

Preparing for surgery

STEPS TO HELP EASE THE WAY

WHEN YOU'RE going to have surgery, it's understandable to be a little nervous. Even outpatient surgery, which doesn't require a hospital stay, can cause some anxiety.

But there are some steps you can take to ease your worries. Understanding the process and planning ahead a bit can help pave the way for a smoother time and a faster recovery, says Kevin Thomas, MD, Chairman of Surgery at United Regional.

For starters, be sure to ask your doctor about anything you don't understand.

"It is important that you understand why you are having surgery and what the outcomes will be," Dr. Thomas says.

TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

Giving yourself a little extra care now can help prepare your body to handle surgery. Get plenty of rest and eat a well-balanced diet. Your doctor may suggest a daily multi-vitamin as well.

Some additional steps from leading health authorities:

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A few questions worth asking

If you are scheduled for surgery weeks or days in advance, take advantage of this time by asking your doctor any questions you have.

As a surgeon, Dr. Thomas recommends that patients ask the following questions before their procedures:

■ Are there new procedures or minimally invasive procedures that can treat my condition?

- Why do I need this surgery?
- What are the risks and benefits?
- Should I get a second opinion?
- What will happen during surgery?
- What will happen if I don't have the operation?
- What kind of anesthesia will I be given?
- How long will I be in the hospital, and what can I expect during recovery?

Source: American Medical Association

We're at your service

GRANDMA'S CHOCOLATE pie. Mama's meatloaf. Dad's barbeque chicken. Very few things bring back memories of home quite like home cooking. Yet when patients are admitted to the hospital, they may think they need to give up quality cooking for a few days.

That may have been true in the past, but not anymore.

In this age of service excellence, leading hospitals are abandoning traditional meal service programs—food served at times convenient for the hospital and with limited meal choices—for service that provides greater patient satisfaction and comfort.

At United Regional we pride ourselves on providing compassionate, quality care. That care now extends beyond excellent clinical treatment to a new dining experience called Room Service.

FRESH FOOD, FRIENDLY SERVICE

United Regional's Room Service Program encourages patients to choose the time of day they prefer to eat. Patients are no longer required to choose from only one or two options but rather from a full menu (unless a restricted diet is required). Fresh, made-to-order meals are served in the

"There is no love more sincere than the love of food."
—George Bernard Shaw, Irish playwright (1856-1950)



patient's room within 45 minutes of the patient placing the order.

"The Room Service Program is about meeting and exceeding the expectations of our patients," says Phyllis Cowling, President and CEO of United Regional. "We want to provide patients with choice in a setting and circumstances that often seem to limit patient choice and flexibility."

The program has been extremely successful. United Regional patients

are rating food quality, temperature and delivery higher than ever in satisfaction surveys. And patient letters complimenting the food are no longer a novelty.

At United Regional our passion is to provide excellence in health care for the communities we serve. With the Room Service Program, our passion for excellence now means providing the quality food you want, when you want it.

Bon appétit! ♦

For more information on our services, visit our website at www.unitedregional.org.

Stepping out!

AROUND THE block, up the street, down the lane—no matter which way you go, walking can move you toward better health.

For starters, walking can boost energy and relieve stress. And, over time, it can help control weight, lower blood pressure, reduce the risk of heart disease, and strengthen muscles and bones.

Why not start today? Step out with these pointers from the National Institutes of Health.

Dress smart. Choose synthetic fabrics that absorb sweat and remove it from your skin. Also wear shoes with good arch support, sturdy heels and thick, flexible soles.

Warm up and cool down. Think of your walk in three parts. First, warm up by walking slowly for five minutes. Next, increase your speed

and do a brisk walk. Finally, cool down by walking slowly for another five minutes.

Add stretching. Try doing a few minutes of gentle stretching after you warm up and again after you cool down.

Practice good posture. Keep your chin up and shoulders slightly back. Swing your arms naturally and breathe deeply.

Shake things up. Try walking with a friend or listening to music. Vary your routine by walking up and down hills, lengthening your stride or picking up the pace.

Set goals. One example might be to add a block a day to your walk. Track your progress in a walking journal or log. Using a pedometer is another way to track your walking.

