



WELLNESS WORKS

around the state

MAINE MUNICIPAL EMPLOYEES HEALTH TRUST

SPRING 2008

Celebrating 25 Years of Trust!

The Maine Municipal Employees Health Trust is celebrating its Silver Anniversary this year! The Health Trust has been in existence as a self-insured health insurance trust since 1983, and we are looking forward to serving our participants and over 450 employer groups for many more years to come!

During the course of this year, we will be bringing you stories and news of the past 25 years including a look back at some of the Trust's milestones and achievements. We are proud to serve our members – the municipalities, counties, quasi-municipal entities, and non-profit members of the Maine Municipal Association – and to bring you the high quality benefits and customer service that you have come to expect from us. All in all, the Health Trust provides benefits to over 20,000 municipal, county government, special district employees and retirees and their family members.

From health insurance to disability plans, from health education programs at the worksite to information on

quality physician and hospital care, the Health Trust is here to serve you – and to keep you healthy! Check out all that the Health Trust has to offer by visiting our Website, at www.mmeht.org.

We welcome your input as well – let us know what you like most about the Health Trust, and how we have served you over the years! Send an e-mail to wellness@memun.org, or drop us a line, at MMEHT, 60 Community Drive, Augusta, ME 04330.

And remember – the Difference Is Trust!



See the world as a wonderful place...and you will make the place more wonderful. - Unknown



Spring 2008

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Farewell to Anne Wright

Anne Wright, Assistant Director, Health Trust Services will be leaving MMA at the beginning of April to assume a new position with UNUM in Portland. Anne will be UNUM's Director of Health and Insurance Benefits, overseeing the company's self-insured health plan and other benefit plans for its employees nationwide. Anne has been with MMA and the Health Trust for twelve years. She has provided outstanding service to the Trust's participants and employer groups and has been dedicated to the Trust staff and the Maine Municipal Association. We will miss her. Congratulations to Anne, we wish her the best!

A Body Image Reality Check

The other day I walked into my living room and found my 7-year old, Meghan, reading a magazine. I asked her what she was reading – assuming that it was her wholesome Spider or Ranger Rick magazine. Instead she responded, “I am reading about how to get a flatter stomach.” I then noticed that Meghan was reading my Fitness magazine. On the front cover is a bikini clad, super-thin model, with feature articles all around her such as, “Whittle Your Waist,” “Yoga for Hotter Sex,” “Indulge and Still Lose Weight,” and “2008 Full-Body Makeover.” I took the magazine away from her and we had a conversation about what it means to be a healthy person.

This conversation forced me to reflect about the messages that I may be consciously or unconsciously giving my two young daughters. I thought I was doing a pretty good job at limiting the negative influences that are out there – we only get PBS programming for kids and I try to make sure that the movies that we watch are wholesome and have a message that the kids can take with them. To be completely honest, I never even thought about how the magazines that I have lying around may influence my children – and that

they would even stop to read them at such a tender young age.

Here is a little food for thought regarding body image that you can share with your children (boys can benefit from this conversation too):

- Did you know that if female mannequins were real women they’d be too thin to have babies?
- There are 3 billion women who don’t look like supermodels and only a handful that do.
- Marilyn Monroe wore a size 14, and she is still considered beautiful.
- If Barbie was a real woman, she’d have to walk on all fours due to her proportions.
- The average woman wears between a size 12-14.
- The models in the magazines are airbrushed – no one, not even the models, look that good without some help!

Now for the scary facts:

- One out of every four college-aged women has an eating disorder.
- A psychological study in 1995 found that three minutes spent looking at a fashion magazine caused 70% of women to feel depressed, guilty, and shameful.

- Twenty years ago, models weighed 8% less than the average woman. Today they weigh 23% less.

As a result of this episode, I have decided to get rid of the magazines that come to my house that may influence my children in a negative way. Sure, it’s great to read about how to get healthier and fitter, but I can find other avenues to do this without having month after month of sexy magazines coming to my house pounding the message in.



Strategies for Waking Up Early to Exercise



So many of us need to exercise but the only way we can fit it into our schedule is to do it in the early morning. But what if we are not morning people?

