

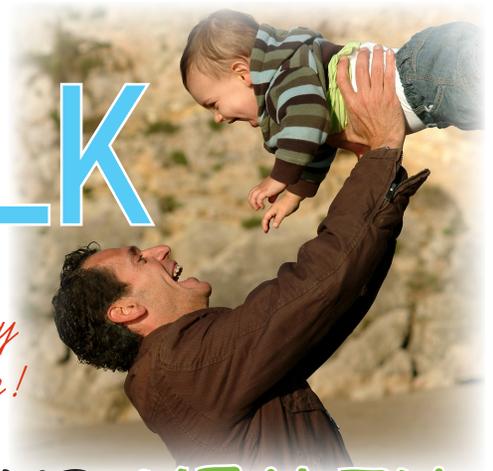
Keeping your health and wellbeing in the know

# MyHealthTALK

January 2013

Courtesy of Asset Health

*Wishing you a  
Happy & Healthy  
New Year!*



## KIDS ARE GOOD FOR YOUR HEALTH

Parenthood is positively good for your health. According to a new study, being a mom or dad makes you live longer, take fewer risks, and lead a healthier lifestyle. Research finds that mothers and fathers get a healthy dividend just by being parents, compared to couples without children.

What this means is the bundle of joy that new moms and dads bring home may also be their fountain of youth. Moreover, adoptive parents share the same health and longevity benefits as biological parents, researchers said.

The Danish study spanned 14 years and involved 21,000 couples seeking fertility treatments. Among women, death rates from cancer, heart disease and accidents were substantially decreased if they became mothers. Fathers benefited too.

Women who gave birth had a survival rate that was four times higher than childless women. The death rate for women who adopted fell by 33 percent. For men who became fathers, their death rates dropped in half, compared to men who had no children.

During the study, more than 15,000 women gave birth, more than 1,500 adopted a child, and nearly 800 gave birth and adopted. Sadly, among 5,354 women who remained childless, nearly 300 participants died during the study period. Couples without children were more likely to drink alcohol and suffer from heart disease or accidents.

"Parents may change their behavior to live more healthy lifestyles by eating healthier, drinking less, and giving up smoking, while the childless are more prone to continue or take up unhealthy habits," says lead researcher Esben Agerbo, Ph.D., a professor at Aarhus University in Denmark. Critics of Agerbo's research said studying couples with fertility problems might have influenced the outcome.

Published in the December 2012 *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, the study also examined the connection between parenthood and mental health. It found that couples with their own biological children and childless couples have the same rates of psychiatric illness. However, mental illness risks for mothers and fathers with adopted children diminished to half.

Even if having kids is not on your bucket list, you can still make changes that will improve your health, wellbeing and longevity. Eating healthy, exercising regularly, and developing healthy lifestyle habits are good places to start.

### YOUR SOFA? NOT SO MUCH

People may be breathing in flame retardant chemicals from their upholstered furniture, electronics and other household items. University and environmental researchers found potentially unsafe levels of several flame retardants in sofas and dust from a majority of homes they examined.

They said among the chemicals found in upholstery were those banned from children's pajamas in the late 1970's. In one of the studies, 85 percent of the sofas tested were treated with flame retardants such as chlorinated Tris, which was identified as a carcinogen decades ago.

Consumers will need to decide for themselves whether benefits outweigh the costs. The American Chemistry Council (ACC) said flame retardants are an effective way to prevent and slow the spread of fires. In response to the study, ACC states, "It's important to remember that the flame retardants currently in use, like all chemicals, are subject to review by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and national regulators around the globe."

Meanwhile, researchers have published their studies in the November 2012 issue of *Environmental Science & Technology*.



# KNOW YOUR NUMBERS



You probably know a few of your numbers by heart. Like your birthdate, phone number, and PIN numbers. What you may not know are your most important numbers—your health numbers. Also called health measurements or biometrics, these numbers pack a powerful punch. They can save your life.

Knowing your health numbers is a big deal. They sum up your health and health risks. Knowing your numbers is key to understanding the health of your body today and risks you may be facing tomorrow. Your personal doctor evaluates your health by obtaining your biometrics or health numbers.

Among the most important health measurements are your blood pressure, cholesterol, glucose, and body mass index (BMI) or waist size. When evaluated as a whole, they create sort of a personal health meter, the measure of your overall health status. Your health numbers tell you what you are doing right to take care of your health—and what you can do better. They give you a potentially lifesaving preview of your body's long-term health. Most importantly, your health numbers can steer you towards lifestyle changes that help you improve your health and wellbeing.

Lori Mosca, MD, director of the Columbia Center for Heart Disease Prevention in New York City, says it's not only important to know where you are health wise; knowing what direction you are heading in is also a vital part of the equation.

"Trend lines are important," she says. "If your blood pressure is below the cutoff point for high blood pressure,

that's good, but if it's been going up, it's still a concern." Yet, if your cholesterol is high but going down, give yourself a gold star and keep working toward your goal.

Make it one of your 2013 resolutions to know and keep tabs on your health numbers. If they're not where you and your doctor want them to be, making small changes in your lifestyle can significantly improve them. When you follow a healthy lifestyle, eat a balanced diet, get regular exercise and avoid smoking, you can turn bad numbers around.

Mosca advises if you can only remember one number, your waist size is the one to know. Your waist size predicts heart disease risk better than BMI or weight, she says.

Make an appointment with your personal doctor to find out if you have healthy numbers. You can get a head start by figuring out one of them yourself. Find a tape measure and circle it around your belly button. Women with a 35-inch or more waist and men with a 40-inch or more waist have increased risks for cardiovascular disease, diabetes, metabolic problems, high blood pressure and high cholesterol. The right waist size and BMI keep your heart healthy.

"If patients lose even one inch off their waist, we see improvements in all the other heart health numbers," Mosca says. "Conversely, if they gain even one inch, we see worsening in those numbers. It's a much better indicator than weight, because you can be gaining weight and still losing waist size if you're working out and gaining lean muscle mass."

## BLOOD PRESSURE

Healthy blood pressure numbers are less than 120/80. When your blood pressure is higher, the added pressure can damage your blood vessels and organs, increasing your risk for heart attack, stroke, kidney disease, and damage to blood vessels and organs.

120/80

## CHOLESTEROL

A healthy total cholesterol is 200 and includes LDL, HDL, and triglyceride levels. High cholesterol can lead to heart attack, stroke, disease of the blood vessels and memory loss.

<200

## GLUCOSE

What is considered a healthy blood glucose level will vary, depending on whether you are fasting or on medications. High glucose numbers may lead to diabetes and its complications, which include heart disease, poor circulation, and high cholesterol and blood pressure numbers.

## BODY MASS INDEX/ WAIST SIZE

A healthy body mass index (BMI) is between 18.5 and 24.9 (pounds per inches squared). A healthy waist size for women is less than 35 inches and for men, less than 40 inches. Being overweight or obese can lead to serious health problems such as diabetes, heart disease, stroke, high cholesterol and high blood pressure.

18.5-24.9

*Make a New Year's resolution  
to take care of your health!*