

# BOTTOM LINE Women's Health

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THE BEST OF MAINSTREAM AND NATURAL MEDICINE

## You need to know...

■ **MEDITATION LOWERS HEART RISK** by half. Patients with coronary heart disease practiced transcendental meditation for 20 minutes twice a day for five years, on average...or got instruction in heart-protecting diet and exercise habits. Meditators were 47% less likely than nonmeditators to have a heart attack or stroke, or to die. *Information:* [www.TM.org](http://www.TM.org).

Robert Schneider, MD, director, Institute for Natural Medicine and Prevention, Maharishi University of Management, Fairfield, Iowa, and leader of a study of 201 heart patients.

■ **ALCOHOL HITS OLDER ADULTS** harder than they think. Researchers measured response time to cognitive tests in people ages 25 to 35 and those ages 50 to 74 after they had had two alcoholic drinks. Though the older group reported being less impaired than the younger, they took five seconds longer to complete the tests. Even a five-second cognitive delay can be dangerous—for instance, while driving. *Daily alcohol limit:* One drink for women, two for men.

Sara Jo Nixon, PhD, professor of psychiatry, University of Florida, Gainesville, and lead author of a study of 68 adults.

■ **COMBO THERAPY BUILDS BONES.** Osteoporosis patients received one annual dose of intravenous *zoledronic acid* (Reclast)...daily injections of *teriparatide* (Forteo)...or both. *After one year:* Lumbar spine bone mass increased by 7.51% in the combination group, 7.05% in the teriparatide group and 4.37% in the zoledronic acid group. *Best:* Discuss osteoporosis treatment options with your doctor—the drugs can have side effects.

Kenneth Saag, MD, MSc, professor of medicine, University of Alabama, Birmingham, and investigator of a study of 388 postmenopausal osteoporosis patients.

Donnica Moore, MD

## Are You Just Getting Older or...

### Do You Need to See a Doctor?

**Y**ou sigh with resignation when some annoying symptom appears or worsens, dismissing it as an inevitable sign of aging—but that can be a mistake. *Reasons:* Often, simple self-help strategies correct the problem. In other cases, a visit to the doctor can prevent unnecessary suffering—or even save your life. *Symptoms to watch for...*

**SEEING SPOTS.** Gazing at a blank wall, you notice floaters—tiny dark specks or strings—in your field of vision. *Normal aging:* The *vitreous*, a gel-like substance inside the eye, becomes more liquid, allowing microscopic fibers within to clump and cast shadows on the retina.

*For self-help...* Try nonprescription Dry Eye Relief Tear Stabilization

**Bottom Line/Women's Health** interviewed Donnica Moore, MD, president of Sapphire Women's Health Group, a multimedia education and communications firm in Far Hills, New Jersey, and editor-in-chief of *Women's Health for Life* (DK). She is a medical expert on ABC's *Good Morning America Health* and has served on the board of directors of the American Medical Women's Association and Research!America. [www.DrDonnica.com](http://www.DrDonnica.com)



Formula ([www.CureFloaters.com](http://www.CureFloaters.com)). Its omega-3 fatty acids and other nutrients may reduce visual distortion from floaters by improving the cornea's film of tears.

*See your doctor if...* floaters are accompanied by gradual blurring or an overall yellowish or reddish hue to your visual field. You may have cataracts (clouding of the eyes' lenses), correctable with surgery.

*Seek emergency care if...* floaters suddenly increase significantly in number or are accompanied by >

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Tamara Eberlein  
Editor

## What My Doctor Brothers Tell Me

**I**s there a doctor in the house? When my family gathers, there are three. *What I've learned...*

**Men ignore symptoms**—so watch for signs that your partner needs to see his doctor, suggests brother David Eberlein, MD, a family physician in Cleveland. “If you notice that he smells like mushrooms or spoiled meat, he could have a fungal infection or an unhealed wound. Frequent urination may signal prostate disease. Blood on his underwear could just be hemorrhoids—but his doctor needs to check for colorectal and urogenital cancers. Getting treated for high blood pressure, low thyroid, vascular disease or vitamin B-12 deficiency might fix erectile dysfunction, too.”