Think baby steps. Before you set your alarm two hours earlier than normal to start exercising only to end up disappointing yourself by hitting the snooze button or trudging through an uncomfortable workout, try the following tips:

Your initial goal should be to wake up a mere 10 to 15 minutes earlier than usual. Just roll out of bed and onto the floor for a few easy yoga poses or a quick set of push-ups, sit-ups, lunges or jogging in place. You don’t even have to change out of your pajamas! Then on alternating days, climb the stairs, try some step-ups on the first step, take a quick jog around the block or try a few moves to an exercise video.

At this point, what you do isn’t as critical as getting into a habit of doing something- anything- every morning. In other words, for the first few days, simply concentrate on making those 10-15 minutes of activity happen any way you can. Then gradually increase your workout time, by getting up 5 minutes earlier each day, until you are exercising for at least 30 minutes each morning. After a few weeks, your exercise routine will become a habit and you won’t even want to hit the snooze button!

Source: *Prevention.com*

No Child Left Inside

Getting outside and moving around is a great way for both adults and children to get or stay healthy. Children not only discover nature's wonders in a unique way during each outing, but it is also a great way for them to avoid obesity and ailments, which may result from lack of movement. Instead of grabbing the next bag of chips and watching excessive TV, your kids will quickly get in the habit of wanting to get out and make things happen in the heart of nature. How can parents make it more interesting for their kids to get out and get active?

Lead by example: If you are truly interested in the outdoors, then half the battle is won. Just be yourself, get out, and enjoy nature. Children will sense your enjoyment and will soon follow. Pretty soon, your children will be pulling YOU off the couch to jog on the moss-bedded forest path, jump from rock to rock along the stream, or simply look and listen to the sights and sounds of the surroundings while taking your daily family walk.

Make reading children's books about nature exploration part of your regular reading routine with your children. Let your child choose his or her favorite book character – be it a boy, girl, or animal. Discuss that character's

discoveries in nature and compare them to those you and your child make. If the character made certain discoveries that you can realistically see or do in nature near you, make that your goal on your next expedition. Christopher Robin, Winnie the Pooh, and friends set out in the Hundred Acre Woods to find the North Pole. The pole turned out to be a long branch that they loudly proclaimed to be the North Pole.

In other words, your goals or discussions in nature don't always have to be too serious or scientific. It's about having fun and bonding. The stories you read and the goals you set before you take your walks give you and your child the possibility to talk about your expectations before leaving home. They give you something to refer to during



your walks or swims – even something to be silly about, or laugh about.

Sitting at the dinner table can sometimes be boring for a kid. Use these opportunities to talk about your nature adventures. Discuss the vibrant color of a flower. Let your child take the lead and share what they discovered on an outing.

Offer habit and variety: Children love ritual. So do take those walks along the same path. But also offer variety. Take a bike ride on a new path, go for a swim in a different lake, or ride a pony with your children. Your children will continue to feel the warmth of the better-known "home" path. But an occasional change of pace will help expand their horizons and wake their curiosity even more.

Include other children: Bring the neighbors' kids along. Children love their parents. But when children see that other children are also interested in climbing trees in the woods and playing hide-and-seek in the yard, they will be that much more motivated to get out. Inspire them to do whatever interests them most.

Source: www.wellness.com.
Mark J. Stevens

Lending Library



The *Wellness Works* Lending Library has many materials that can help those who want to take control of their finances. In our library you can find books and audio cassettes that address financial issues that you may be facing such as living paycheck to paycheck, paying debt down, and retirement planning. To borrow materials *free of charge* from the *Wellness Works* Lending Library, contact Amanda Collins at 1-800-452-8786 extension 283 or via e-mail at acollins@memun.org. To view the entire list of materials that the Lending Library has to offer check out our website at www.mmeht.org. Click on *Wellness Works*, then click on Lending Library. There you can search for items by subject or see the entire list of the materials in the Lending Library.

You don't stop laughing
because you grow old. You
grow old because you stop
laughing.

