

Oh, the Gall... Bladder!

You've just had a heavy, fatty meal and you feel a rapidly increasing pain in your right upper abdomen. If you're overweight and older, could it be a gall bladder attack? **Read on:**

➔ **What are gallstones?** The gallbladder is a small sac that stores bile from the liver. When bile is needed for digestion, the gallbladder releases some into the small intestine. Problems can occur when the flow of bile is blocked, most commonly when bile hardens into pebble-like gallstones.

➔ **What are the symptoms?** Most gallstones don't produce symptoms, but when they do, medical treatment is necessary. Common symptoms include pain in the right upper abdomen, between the shoulder blades or under the right shoulder, often accompanied by loss of appetite, fatigue and sometimes vomiting. Those who experience prolonged pain, fever, jaundice, nausea or vomiting should seek help promptly. **Quick note:** Gallstones are increasingly being detected asymptotically (or without symptoms), but surgery isn't always necessary.

➔ **A connection to diet?** Though studies continue, what you eat appears to affect your risk. **What hurts:** a diet low in fiber and high in fat, especially saturated fat and cholesterol. High blood triglyceride levels is another possible factor. **What may help:** a high-fiber diet.

➔ **How much you eat matters too.** Some researchers believe that the growing obesity epidemic will increase the incidence of gallbladder disease. It is important to maintain a healthy weight. If you do need to lose weight, do so slowly and be sure not to skip meals. Rapid weight loss, fasting and very-low-calorie diets will increase your risk.



Did you know?

Women are twice as likely as men to develop gallstones, for a variety of reasons. If you're pregnant, using hormone therapy or taking birth control, you're at a higher risk. Obesity, very-low-calorie diets, fasting, and rapid weight loss or "crash diets" are also factors. Mexican-American women are at an increased risk as well. If you fall into one of these categories, talk to your health care provider about ways to reduce your risk and avoid a pricey procedure.

WELL CONNECTIONS:

Go online! We celebrate Mother's Day and Women's Health Week in May. Find a featured assessment, work-life balance reminders and more ways to a healthier you at www.personalbest.com/extras/maywomen10.



DR. ZORBA'S LONGEVITY CORNER

Tips for Preventing Trips.

Falls are among the leading causes of death for seniors. Staying active and doing strength-building exercises can reduce the risk. Recent research also shows that seniors with chronic pain in more than one location are at higher risk. Unfortunately, many doctors undertreat pain or lack sufficient training in managing chronic pain, so make sure you and your loved ones see appropriately qualified professionals.

Garden Well Without the Sneezes

Working in the garden can be a joy — unless it triggers allergies. **The good news is that you can diminish your allergic reactions by following some easy guidelines:**

Choose allergy-friendly plants. Type in "garden and allergies" at www.aaifa.org for a list of allergy-friendly choices, or talk to your local horticulturist. For example, St. Augustine variety grass is less allergenic than the timothy variety. Diversify your garden — don't plant too much of any one thing.

Wear gloves, a hat and a long-sleeve shirt (and breathing mask if necessary). Change your clothes and shower when you go indoors.

Limit gardening to cool or cloudy days, and wait until later in the afternoon or early evening, when pollen counts are lower.

Have someone else mow the grass, and keep your windows closed at the time. Keep grass low (about 2 inches) to prevent pollen from becoming airborne.

Consider using gravel, oyster shell or groundcover (such as vinca) instead of wood chips or mulch, which can promote mold growth.

Remove dying trees or shrubs to reduce mold and other allergens.

Follow these tips and you won't have to "throw in the trowel."



“To insure good health: Eat lightly, breathe deeply, live moderately, cultivate cheerfulness and maintain an interest in life.” ~ William Londen



Eat Right, Sleep Tight

If you toss and turn at night, your problem may be your diet. **Slumber interrupters include:**

Stimulants – If you're sensitive to caffeine, even small amounts can be a problem. Caffeine can be found in chocolate, soda, some medicines and candy. Avoid caffeine near bedtime or eliminate caffeine for two weeks and see if you sleep better; you may be able to add a little back later, if sleep problems don't recur.

Alcohol – A nightcap might make you sleep, but you'll sleep less soundly. Never mix alcohol with sleeping pills.

Big meals – When you take in a lot of calories before bed, your digestion can cause restless sleep. Eat a light dinner (500 calories or less) that includes lean protein to avoid hunger pangs.

Spicy dishes – Garlic, chilies and hot spices can cause heartburn, while gas-forming foods and rapid eating can contribute to bloating. Limit such foods to the morning or early afternoon hours, and chew slowly.

Midnight wakings – Avoid nighttime hunger by eating more during the day or having a light snack (under 300 calories) before bed. Steer clear of fluids three to four hours before lights-out.

Changing your eating habits could have you sleeping soundly in no time. Sweet dreams!



10 WINNING WAYS TO WALK

The key to making walking a regular part of your routine is to make it fun. Think up new ways to build walking into your life or **try these great ideas:**

- 1 Enjoy a brisk walk in place of your regular coffee break — it's a sure way to ease stress.
- 2 Take a business walk instead of a business lunch.
- 3 Walk the dog.
- 4 Take walks with a friend.
- 5 Make morning, evening or weekend walks a new ritual for the whole family.
- 6 Listen to your favorite music or audiobooks while walking (just keep the volume low and stay alert to your environment for safety's sake).
- 7 Vary your route to see new sights.
- 8 Explore your neighborhood, town or city.
- 9 Join a walking club and make new friends.
- 10 Plan a walking or hiking vacation.

FREE ASTHMA SCREENINGS? May is National Asthma and Allergy Awareness month, and free asthma screenings will be offered across the country. Screenings include a short health questionnaire, a lung function test and a consult with an allergist. Asthma is a serious but treatable condition. People with wheezing, coughing or shortness of breath are encouraged to take advantage. To find a screening location near you, see www.aacai.org/public/lifeQuality/nasp/index.htm.

Communicate Better, Stress Less

Communication problems at home or work can lead to unhealthy levels of frustration, stress and anger. However, it's possible to lower your stress by becoming a more effective speaker and listener. **Here's how:**



- **Listen** without interrupting or defending (or planning what to say next).
 - **Acknowledge** what the other person said, even if you disagree.
 - **Ask** others to explain and clarify as needed; don't assume what they feel.
 - **Describe** your own motivations and reactions, and let others speak for themselves.
 - **Emphasize** the positive. Tell others what you like and what you want.
 - **Save** touchy subjects for calmer moments — it's hard to have rational discussions when feelings run "hot."
 - **Be specific.** Avoid labels and generalizations such as "always" and "never." And keep it brief.
 - **FOCUS** on finding solutions rather than "winning." Respect others' points of view, and realize that you don't always have to reach an agreement.
- TopHealth takeaway:** Keep the big picture in mind. Let the other person know you still care and want to work it out even if you haven't found the solution yet.

NEXT MONTH: TOP HEALTH HABITS CHANGING LIVES

WELL CONNECTIONS: Take a QuikRisk™ Self Assessment at www.personalbest.com/extras/maywomen10.