Sharing Reliable Health Information
10 Years of NIH News in Health

You hear and read health advice all the time—from friends, online sources, radio, TV, and more. How do you know what health information you can trust? This issue marks the 10-year anniversary of NIH News in Health, the monthly newsletter based on research supported by the U.S. National Institutes of Health—the nation’s medical research agency. Every article in this newsletter is carefully reviewed by NIH experts, so you can be confident that the health news you read here is trustworthy.

So far, we've brought you 600 articles on all kinds of topics. They've ranged from healthy eating and physical activity to the microbes within you, personalized medicine, and the hazards of stress. We've learned from our tens of thousands of readers that you appreciate these stories and often share the information with your friends, family, and others.

People love exchanging health information. More than half of adults nationwide say they turn to friends or family for health information or support when facing a serious health issue. People also share health information within their communities—at school, work, places of worship, and various events.

The quality of the health information you get depends on the source. “When looking online for health information, it’s a good idea to start with reputable websites, such as government websites,” says NIH’s Stephanie Dailey, who specializes in sharing health information with older adults. “Government agencies have well-researched information that’s been vetted by expert scientists and doctors.”

“Students and others can be drawn to websites with quirky or ‘amazing’ health stories that may be inaccurate,” says Timothy Keady, who heads the student wellness center at the Rochester Institute of Technology in New York. “We always try to steer them back toward more appropriate health information that's based on science. We know that information from NIH, the CDC, and other agencies is going to be accurate.”

Like all the information available from NIH, the stories in NIH News in Health undergo multiple levels of review before you ever see them. Researchers interviewed for each story read and comment on draft articles to make sure they’re correct. NIH health and science experts also review each story before it’s published. The goal is to give you reliable, science-based information so you can make informed decisions about staying healthy and seeking medical care.

In recognition of the newsletter’s 10th year, we turned to readers like you to learn how you've been sharing NIH News in Health and other health information with your community. We've learned that the articles are shared in many different ways. Teachers in California and elsewhere have shared stories with their students on how sleep affects learning and health. A middle school nurse in Texas copies and shares articles with school staff and makes the newsletter available to visiting parents. And the staff of a hospital in Montana says they read the online version and discuss the newsletter’s stories, which ultimately helps to improve their conversations with patients.

Community health clinics, senior centers, libraries, and nonprofit organizations across the country share copies of NIH News in Health with their communities. In Florida, the Franklin County Health Department distributes the newsletter to patients and staff in 2 rural, remote public health clinics. At the Friend Family Health Center in Illinois, NIH News in Health is shared at large neighborhood clinics in the southeast and southwest sides of Chicago.

continued on page 2

Subscribe
newsinhealth.nih.gov
In the Rocky Mountains, a nonprofit agency has been sharing NIH News in Health with older adults and their caregivers for nearly a decade. “The newsletter regularly offers relevant health information for our seniors. It’s something they really look forward to each month,” says Stephen M. Holland, director of the Upper Arkansas Area Agency on Aging.

In rural Oregon, copies of NIH News in Health are distributed to a largely Native American community by the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, a tribal organization that provides a range of services, including home health care visits and transportation to medical facilities. “We place the newsletter in our elders’ meal site and in the lobby of the community health clinic, in adult foster care, and next to the pharmacy, so people can read it while waiting for prescriptions,” says community health director Kari Culp. “We’ve found the newsletters to be very informative and much appreciated by our community members and also our medical staff.”

Many people share health information by putting it where people are waiting and where it will be seen. At several colleges and universities, for instance, officials have been placing easy-to-read health information in common bathrooms—an approach sometimes called “stall talk.”

In Rochester, Keady puts NIH News in Health in the school’s health clinic and counseling waiting rooms. He also brings the newsletters to lectures and presentations on health and wellness. “Although students search for a lot of health information online, they still like to read some information on paper, especially while they’re waiting or relaxing in a common area,” Keady says. “Stories on stress and other psychological issues are of special interest to students. And they tend to gravitate to stories on exercise, sleep, and nutrition.”

School, church, and community newsletters often reprint NIH News in Health stories in their publications because they know they can trust the content. Organizations focused on diabetes, healthy aging, mental illness, and other medical issues also reprint NIH News in Health stories in their own publications. The articles aren’t copyrighted, so they can be freely republished, as long as NIH News in Health is credited as the source (see http://newsinhealth.nih.gov/about for details).

No matter where you gather and read health information, it’s a good idea to discuss what you’ve found with your health care provider. Your provider can help you understand and interpret what you’ve found.

“Being well informed about a condition can be helpful when you visit your doctor,” Dailey says. “You may wish to print out some of the information you find to share with your doctor during your appointment.”

