Influenza infection, also known as the flu, is a serious and dangerous disease caused by a virus that spreads easily. On average, one in five Americans gets the flu in a season (generally October to March). More than 200,000 people get sick enough to be hospitalized.

**Why get the flu vaccine?**

If you ever had the flu, you know how sick you can be.

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Opioid pain medications may be used to help with moderate to severe pain. Opioids are often prescribed for acute pain relating to an injury or surgery. Opioids are also used to help with pain and suffering from active cancer and at the end of life. The benefits of long-term opioid therapy for chronic pain are unclear. Opioids do not help with all types of pain. Opioids may help reduce the pain, but rarely do they take away all the pain. The goal of chronic opioid therapy is to help patients be more active and do more of the things that are important to them.

**Opioids have serious risks even when taken as directed:**

- Overdose (and sudden DEATH)
- Addiction (1 in 4 people receiving opioids long term in a primary care setting struggles with addiction)
- Physical dependence (may experience withdrawal symptoms if the medication is stopped)
- Worsening pain (increased sensitivity to pain)
- Low levels of testosterone (which may lead to decreased
Opioid Pain Medication – continued from page 1

- Energy and low sex drive
- Dizziness, drowsiness, confusion
- Worsening mood (depression)
- Constipation
- Nausea, vomiting, dry mouth
- Itching and sweating
- May impair your ability to drive a car or operate machinery

There is a greater risk for overdose when opioids are used at high doses and when combining opioids with alcohol and/or other medications like benzodiazepines, “benzos” such as Xanax (alprazolam), Valium (diazepam), Klonopin (clonazepam) or Restoril (temazepam).

Talk to your health care provider about other ways to manage pain:
- Heat and cold
- TENS (Nerve stimulation)
- Stretching and exercise
- Weight loss
- Physical therapy
- Relaxation or stress reduction
- Cognitive behavioral therapy (development of self-care techniques)
- Pain classes or groups
- Acupuncture
- Chiropractic Care
- Injections
- Nonopioid pain medications (such as acetaminophen, ibuprofen, naproxen, capsaicin cream, gabapentin or pregabalin, and other medications that are used for depression (nortriptyline, amitriptyline, duloxetine, or venlafaxine)

*Opioids should never be used alone to treat chronic pain.

Other Tips:
- NEVER take more opioids than prescribed
- NEVER use another person’s opioids
- NEVER sell or share opioids
- Store prescriptions in a safe place
- Dispose of unused opioids using local community take-back programs or your pharmacy mail-back program

The VA is committed to the safe prescribing of opioid pain medications.
Inflammatory Bowel Disease and You

Isabelle Lynch, MBA, BSN, RN

If you have a new diagnosis of inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) you will likely have questions. IBD includes Crohn’s disease (CD) and ulcerative colitis (UC). The first questions are generally food-related: “Do I need to be on a special diet?” or “Are there foods I need to avoid?”

What is IBD?

Crohn’s disease and ulcerative colitis are the two main disease categories that belong to a larger group of illnesses called inflammatory bowel disease.

Over one million people in the United States have IBD. Although it is most commonly found in teenagers and young adults, IBD can also occur in older adults.

The exact causes of IBD are unknown. Research suggests that the body’s immune system – the system that fights bacteria, viruses, and cancer - changes in some way in people with IBD. Environmental factors, such as smoking and highly refined diets, infections and psychological factors are all thought to affect IBD, but none has been absolutely proven to cause IBD.

Importance of Nutrition in IBD

Regardless of age, people with IBD are at risk of becoming malnourished due to:

- Loss of appetite (from nausea and abdominal pain)
- Poor digestion and absorption of nutrients (Crohn’s disease in particular). People with IBD may need to increase their daily calorie intake due to the impact of the disease on the body.

There is no single diet or eating plan that will work for everyone with IBD. However, it is important for all IBD patients to eat a well-balanced, healthy diet at all times.

During a flare, which is a sudden attack or worsening of IBD symptoms, the following suggestions may be helpful:

- Follow a low-fiber diet to relieve abdominal pain and diarrhea. High fiber foods are more difficult to digest, forcing the gut to work harder than necessary.
- Avoid foods that may increase bowel movements (e.g., raw fruits and vegetables, prunes, caffeine).
- Eat smaller, more frequent meals.
- Consider nutritional supplements if your appetite is poor.

Remember, if a certain type of food does not agree with you, do not eat it because diarrhea can be severe. When there is inflammation in the gut, it cannot digest the food as well and absorb the nutrients.

If you believe you have the symptoms above, please contact your provider, and you may be referred to the IBD clinic. As always, speak with your provider before changing any aspect of your diet.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crohn’s Disease Symptoms</th>
<th>Ulcerative Colitis Symptoms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intestinal Symptoms</strong></td>
<td><strong>Intestinal Symptoms</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Abdominal pain and cramping</td>
<td>• Abdominal pain and cramping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Bloating/distension</td>
<td>• Bloating/distension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Blood in the stool</td>
<td>• Blood in the stool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Perianal disease</td>
<td>• Loss of appetite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Fistulae and fissures</td>
<td>• Mucus in the stool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mucus in the stool</td>
<td>• Persistent diarrhea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Persistent diarrhea</td>
<td>• Ulceration in the intestinal tract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ulceration in the gut</td>
<td>• Urgency to move the bowels</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symptoms Outside of the Intestines</th>
<th>Symptoms Outside of the Intestines</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Arthritis</td>
<td>• Arthritis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Painful skin sores</td>
<td>• Painful skin sores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Red painful skin bumps</td>
<td>• Red painful skin bumps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Inflammation of the eye</td>
<td>• Inflammation of the eye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Fever</td>
<td>• Fever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Fissures</td>
<td>• Weight loss</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The flu vaccine can keep you from getting sick with the flu and/or reduce the risk of more serious flu complications, such as pneumonia, hospitalization, and although rare, death. The vaccine provides the best protection against the flu. Protect yourself and the people you love by getting vaccinated. Prevent the spread of the flu.