**A season's “firsts” are dangerous**, so take care, cautions brother Robert “Sam” Eberlein, MD, an emergency room doctor in Ravenna, Ohio. “The first icy day of winter, we see broken bones from falls. The first pretty spring day, patients have fingertip amputations from lawn mowers. The first sunny summer day, it's sunburn and heatstroke. When autumn leaves fill gutters, people fall from ladders.”

**End-of-life topics are seen as taboo**, but when family members disagree on how to handle a loved one's terminal illness, everyone suffers more, says brother-in-law Kevin Dooley, MD, a family doctor in Wilton, New York. “Some people want to live at all costs, others want to pass peacefully—so discuss living wills and organ donation with your loved ones.”

**In a future column:** Advice from the three nurses in the family!

*Tamara*

>> flashing lights or hazy vision. You could have a retinal tear or detachment that requires immediate surgery to prevent vision loss.

**DIZZINESS.** You stand up and your head spins. *Normal aging:* The ear has fluid-filled structures that sense movement and balance. When tiny calcium crystals in the inner ear dislodge and float in this fluid, you may develop *benign paroxysmal positional vertigo* (BPPV). Other possibilities include *orthostatic hypotension* (postural low blood pressure), which occurs when blood pools in the legs, decreasing oxygen-rich blood flow to the brain...or *hypoglycemia* (low blood sugar).

**Self-help...** get up more slowly. In mild cases of BPPV or orthostatic hypotension, this prevents dizziness. BPPV also may be corrected with head movements called Epley or Semont maneuvers, which cause the crystals to lodge in a harmless area. For instructions online, see [www.dizziness-and-balance.com](http://www.dizziness-and-balance.com) (click on “Dizzy Patients”). To avoid blood sugar dips, each day eat three moderate meals and two healthful snacks that include some protein. Do not drive when dizzy!

**See your doctor if...** dizziness persists or is severe enough to create a risk of falling. A physician or physical therapist can guide your head through the Epley or Semont maneuvers. Low blood pressure can be corrected with diet, drugs and/or compression stockings. You also should be checked for medication side effects and underlying disorders (diabetes, anemia, ear or sinus infections) linked to dizziness.

**Seek emergency care if...** dizziness is accompanied by impaired vision, speech problems, and/or weakness or tingling on one side of the body. These may indicate a stroke.

**INDIGESTION.** You feel a burning sensation beneath your breastbone. *Normal aging:* When the sphincter between the esophagus and stomach

weakens, digestive acids can move upward and irritate the esophagus.

**Self-help...** limit foods and beverages likely to trigger discomfort—citrus, onions, tomatoes, mint, spicy or high-fat foods, coffee, alcohol. Do not eat within three hours of bedtime. Lose excess weight. Wear clothing that is loose at the waist. Do not smoke. Use blocks to raise the head of your bed by about six inches.

**See your doctor if...** symptoms occur more than twice per week—chronic heartburn may warrant medication or surgery. If you also experience swallowing difficulties, vomiting, tarry stools or unintended weight loss, get screened for gastrointestinal ulcers and cancer.

**Seek emergency care if...** upper abdominal pain occurs along with unusual fatigue, shortness of breath, nausea and/or back pain. These can be signs of a heart attack.

**LEAKING URINE.** You sneeze or are hurrying to the bathroom and—whoops! Some urine escapes. *Normal aging:* Pelvic muscles that control urination weaken over time...and declining estrogen thins the walls of the urethra, creating a wider and weaker channel for urine to leave the bladder.

**Self-help...** six times each day, do “fast-and-slow” Kegel exercises. *How:* Contract the muscles around your vagina and anus, lifting them upward and inward...hold for 10 seconds, then relax for 10 seconds...repeat 10 times. Next, contract for one second, then relax for one second...repeat 10 times. Avoid caffeine and carbonated beverages—they can irritate the bladder.

**See your doctor if...** you often leak urine or use the toilet more than eight times per day or more than twice at night. *Treatments:* A probe inserted into the vagina emits a current that may stimulate and strengthen pelvic muscles over time. Collagen injected into the bladder outlet may improve closure...Botox


injected into the bladder lining can reduce spasms. Surgical options include inserting a sling to support the urethra...or implanting a nerve-stimulating device that calms spasms in an overactive bladder.

**Seek emergency care if...**there is blood in your urine. You must be checked for kidney stones, *pyelonephritis* (a kidney infection), severe urinary tract infection and/or urinary tract cancer.

