

Health

Filling a gap

Doctor focuses on healing pregnancy's discomforts

BRAIN:

Not all pregnant women are comfortable taking pain medication, and holistic services can address stress and anxiety.

LOWER BACK:

The enlargement of the uterus can lead to a heightened curvature of the back.

PELVIC REGION:

The release of pregnancy hormones can place increased stress on the ligaments of the pelvis, causing spasms in the spine. Also, muscle spasms can occur here following the physically demanding act of delivery.

JEFF COLSON/STAFF GRAPHIC

By Susan Bloom :: For NJ Press Media

Pregnancy can wreak havoc on a woman's body, a reality that 24-year-old Elizabeth Pelaez experienced firsthand while pregnant with her second child in 2010.

The Freehold resident's first pregnancy had been tolerable, but during her second pregnancy she felt "stabbing pains, like pins and needles" on the backs of both thighs.

"Walking and sitting were both really painful," said Pelaez, a medical receptionist. "Laying down helped, but I had a lot of trouble getting up. I didn't know what to do, and I didn't want to take anything for the pain for fear it could harm the baby."

Pelaez's sentiments echo those of many pregnant women. Expected to just deal with the variety of aches and pains often associated with pregnancy on the basis that they're only temporary, pregnant women routinely suffer through their discomfort, afraid to jeopardize the health of their babies by taking pain medication and unaware of any other alternatives.

It's this very void that led Dr. Kristen Cardamone, an interventional physiatrist practicing at Advanced Orthopedics and Sports Medicine Institute (AOSMI) in Freehold, to spearhead a new program through AOSMI that specializes in integrative healing and wellness for pregnant and post-natal women.

"The fact is, there tends to be an undertreatment of pregnancy and post natal-related musculoskeletal issues," Cardamone said. "While OBGYNs manage pre- and post-natal care, and physiatrists, orthopedic surgeons and other doctors specialize in musculoskeletal care, there's often a communication gap when it comes to effectively combining the expertise of the two specialties and working as a team to address the needs of pregnant women suffering from low back pain and a range of other uncomfortable conditions. As a result, many patients are left with nowhere to go."

Medical, holistic solutions

According to Cardamone, the changes that occur in a woman's body as her pregnancy progresses, particularly

WOMEN'S INTEGRATIVE WELLNESS PROGRAM

The new Women's Integrative Wellness Program at Advanced Orthopedics and Sports Medicine Institute, 301 Professional View Drive in Freehold's Pond View Professional Park, in addition to offices in Wall and Monroe, can be reached by calling 732-665-1600 or visiting www.AdvancedOrthoSports.com/wellness.

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People's Pharmacy

By Joe Graedon & Teresa Graedon

A unique cough remedy

Q. Our 5-year-old caught a cough that was going around her class. She was miserable with a nonproductive cough every half-minute or so. It was torture.

Finally, at midnight, after trying chamomile tea and steaming in the shower, we tried rubbing the soles of her feet with a generic brand similar to Vicks Vapo-Rub. It worked like turning off a spigot. Awesome remedy! Dark chocolate also helps a cough, but it was so late at night, we didn't want to stimulate her little system with theobromine.

Thank you, People's Pharmacy!

A. Thanks for sharing your story. It seems unorthodox, but other parents also report that Vicks on the soles of the feet helps ease a child's cough.

We have hundreds of other intriguing uses for common household products in our brand-new book from National Geographic, "The People's Pharmacy Quick and Handy Home Remedies." It is available in libraries, bookstores and online.

Preliminary research suggests the theobromine in dark chocolate may indeed ease a cough (FASEB Journal, Feb. 1, 2005).

Because theobromine is related to caffeine, it sometimes can be stimulating.

Q. My sister has been on the osteoporosis drugs Fosamax, Forteo and Reclast during the past 10 years. The first of March, her leg just gave way, and she had a broken femur. She also has had jaw and teeth problems for the past several years.

I think the prescribing doctor has a responsibility to highlight the serious side effects of these drugs.

A. A new study in the New England Journal of Medicine (May 5, 2011) establishes a strong relationship between the use of bisphosphonate drugs for osteoporosis (Actonel, Boniva, Fosamax, Reclast) and atypical fractures of the thigh bone (femur).

Such drugs also have been associated with jawbone death (Journal of Dental Research online, May 6, 2011). We agree that the prescriber has a responsibility to review all serious complications of such medications, even if they are relatively rare.

Q. A heart doctor put me on Niaspan because my good cholesterol was very low. I am taking 2,000 mg a night. He only told me I would have a little facial flushing. I woke up one night red as a lobster and itching all over. When I called my regular doctor the next day, he laughed and said lots of people will not take Niaspan because of these side effects.

A heart doctor he knows told him to have his patients on niacin take aspirin half an hour before taking the niacin and to eat a few tablespoons of unsweetened applesauce when taking the pills.

Problem solved. No more flushing or itching. My doctor keeps a check on my liver enzymes regularly. My good cholesterol has come up to normal levels without causing any problems.

A. Your doctor's recommendations are on target. It is a shame the cardiologist didn't prepare you better to take this medicine.

Niacin can be helpful in normalizing cholesterol levels, but as you discovered, the flushing can be uncomfortable or even alarming. Pre-treating with aspirin and taking the controlled-release niacin with a meal or with an applesauce snack helps prevent flushing for many patients (Mayo Clinic Proceedings, April 2010).

It may take a few weeks for the body to adapt.

Write to the Graedons via their website, www.PeoplesPharmacy.com.

Hope for pancreatic cancer patients

By Liz Szabo :: USA TODAY

For the first time in years, doctors are making progress against pancreatic cancer, one of the deadliest of all tumors, which kills all but 6 percent of patients.

Although there is still no cure, a new drug combination can help patients live months longer than on standard therapy. And other studies already under way may soon offer patients even more options, researchers say. Patients taking Folfirinox, a novel combination of four drugs already approved to fight other cancers, lived 11.1 months — 4.3 months longer than those given standard chemo, according to a French study of 342 patients in a recent issue of the New England Journal of Medicine.

That might not seem like a lot of time in any other disease. But study author Thierry Conroy notes that pancreatic cancer is especially lethal, typically killing patients in only about six months. Patients diagnosed with the disease have so few options that the Food and Drug Administration approved a drug called Tarceva to treat pancreatic cancer in 2005, even though that drug improved survival by only about two weeks.

Although Folfirinox caused more serious side effects than

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GAURI VARADHACHARY,
cancer specialist

standard chemo, patients still rated their quality of life higher, Conroy says. That may be because Folfirinox prevented their tumors from causing serious side effects, such as pain, loss of appetite and weight loss.

Doctors are already changing their practice based on the study, says cancer specialist Gauri Varadhachary of Houston's M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, who wasn't involved in the new study.

"This is great news for our patients," Varadhachary says. "I see it becoming the standard of care. I see patients requesting it."

Patients in the study were younger than 76 and especially healthy, says cancer specialist Nilofar Azad, from Baltimore's Johns Hopkins Kimmel Cancer Center, who wasn't involved in the new study.