**Is it too late into the season to get vaccinated?**

Not at all! Medical experts recommend that it is the best time to get the flu vaccine in October. But, it is never too late to get it in January or later.

**What should you do if you do get the flu?**

Stay home and avoid contact with other people except in cases of getting medical care. However, if your symptoms are severe and you are in an especially high risk group as mentioned above, contact your health care provider as soon as possible.

Sometimes people may think they have the flu, when in fact they have the cold. How can you tell the difference? Cold’s, lasting only up to a week, are usually milder than the flu, which can last up to several weeks. Colds do not usually result in severe health problems, while the flu can have very serious complications that can lead to hospitalizations.

**How to lower your risk of getting the flu/cold?**

- Get the flu vaccine to protect yourself from the flu! (However, keep in mind that the flu vaccine does not prevent colds.)
- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Avoid touching your eyes, mouth, and nose.
- Avoid crowds during flu season.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces at home, work, or school.
- Get plenty of sleep, and drink plenty of fluids.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Myths</th>
<th>Facts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“The flu shot can give me the flu.”</td>
<td>The flu vaccine will NOT give you the flu because the vaccine does not include an active virus, but rather pieces of viruses to stimulate the immune system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The flu vaccine does not work.”</td>
<td>The flu vaccine may not be 100% effective, but it is better than not protecting yourself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I should wait to get vaccinated so that I’m covered through the end of the season.”</td>
<td>People should get flu shots as soon as they are available because it takes about two weeks for your body to develop protection against flu virus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I’m healthy. I do not need the vaccine.”</td>
<td>Healthy people can still get the flu. The flu vaccine not only protects us and others around us, but also protects those who cannot be vaccinated, such as babies younger than 6 months.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Antibiotics can fight the flu.”</td>
<td>Antibiotics are used to treat bacterial infections. However, the flu is caused by a virus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“You do not need to get a flu vaccination every year.”</td>
<td>Flu viruses change from year to year. Flu vaccines are only designed to help protect you for a single season (usually between October to March), and should be obtained once a year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I had the flu once this season, so I am protected against it for the rest of the year.”</td>
<td>Getting the flu does not guarantee that your body will be protected against other flu strains that are going around in the same season.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I have an egg allergy, so I can not get the flu vaccine.”</td>
<td>There are egg-free flu vaccines available. People with egg allergies can receive an egg-free flu vaccine.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Healthy Recipes

Tasty Low-Carb or No-Carb Stir Fry

Chinese food can have high amounts of hidden sugars and salt. So, whether you are trying to lose weight or improve your blood sugar levels, try this lower carbohydrate, lower salt version of Chinese stir-fry.

Stir-Fry Ingredients
- 2 Tbsp of sesame oil
- 2 tsp garlic
- 2 tsp ginger
- 2 cups low-sodium chicken broth
- 4 Tbsp low-sodium soy sauce
- 4 Tbsp honey
- ¼ tsp crushed red pepper flakes
- 2 Tbsp orange juice
- 1 Tbsp orange zest
- 2 Tbsp cornstarch
- 1 tsp ground black pepper
- 4 Tbsp Water

Stir-Fry Mix Ingredients
- 12 oz. of chicken, store bought rotisserie
- 1 bag of frozen stir-fry vegetables
- ½ cup of water

Yields: 4 Servings             Serving Size: 1 Cup

Each Serving Provides:
- Calories: 232
- Total Fat: 10g
- Protein: 24g
- Carbohydrates: 11g
- Sugar: 9 g
- Sodium: 680g

Directions for Stir Fry Sauce
1. In a small saucepan, heat the sesame oil to medium heat
2. Add garlic and ginger and cook for 30 seconds, allowing the flavors to combine
3. Add unsalted chicken broth, lite soy sauce, honey, red pepper flakes, orange juice, orange zest and ground black pepper
4. Mix to combine
5. In a small cup, mix cornstarch and water together until the cornstarch is smooth
6. Bring the sauce pan mix to a boil while mixing with a whisk, then slowly add the cornstarch mix and bring back to a boil
7. Lower the heat to a simmer as soon as the mix boils
8. Simmer for 30 seconds then remove from the heat
9. Set to the side

Directions for Stir Fry Mix
1. Take the chicken and remove all the meat
2. Set on a cutting board and coarsely chop meat to bite size pieces
3. Empty vegetables into a microwave safe bowl, add ½ cup of water, and microwave until the vegetables are warm
4. Drain off excess water from the vegetables and toss into a wok or large sauce pan
5. Turn pan on medium heat, add chicken and 1 cup of the sauce, and heat ingredients thoroughly while stirring
Flu Vaccine: Myths Debunked – continued from page 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symptoms</th>
<th>Flu</th>
<th>Cold</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fevers</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Maybe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sore throat</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cough</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Runny/stuffy nose</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chills</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muscle/body aches</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headaches</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiredness</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>