who have high blood pressure and a low potassium level
- patients who have a family history of high blood pressure that started before age 40
- patients who have a family member with hyperaldosteronism

## Diagnosis, causes and care

If an initial screening blood test suggests hyperaldosteronism, you may require additional tests to confirm the diagnosis. "The most common causes of this condition are benign growths in an adrenal gland or enlarged and overactive adrenal glands," Dr. Edwards says.

Treatment may include medications or surgical removal of the adrenal gland. "If surgery is needed, we offer minimally-invasive laparoscopic adrenal surgery. This has the benefits of smaller incisions, less pain after surgery, shorter hospital stays and easier recoveries," says Dr. Edwards. ■

## MCGHealth offers adrenal services

**A**drenal disorders often require coordinated care by a team of specialists in various fields.

That's why the adrenal team at MCGHealth includes an endocrinologist, cardiologist, radiologist, pathologist and surgeon. To make it easy to access coordinated care, patients may schedule same-day appointments with their endocrinologist and surgeon. The center also conducts research to better understand adrenal diseases.



### Stay healthy!

For more information or to schedule an appointment, call MCGHealth adrenal services at **706-721-5293** or call **706-721-2273 (CARE)**.



### Log on, learn more

For more information about MCGHealth adrenal services or adrenal disorders, visit [mcghealth.org/adrenal](http://mcghealth.org/adrenal).

# Battling seasonal allergies

## Take the offensive

**If you're among the one in five people in the United States who suffers from hay fever, you probably know the condition can be especially troublesome in the spring, when tree pollen and other common allergens cause symptoms including:**

- runny nose and watery eyes
- congestion, facial pressure and frequent sneezing
- itchy eyes, nose, roof of mouth or throat
- swollen, blue skin under the eyes
- cough

### When to see a doctor

“If you have persistent symptoms, nasal polyps, asthma or frequent sinus infections, or your child has

hay fever, see an allergy and immunology specialist,” says Dennis R. Ownby, MD, an immunologist with MCGHealth. “Early intervention in children can help prevent the development of asthma.”

### Tests and treatments

Your physician will review your medical history and perform a thorough physical exam. He or she may also recommend skin tests to identify the substances that trigger your allergies.

Your personalized care plan may include lifestyle changes and medications to reduce inflammation, sneezing, itching and other symptoms. If these therapies don't bring relief, allergy shots may help. These injections of purified allergens will desensitize your immune system to triggers and decrease the need for medications. ■

## An ounce of prevention

**If you suffer from pollen or mold allergies, try these tips:**

- Close doors and windows during pollen season.
- Don't hang laundry outside.
- Use air conditioning in your house and car.
- Use an energy-grade filter in your ventilation system.
- Avoid outdoor activities in the early mornings.
- Use a humidifier.
- Use a HEPA filter in your bedroom.
- Don't mow the lawn or rake leaves.
- Wear a dust mask when doing outdoor activities.



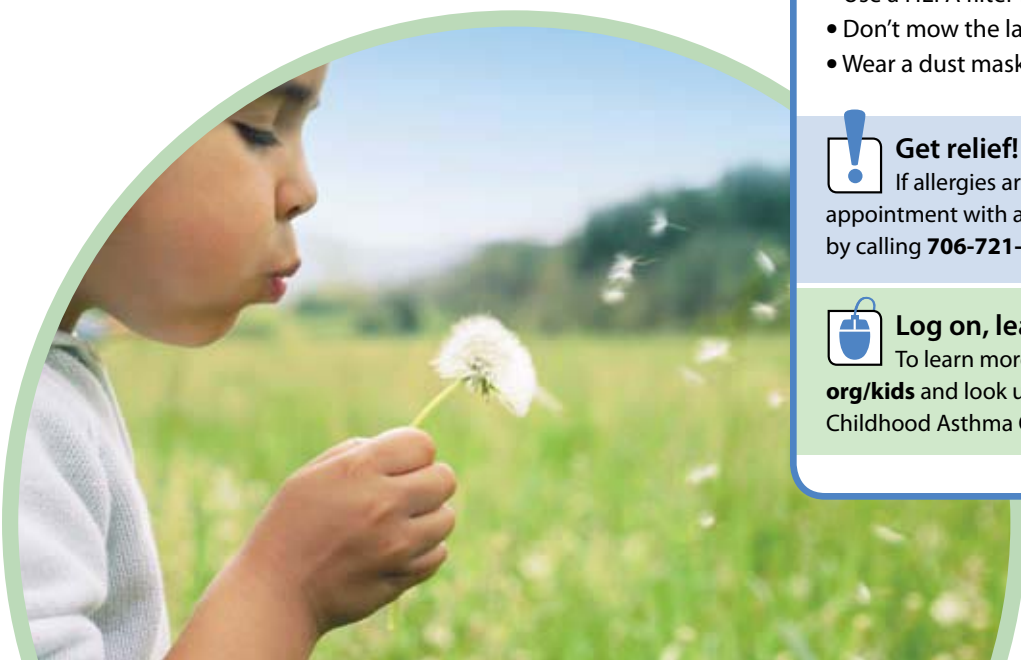
### Get relief!

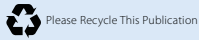
If allergies are disrupting your life, schedule an appointment with an allergy and immunology specialist by calling **706-721-2273 (CARE)**.



### Log on, learn more

To learn more about this topic, visit **mcghealth.org/kids** and look under “Health Topics” to take our Childhood Asthma Quiz.





## In the News

# Tune in!

## Watch the Children's Miracle Network Celebration broadcast

**T**he local Children's Miracle Network Celebration broadcast will air on NBC Augusta on Sunday, May 31. Last year's event celebrated raising \$925,000 for the year to benefit the services and programs at MCGHealth Children's Medical Center.

During this year's broadcast, dozens of volunteers will man the phone lines as contributors call in to pledge their support. "The numbers in the past have shown us that the community is pleased with the quality and vitality of services provided at MCGHealth Children's Medical Center," says Connie Guinn, philanthropy officer at MCGHealth Children's Medical Center. "Thanks to the generosity of NBC Augusta and our community, families and staff, we hope to have another successful celebration year, that will allow us to continue our excellent level of health care for kids."

MCGHealth Children's Medical Center is a not-for-profit organization and relies on community support to provide patient care services to children and families. Funds raised will go toward upgrading specialized areas



Last year's Children's Miracle Network Celebration broadcast event celebrated raising \$925,000 for the year for MCGHealth Children's Medical Center.

such as the pediatric cancer clinic, where children who have cancer spend hours receiving chemotherapy, and supporting programs such as community classes focusing on parenting, child safety and special needs topics.

MCGHealth Children's Medical Center has been a beneficiary of the Children's Miracle Network Celebration since 1986. ■



### Do you remember Wilhenford Hospital for Children?

If you or a member of your family worked or received care at the former Wilhenford Hospital for Children, established in 1910, we'd like to hear your story. Please call **706-721-3957** or e-mail your story to [philanthropy@mcg](mailto:philanthropy@mcg).

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High blood pressure **and** the adrenal glands