Smoking Increases Bladder Cancer Risk

Smoking increases your risk of bladder cancer more than 400 percent over that of non-smokers. “Even cigars and chewing tobacco can increase the risk because the carcinogens are excreted in the urine regardless of how they enter the body,” says Dr. Yair Lotan, Assistant Professor of Urology at University of Texas Southwestern.

Bladder cancer may develop years after people stop smoking because of cumulative effects on the bladder lining. Other risk factors include environmental and occupational exposures such as aniline dyes; combustion gases; and soot from coal, petroleum by-products, and chemical dyes used in the rubber and textile industries.

Bladder cancer is the fourth most prevalent cancer in men and the ninth most common cancer in women. Most patients are in their 50's or older. Unfortunately, people do not experience symptoms until relatively late in the course. The most common complaint is blood in the urine, which is usually painless.

Even when patients seek prompt evaluation, up to 25 percent of cancers are detected at a late stage, resulting in a significantly higher risk of death. Early detection is crucial to survival.

Any sign of blood in the urine should result in a prompt evaluation to reduce the risk of overlooking cancer, Dr. Lotan advises.

Psoriasis Linked To Obesity

For years, dermatologists have noticed that many patients suffering from psoriasis also were obese, and many have wondered whether obesity was a cause. “It was sort of a chicken-and-egg question. Is obesity driving psoriasis or is psoriasis leading to obesity?” says Dr. Christopher Hansen, a resident in dermatology at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center. “It appears psoriasis precedes the onset of obesity. The explanation could be patients with psoriasis—particularly severe psoriasis—may practice different social behaviors. They may not go out as much, may not exercise, and may be more sedentary.”

While psoriasis is not a life threatening disease, the study indicates that its impact on the patient’s quality of life may be greater than suspected, says Dr. Paul Bergstresser, chairman of the department of dermatology at the University of Texas Southwestern.

The study also found that psoriasis sufferers were more likely to smoke and that smoking worsens symptoms.

Very Low Cholesterol May Affect Moods

Over the past few years, the idea that a very low cholesterol level might be associated with behavioral changes has been gaining momentum.

In a recent study, 80 volunteers 65 years of age or older received either a statin drug or placebo dose for 15 weeks. After 90 days, 31 percent of the statin patients and 10 percent of the placebo group experienced a disruption in overall happiness, contentment, and energy. The change was statistically significant only in patients whose final total serum cholesterol level was lower than 148 milligrams per deciliter (mg./dl.). No placebo patients reached a level that low.

Because statin use is increasing in American adults and elderly people, more research is needed.

(Source: Journal of the American Geriatric Society; 2006;54:70-76.)

Health Care Consideration Can Help Fertility Hopes

Infertility affects approximately 10 to 15 percent of couples in the United States, says Dr. Lisa Halvorson, associate professor of obstetrics and gynecology at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center.

In general, the first specialist to consult will be a gynecologist with expertise in infertility—medically defined as the inability of a couple to conceive after one year without using artificial controls. For men, a urologist with an interest in male infertility should be contacted.

There are situations in which it is best to seek help early, Dr. Halvorson says. A woman’s ability to become pregnant decreases as she ages. Any woman over 35 should consider evaluation after six months of attempting to get pregnant. An early visit to the physician would also be considered if a woman has irregular menstrual cycles, has had a pelvic infection, ectopic (tubal) pregnancy, pelvic surgery, radiation to the pelvis or chemotherapy. Warning signs in males include infection, surgery, dilated veins in the scrotum, chemotherapy and/or radiation in the genital region.

“The good news is that the majority of the time, it is possible for a couple to have a happy, healthy baby—the question is when and how,” Dr. Halvorson says.

Nonstick Chemical Taints Food

A new federal study suggests that all residents of the United States have measurable traces of fluorochemicals in their bodies. Fluorochemicals are compounds used in many common household products to make them resistant to water and oil. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) notes that the pollutants have caused developmental problems, liver toxicity, immune problems, and cancer in laboratory tests. The most troubling aspect of the discovery is that no one is sure which sources are responsible for the most significant tainting.

The chemicals have been used since the 1960’s for everything from non-stick cookware, oil-resistant food packaging, stain-resistant carpeting, and water-repellent fabrics. Non-stick cooking pans—long believed to be a culprit—were recently re-examined and found to be safe; however, some grease-resistant microwaveable popcorn bags were found to release traces of fluorochemicals during cooking.

A separate study done by Japanese researchers showed that some of the pollutants were able to reach fetuses.

(Source: Society of Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry.)