~ Michael Pritchard

How to be Happy

Many studies have proven that people who are happy are also healthier, less stressed, and less likely to suffer from conditions like heart disease and diabetes. So how can you get rid of the gloominess and start looking at the bright side of life? Try these secrets to making your world a little happier:

1. Challenge yourself. People are often happier when they are working toward a goal than after they have reached it. This is because working toward something gives your life purpose, which makes you feel good. So start challenging yourself – learn a new language or master a new hobby, it will boost your mood!
2. Say NO! This is usually one of the first words we learn to say as a child, but one of the hardest ones to use as adults. Saying ‘yes’ to everything can leave you feeling overwhelmed and overcommitted, which may make you cranky. So before you say “yes,” consider the request and determine whether it is something you really want to do and if you have room in your schedule to do it.
3. Pay cash. Shopping is one way that some people improve their mood; however, if you are simply swiping the plastic for every purchase you are going to have a big problem when the bills come in. Paying cash can help ensure that you aren’t spending beyond your means and can help you avoid the overwhelming credit card bills that can put you in a grumpy mood.
4. Make memories. Someone once said that, “We spend too much time

making a living and not enough time making a life.” Is this true in your life? Spending time doing things that you enjoy – like family vacations – brings more joy than having things like a fancy car. Memories can last a long time and make you feel good, even when you aren’t having the best day.

Source: Intelligence for Your Life, www.tesh.com/radio



Spring Cleaning – Things You NEED to Throw Away!

Spring cleaning isn’t just about washing your windows and cleaning your linen, it is also a good time to throw out some personal items that may be past their prime. Below is a list of often forgotten areas for spring cleaning:

- ❖ Toothbrush – Toss it after 4 months, or sooner if the bristles have begun to fray. The American Dental Association says that worn-out bristles can’t clean between your teeth so you may be missing some crucial areas when brushing!
- ❖ Running shoes – Toss them if you have logged 400 miles (about 80 hours) of running; sooner if your shoes tilt to one side while sitting on a flat surface. The cushioning support of the sneaker does wear out and can increase your risk of injury to your feet, ankles, knees, hips and back.
- ❖ Kitchen sponge – Believe it or not, food safety experts recommend throwing your sponge out after just one week of use or sooner if it starts to smell funny! Sponges tend to be full of bacteria that can spread to your food.
- ❖ Natural loofah sponges – If you like to scrub your skin with a loofah to exfoliate, be sure it is made of nylon, which is bacteria resistant. The natural loofah sponges tend to harbor harmful bacteria that can create skin infections. Nylon loofahs need to be replaced every few months because they become less effective in cleaning and exfoliating with every use.

Flat Tummy, Healthy Heart

The measurements of your waist and hips can help you determine if your heart is healthy. If you have noticed a few extra inches around the waist, it may not just be time for an appointment with your trainer, but with your physician as well. The Journal of the American College of Cardiology shows that extra inches in the mid section could point to

plaque build up in your arteries, a major risk factor for cardiovascular disease. It’s true even if your BMI (body mass index) still falls in the normal range. Waist circumference for men should be less than 40 inches; waist circumference for women should be less than 35 inches.

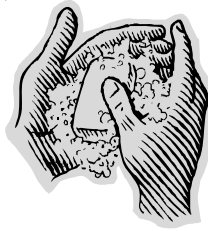


Wash Away the Germs

Hand washing is the single most important factor in reducing the spread of harmful germs and illnesses, but many people aren't washing up. A new study by the American Society for Microbiology and the Soap and Detergent Association found that the rates of people who report washing their hands after using public restrooms have fallen in recent years. While 92% of people in a telephone survey reported washing up after using the restroom, only 77% were observed doing so, a drop of 5% from just two years ago! Researchers found that men were the worst offenders, with only 66% observed washing up - an 11% drop since 2005. Women also have some washing up to do, with only 88%

scrubbing up, a decline of 2% since 2005. To be sure you have achieved good hand hygiene every time you wash up, scrub with warm soap and water while you sing Happy Birthday - the time it takes to get you through the song will kill the majority of the germs on your skin.

For more information on this study, visit www.cleaning101.com/newsroom/2007_survey/handhygiene



The 10 Most Germ-Infected Public Places

10. Elevator Buttons
9. Public Telephones
8. Shared Pens
7. Vending Machine Buttons
6. Chair Armrests
5. Escalator Handrails
4. Shopping Cart Handles
3. Public Bathrooms
2. Bus Rails/Armrests
1. Playgrounds

Talking Tact

It seems like no matter where you go these days there is a cell phone ringing nearby. And while it may be a convenience many of us couldn't live without, it is important to remember that talking on a cell phone isn't always the best idea in certain situations. So next time your cell phone starts to ring, keep these simple rules in mind:

1. The people you are with come first. So if you're expecting a call that absolutely can't wait, let your friends know as soon as you meet that you'll need to answer the phone.
2. If you must use your phone in front of others, first explain - for example, "I need to check in with the baby sitter."