**POOR MEMORY.** You made plans to see a friend but cannot remember where to meet. *Normal aging:* As the body produces lower levels of chemicals that brain cells need to function optimally, memory worsens.

**Self-help...**try daily crossword or Sudoku puzzles or games that challenge brain speed (see [www.GamesForTheBrain.com](http://www.GamesForTheBrain.com)). Get regular aerobic exercise to increase cerebral blood flow and promote neuron regeneration. Aim for seven to nine hours of sleep per night. Do not smoke or consume more than one alcoholic drink daily—people with these bad habits develop Alzheimer's disease an average of 2.3 to 4.8 years earlier, respectively, than nonsmokers and nondrinkers.

**See your doctor if...**forgetfulness interferes with day-to-day tasks or if loved ones say that they notice behavioral changes. High blood pressure and diabetes increase dementia risk, so work with your doctor to control these conditions. Ask your doctor if memory problems may be linked to medication or an underlying problem, such as a vitamin B-12 deficiency, sleep disorder, anemia, low thyroid or depression.

**Seek emergency care if...**a memory lapse occurs suddenly and is accompanied by changes in vision, speech and/or balance—this could signal a stroke. Also get immediate help if memory problems occur after a head injury, even a seemingly minor one. This can signal bleeding within or around the brain. Emergency surgery can be lifesaving. 

Janet K. Baum, MD, and Elvira Lang, MD  
Harvard Medical School

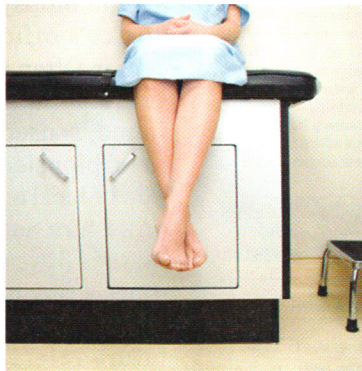
## Stress-Less Guide to Getting Through a Breast Biopsy

A woman finds a lump in her breast. After a mammogram and ultrasound, her radiologist says that the only way to determine if it's cancer is to do a *biopsy* (removal and analysis of a small tissue sample). *Or:* After a routine mammogram, a woman with lumpy breasts is informed that suspicious-looking calcifications have appeared. Again, a biopsy is recommended.

Such scenarios are common. Each year in the US, more than 1.6 million breast biopsies are done. But that's small comfort when *you* need a biopsy—because the situation naturally provokes a lot of anxiety.

**Recent study:** Women waiting for breast biopsy results have levels of the stress hormone *cortisol* equal to those of women actually diagnosed with breast cancer. The flood of cortisol can impair immune function.

**Reassuring:** Only about 20% of



breast biopsies turn out to reveal cancer...and knowing what to expect helps ease stress.

### WHAT TO DO FIRST

From your primary care doctor

or gynecologist, get a referral to a *breast radiologist*, a doctor who specializes in breast imaging and biopsies. *Best:* Ask any breast radiologist you are considering if he/she is a member of the Society of Breast Imaging or is affiliated with a facility certified as a Breast Imaging Center of Excellence by the American College of Radiology. These credentials indicate adherence to high standards.

Ask the breast radiologist about various biopsy techniques (see below). The technique used depends on the location and size of the lump, how suspicious the area looks and other factors. *Concern:* A national panel of experts recently concluded that nonsurgical needle biopsy should be the “gold standard” for initial diagnosis of breast abnormalities—yet about 35% of initial breast biopsies in the US still are done using more invasive open surgery.

**Recent study:** Patients who received guidance in self-hypnotic relaxation before and during their breast biopsies experienced significantly less emotional distress and less physical discomfort. Ask your doctor if the biopsy facility provides *procedure hypnosis*...or consult a >

**Bottom Line/Women's Health** interviewed Janet K. Baum, MD, and Elvira Lang, MD, both associate professors of radiology at Harvard Medical School in Boston. Dr. Baum is director of breast imaging at Cambridge Health Alliance and author of numerous studies on breast imaging. Dr. Lang is coauthor of *Patient Sedation Without Medication* (Trafford), and founder and president of Hypnalgessics ([www.Hypnalgessics.com](http://www.Hypnalgessics.com)), which trains health professionals in hypnotic techniques.



Dr. Baum (left) and Dr. Lang are coauthors of a study on self-hypnotic relaxation during breast biopsy.