We love hearing from readers who let us know how they share and use health information, including NIH News in Health. Thanks for sharing your feedback, story ideas, and other comments over the past decade. We look forward to bringing you 10 more years of evidence-based health information. Share your thoughts with us at nihnewsinhealth@od.nih.gov or send us a photo showing how you or others use the newsletter, and we may post it to our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/newsinhealth.
Your kidneys aren’t very big—each is about the size of your fist—but they do important work. They keep you healthy by maintaining just the right balance of water and other substances inside your body. Unfortunately, if your kidneys start to malfunction, you might not realize it for a long while. Kidney disease usually won’t make you feel sick until the problem is serious and irreversible. That’s why it’s important to catch kidney disease early, so you can try to prevent or delay health problems. You’re at increased risk for kidney disease if you have diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, or a family history of kidney failure. Talk with your health care provider about whether you should be screened for kidney disease. (http://newsinhealth.nih.gov/issue/mar2013/feature1)

4. Should You Take Dietary Supplements? More than half of all Americans take one or more dietary supplements daily or on occasion. Common supplements include vitamins, minerals, and herbal products, also known as botanicals. People take these supplements to maintain or improve their health. But not everyone needs to take supplements. “Learn about their potential benefits and any risks they may pose first,” says Dr. Paul M. Coates, director of NIH’s Office of Dietary Supplements. “Speak to your health care providers about products of interest and decide together what might be best for you to take, if anything, for your overall health.” (http://newsinhealth.nih.gov/issue/aug2013/feature1)

5. Waking Up to Anesthesia.
When you face surgery, you might have many concerns, including worries about going under anesthesia. General anesthesia is a combination of drugs that damps pain, knocks you unconscious, and keeps you from moving during the operation. Although anesthesia is typically considered quite safe for most patients, many people have concerns about possible risks and side effects. Some people, especially elderly patients and children, can have lingering confusion and thinking problems for several days after anesthesia. Talk with your doctor if you have concerns, but don’t delay important surgery because of fear of anesthesia. (http://newsinhealth.nih.gov/issue/apr2011/feature1)

Web Links
To see readers’ favorite online health articles over the past 6 months, visit: http://newsinhealth.nih.gov/favorite
Health Capsules

Cleaner Air Tied to Healthier Lungs in Kids

As air quality improved in a once-smoggy region of California, lung function also improved in children during a critical period of growth and development. The findings point to the potential long-term effects of air quality on human health.

Air pollution has been linked to a wide range of health problems, including breathing difficulties, cardiovascular disease, and even death. In Southern California—long known for its high levels of air pollution—public policies have helped to improve air quality over the past few decades.

NIH-supported scientists took a closer look at the link between better air quality and breathing in 11- to 15-year-old kids. Those ages are especially important to long-term lung function, because that's when lungs undergo rapid development. The researchers looked at data from 3 different groups of children taken during the time periods 1994–1998, 1997–2001, and 2007–2011. More than 2,100 kids participated.

The researchers found that as levels of air pollution declined, lung function development improved. Improvements were seen in both boys and girls, in children with and without asthma, and in children of different racial/ethnic backgrounds.

The proportion of kids with clinically low lung function at age 15 also dropped as the air got cleaner. Across the 3 time periods, the proportion with low lung function fell from about 8% to 6% to less than 4%.

“We expect that our results are relevant for areas outside Southern California. Improved health was most strongly linked to reduced levels of nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter—pollutants that are elevated in any urban environment,” says research team leader Dr. W. James Gauderman of the University of Southern California.

What Do You Know About Sarcoidosis?

Many people with sarcoidosis don’t realize they have it. The disorder often has no signs or symptoms, or only mild ones.

Sarcoidosis is a chronic (long-term) disorder that causes inflammation and lumps called granulomas in the body’s organs. The lungs are usually involved, although the condition can affect any organ, including the skin, eyes, liver, and brain.

Some people with sarcoidosis feel tired or depressed. They may wheeze, cough, or feel short of breath. The illness may also cause lumps, ulcers (sores), or areas of discolored skin.

Sarcoidosis affects people of all ages and races, but it’s most common among African Americans and people of Northern European descent. The cause is unknown, but genes and the immune system likely play a role. Treatment depends on symptoms and which organs are affected.

In 2008, Congress declared April as National Sarcoidosis Awareness Month to bring more attention to this rare and complicated disorder. Learn more about sarcoidosis, and watch a video about managing the condition, at www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/sarc.

Definitions

Inflammation
Heat, swelling, and redness caused by the body’s protective response to injury or infection.

How to get NIH News in Health

Read it online.
Visit newsinhealth.nih.gov

Get it by email.
Click the “Subscribe” button on our home page to sign up for email updates when new issues are posted online.

Get it in print.
Contact us (see page 2) to get free print copies for display in offices, libraries, or clinics within the U.S.