3. When you're at a restaurant, you should leave the table to make or receive a call. But don't be away from the table for longer than it would take to go to the bathroom.
4. Theaters, places of worship, and funerals should be call-free zones. Another rule of thumb, if you are in a place where the personal distance between you and others is less than 10 feet, stay off the phone.
5. Finally, if your phone rings at an inopportune time, don't pretend it isn't yours and not answer it! Just shut it off!

Source: *The Tesh Media Group, 2006.*



Avoid Germs at the Gym

How can you avoid picking up germs at the gym? With all the recent reports about drug-resistant infections, it's more important than ever to take precautions. Be sure to wipe down equipment, including handlebars and seats, before and after you use it. Most gyms keep a spray bottle of antiseptic handy. If not, ask for one. Wash your hands after using weights; in fact, wash your hands even if you don't use weights. To prevent athlete's foot and plantar warts, wear a pair of flip-flops around the locker room. Bringing your own yoga mat also lessens your contact with germs. And, please, don't share razors or towels!

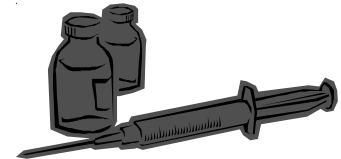


You're Never too Old for Vaccines

While many of us typically think of childhood as the time for vaccinations, there are many vaccines that adults need too! Unfortunately, a recent immunization study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that very few adults are getting the shots necessary to protect them from a range of dangerous diseases. In fact, only 2.1% of adults ages 18-64 had been vaccinated against tetanus, diphtheria and whooping cough. And only 1.9% of people 60 and over had received the new vaccine for shingles, a painful rash that typically affects older adults.

In addition, only 10% of women between the ages of 18-26 had received the new human papillomavirus vaccine that is proven to protect against cervical cancer. Vaccines for the flu and pneumonia among the elderly also seem to be stalled at 60%, well below the 90% goal. Health officials are quick to note that infectious diseases, which we can be vaccinated against, kill more Americans annually than breast cancer, HIV/AIDS or traffic accidents. So what should you be vaccinated against? The CDC recommends that adults have vaccines for chickenpox, diphtheria, hepatitis A, hepatitis B, human papillomavirus/cervical cancer, influenza,

measles, meningococcal disease, mumps, whooping cough, pneumonia, rubella, shingles, and tetanus. (Note: Some vaccinations are recommended at different ages and stages of your life.) Make it a point to discuss the recommended vaccines with your doctor to determine if you are up to date with your shots and to discuss the risk and benefits of these vaccines.



Protect Joint Health For Life – Physical Activity is the Key

Protecting your body's joints is vital at all stages of life, and regular physical activity is an important ingredient in maintaining joint health. Movement is the key to maintaining the function and integrity of the joints.



The way that joints are nourished is through lubrication. The fluid that is in the joints is actually forced into the cartilage by motion. So if you move the joints, it nourishes the cartilage. As long as a person has no warning signs like swelling or developing pain, exercise can be beneficial.

As people age, joints can feel tighter and creakier, and the first inclination may be to stop or restrict physical activity. This inclination can actually be detrimental to long-term joint health. According to the American Academy of Orthopedic

Surgeons (AAOS), inactivity in old age can weaken muscle size and strength, decrease bone density and mass, and cause tendons and ligaments to lose some of their elasticity. All of this makes a person more susceptible to injury. The AAOS recommends moderate exercise three to four times a week to help reduce joint pain and to prevent and manage osteoporosis and osteoarthritis.

Source: *Family Safety & Health*
Fall 2007

Is it Alzheimer's?

If you forget to pick up your dry cleaning once or twice, it's unlikely that dementia is around the corner. Letting a few errands slip isn't a sure sign of the disease. Some symptoms that you should pay attention to, however, include loss of control over speech, trouble completing simple tasks that once came easy to you, like balancing a checkbook, and confusion about where you are.



