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health happenings

7 things you don't tell your doctor - but should!

Choosing not to tell your doctor the whole truth can hurt you. These are the top 7 health-related secrets you shouldn't keep...

You're in for your annual physical and the doctor asks, "How often do you eat red meat? Exercise?" Do you 'fess up to weekly cheeseburger binges or wasted gym memberships? What else are you keeping from your doctor?

"So often, patients don't talk to their doctors because they're afraid of the answer or what the physician will think of them," says Carolyn Clancy, M.D., a general internist, researcher and director of the federal Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality in Rockville, Md.

But hiding health concerns can do more harm than good. So what should you always bring up? We talked to top experts and here are the 7 things you must confess at your next visit...

1. You're taking vitamins, herbs or supplements.

You pop a daily multivitamin, an herbal supplement for sleep and a powder to improve memory. They're harmless, right? Not always. "Supplements [can] cause symptoms and interfere with some medications," says Nieca Goldberg, M.D.,

author of Dr. Nieca Goldberg's Complete Guide to Women's Health (Ballantine Books) and medical director of the Joan H. Tisch Center for Women's Health at New York University Langone Medical Center. Gingko, for example, can cause [heart] palpitations, she says. The herb, touted for enhancing memory, also interacts with blood pressure medications, dangerously lowering levels. Calcium, which many women take for bone health, can reduce absorption of antibiotics.

2. You noticed blood in your stool.

Most of us steer clear of potty talk – even with our doctors. Patients of Dr. Clancy, however, are asked at each visit whether they've seen blood in their stool. The response, she says, is often the same: "Why would I look?" Dr. Clancy's answer: "It could save your life." Blood in the stool is a symptom of colorectal cancer, which is curable when caught early. "People [can] live for years," Dr. Clancy says. So mention any change in bathroom habits to your doctor, advises Renee Scola, M.D., an internist at Northwestern Memorial HealthCare in Chicago. "If you've always been regular and suddenly you're constipated for several weeks, tell your doctor," she adds.

3. You think you're depressed.

So you've been feeling a little down; it'll pass, you think. Besides, why bother your doctor with it? "Some women are embarrassed [of depression]," says Ellen L. Poleshuck, Ph.D., a family therapist at the University of Rochester (N.Y.) Medical Center. But emotions can affect your physical health. Depressed people often feel fatigued, lose their appetite or have stomachaches. In fact, if your doctor doesn't know you're depressed, you may have to undergo unnecessary tests or medications. "Primary care physicians and OB-GYNs are trained to assess and treat depression" and prescribe treatment if necessary, Poleshuck says. If you're not comfortable mentioning it at the appointment, bring a friend or family member for support.

4. You're worried about something you read on the Web.

You're not the first (or last) to turn to Dr. Google. So your doc won't be offended or surprised when you admit this. In fact, most doctors say they like well-informed patients. "Don't stop looking for information," Dr. Goldberg advises. "Just say, 'I saw something on the Internet. Do I need to be concerned?'" Also, remember much of what you read online is general. "Information on the Internet isn't specific to the people reading it," and so it may not apply to your case, she says.

5. Your diet and exercise routine are lacking.

That morning doughnut-and-coffee ritual? Those couch potato nights? 'Fess up! People often lie or omit information because they don't realize how harmful those habits really are, Dr. Clancy says. "That's why we recommend that overweight people keep a food diary, so they can get a more realistic picture of what they eat in a day," she says. Even if weight isn't an issue, talk to your doctor about your

diet. You may not need a major meal overhaul – just a little tweaking. "Weight is only one aspect of it," adds Lisa Norsen, Ph.D., R.N., professor of clinical nursing at University of Rochester Medical Center in New York. Unhealthy eating habits are linked to chronic diseases, such as heart attacks and diabetes.

6. You quit your meds.

One of Dr. Goldberg's patients stopped taking her cholesterol medication. The reason: A friend on the same drug developed muscle aches. But the patient didn't tell Dr. Goldberg. So when tests showed higher cholesterol levels, she called to increase her dosage. That's when the woman confessed that she had stopped taking the medication. "Instead of telling the doctor, some patients [act] on their own," Dr. Goldberg says. "That's one of the most dangerous things you can do." The medicine your doctor prescribes is designed to keep you healthy – and the side effects you've heard about might be rare or insignificant. If you're having problems with medication, ask to be switched to another that won't affect you the same way.

7. You had surgery or sickness a long time ago.

Especially when seeing a doctor for the first time, the details of your medical history matter – and that includes the tonsillectomy you had at age four. Your physician needs background information to diagnose and prescribe the best treatment for you. There's an advantage to being well prepared: You'll get better treatment. How detailed should you be? Tell the doctor about the following:

- Any major illnesses in your immediate family
- Previous major illnesses, past surgeries and current conditions
- All medications you're taking, including vitamins and herbal supplements (along with any adverse reactions)
- Any recent X-rays or medical tests? Bring the films or results, if possible

In addition, jot down notes about current symptoms. If you're having headaches, for example, how often do they occur and at what time of day? How painful are they? What type of pain do they cause – sharp or dull throbbing?

"If you walk in with a record – even just some notes – and can say, 'I've given this some thought,' you'll be taken a lot more seriously by the doctor," Dr. Clancy says. ■



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HOLIDAY STRESS?

Watch for Signs

Everyone reacts to stress differently. Here are some of the most common signs of holiday stress.

- Headaches, muscle tension, neck or back pain
- Upset stomach
- Dry mouth
- Chest pains, rapid heartbeat
- Difficulty falling or staying asleep
- Fatigue
- Loss of appetite or overeating comfort food
- Increased number of colds
- Lack of concentration or focus
- Memory problems or forgetfulness
- Jitters
- Irritability
- Short temper
- Anxiety

It's also important to watch for stress that lasts past the holidays. There's a difference between the holiday blues and more serious conditions such as depression, seasonal affective disorder and anxiety disorders. If you or a loved one can't shake the blues once the holidays are over, it may be a more serious condition.

Trim the Trimmings This Year

Are there chores, events, or activities that you can remove from your holiday checklist this year, thereby reducing your stress? If expectations from family and friends pin the success of the season on you every year, it may be time to take care yourself by reducing the level of magnificence you are accustomed to delivering. Eliminating even one event or simplifying gifts

for distant relationships can reduce the sensation of feeling overwhelmed. Examine the checklist that is beginning to form, and give yourself the gift of less. Move some of your "must haves" to the "nice to have" column, and discover whether trimming the trimmings has you enjoying the season more.

Don't forget that you have 6 free counseling sessions on 6 different topics to use each year through your Employee Assistance Program. Contact Reliant Behavioural Health for confidential assistance at (866) 750-1327 and use access code MMIA. ■



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NEW YEAR, NEW YOU!

Wellness screenings have wrapped up for 2016 and now it's time to take a look at making improvements in any areas that you may have fallen short. Which also means, more money! If you missed one of your health factor outcomes in 2016, you had 30 days from the date on your incentive letter to contact ISWM to discuss opportunities to improve your health and your pocketbook.

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