Memory losses may simply be due to a shortage of certain vitamins such as vitamin B-12, but don't run out and purchase a bottle of vitamin B-12 until you speak with your physician. You can find these vitamins in meats, chicken, fish, dairy products, and fortified breakfast cereals.

It is also important to decompress (release your stress). Studies show that people who are prone to worry, anxiety or even depression may be more likely to develop a condition that is a precursor to Alzheimer's. If you are concerned about

your memory issues, speak with your physician; he/she will help you decide what course of action to take next.



On-Call

On-Call is a medical self-care program for members of the Maine Municipal Employees Health Trust. It helps individuals to assess a variety of health concerns by answering three basic questions:

- *Is this a medical emergency?*
- *Should I see or call my doctor?*
- *Can I treat myself at home and if so, how?*

Medical Self-Care Topic of the Quarter – Hay Fever

Hay fever (allergic rhinitis) is the most common respiratory allergy and is a response to inhaled substances called allergens. Among adults, dust, animal dander, molds, feathers, and pollen are the most common allergens. Animal dander and dust are the most common allergens among infants. For most people, allergy season is a period of moderate discomfort, but for others, pollen or dust can cause significant physical problems and be a year-round challenge. Those who suffer from severe allergies should consult with a doctor; however, people who have mild to moderate hay fever can follow simple home care tips to reduce the burden.

Signs/Symptoms

- Runny nose, sneezing.
- Watery, itchy eyes.
- Wheezing.
- Stuffy head, clogged sinuses, headache.
- Throat irritation, from postnasal drip.

Talk to Your Doctor If:

- You have difficulty breathing or severe wheezing.
- Nasal discharge is green or yellow.
- You would like more effective relief from your allergy symptoms than you are getting with home care.
- Your symptoms are getting worse.

If none of the above are factors, try these Homecare relievers:

Medication:

- Antihistamines may help relieve your symptoms. Be sure to use caution and read the label before use.
- Nasal decongestants for stuffy head. Do not use them for more than three days.
- Cough drops will soothe your throat if it is irritated.

Rest:

- You may need more rest when an allergic reaction strikes.

Prevention:

- If possible, avoid contact with allergens that bother you.
- Keep house pets out of bedrooms.
- Try to keep your pet clean and groomed.
- Dust allergies can be reduced by wrapping your pillows and mattresses in special covers and washing sheets weekly in hot water.
- Consider using a portable air filter in your bedroom.

Additional Tips:

- Blow your nose gently to clear mucus. Do not blow hard, which may cause an ear infection or bloody nose.
- If mowing the lawn, gardening, dusting, or vacuuming aggravates your symptoms, wear a mask while doing those chores.
- If you're allergic to molds, consider using an air conditioner with an electrostatic filter during the summer.

The goal of a Medical Self-Care program is not to deter you from seeking medical attention, but rather to make you more aware of the types of treatment you should seek out. Once you know how to proceed in a particular situation, you will be better able to ask questions, make informed decisions, and have a better relationship with your healthcare provider. Always be sure to check with your doctor if a Homecare remedy goes against your normal course of treatment or if you have been warned against using particular products due to other health conditions.

Source: *WellInformed*, 2004



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Maine Municipal Employees Health Trust
60 Community Drive
Augusta, ME 04330

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Newsletter Search Contest

Do you want a chance to win a *Wellness Works* gym bag? Take a few minutes and answer the following questions (all answers can be found in articles in this newsletter). Send the answers along with your name, address and phone number to: *Wellness Works*, 60 Community Drive, Augusta, Maine 04330. You can also e-mail your answers to us at: **wellness@memun.org**. Entries must be received by April 30, 2008. One winner will be drawn at random.

Congratulations to Stacey Clement, Town of Hancock, who won the Winter Newsletter Search Contest!

Your Name: _____ Phone Number: _____

Address: _____

Employer (or former employer, if you are a retiree): _____

1. List three symptoms of memory loss that you should be concerned about. _____

2. Why are health professionals concerned about extra fat that is carried around the middle? _____

3. List three signs and symptoms of hay fever. _____
4. Why should you dispose of kitchen sponges after a week of use? _____

5. What are some health benefits of being a happy person? _____