Stick with it. Fit 10-minute walks into your schedule whenever you can, but aim for at least 30 minutes a day, five days a week.

It's consistency that's key to gaining health benefits from walking, says the American College of Sports Medicine. ❖



Just out your door is a path that can take you to better health.

Hunting for whole grains

HEALTHY, HEARTY whole grains are a must-have, indeed.

Whole-grain foods contain the entire grain kernel, which is loaded with fiber and other nutrients. When you make whole grains part of your diet, you may be helping to prevent heart disease and diabetes while reaping other health benefits.

But how can you know if you are actually getting whole grains? Color isn't a reliable clue, since brown wheat bread isn't necessarily whole wheat. And the phrases

multigrain or *wheat flour* are no guarantee either.

However, there is a simple strategy you can use: Check the label for the word *whole* listed first in the ingredients, as in *whole-wheat flour* or *whole cornmeal*. The first ingredient is in the greatest amount.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, at least half of your daily grain servings should come from whole grains, such as popcorn and whole-grain breads, cereals and pastas.

So grab your grains and enjoy them every day! ❖

Seize the day!

LIFE IS BUSY, BUT YOUR
HEART NEEDS YOU TOO

Women are notorious for taking care of family needs before their own.

But if you ask your family to list the things they want you to do, at the top would probably be this: Stay healthy.

Luckily, each day holds opportunities to protect your health, especially when it comes to your heart.

KNOW YOUR RISKS

Heart disease is the number one killer of women in the U.S., according to the American Heart Association (AHA). In fact, one in three adult women has some form of cardiovascular disease.

There's no such thing as zero risk, says Bruce Palmer, MD, a Wichita Falls cardiologist. All women need to do things in their daily lives to reduce their risk for heart disease.

If that sounds like a long-term commitment, you're



right. A woman's risk for heart disease is a lifetime issue, and controlling it starts early.

According to Dr. Palmer, that means seeing your doctor to assess your risks. It's best to start as early as your 20s—but it's never too late. Make an appointment to talk about your personal risk, including these factors:

- Family history of heart disease.
- Cholesterol—aim for a total cholesterol level of under 200 mg/dL.
- Blood pressure—less than 120 over 80 mm Hg is best.
- Weight—try to keep your body mass index under 25.
- Blood sugar—high levels can indicate diabetes, which affects heart health.
- Smoking—it triples your risk for a heart attack.

Knowing your risks can help you make plans for reducing them.

Of course, life brings changes, and your heart disease risks can change throughout your life.

Dr. Palmer encourages women to make their heart health a regular topic of discussion during medical checkups.

DESIGN A HEALTHY DAY

Fitting heart-healthy choices into each day takes some planning. Be sure to make one of

your plans to get some exercise.

“Exercise is the foundation of heart disease prevention,” Dr. Palmer says. Aim for at least 30 minutes of aerobic exercise five days each week. Boost your fitness further by adding at least two sessions of strength training a week.

Along with exercise, a healthy diet can help you lose weight and lower other risks as well.

Eat plenty of fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Choose nonfat or low-fat dairy products, and if you eat meat, stay with lean cuts. Replace saturated fat and trans fats

Remember, your healthy choices can impact the well-being of your family.

with mono-unsaturated and poly-unsaturated fats. Cut back on salt.

For women, smoking is the single biggest risk factor for heart attack. Quitting is tough, but the payoff is worth it: One year after quitting, your heart disease risk will be cut in half.

THUMBS UP OR DOWN?

Vitamins and other therapies may help, but with so much information out there, it's hard to know what really works.

Here is what experts from the heart association have to say:

■ Do get some omega-3 fatty acids. The best way is to eat fatty fish—such as salmon, herring or trout—twice a week.

■ Don't count on hormone therapy to prevent heart disease. Studies show it may reduce risks for some women but raise them for others.

■ If you're over 65, consider taking a daily low-dose aspirin (81 milligrams). Talk with your doctor first. If you have other risk factors for heart disease, you might benefit from taking aspirin earlier or taking a higher dose.

■ Folic acid has not been shown to prevent heart disease, though women who could become pregnant

still need it to prevent certain birth defects.

PAY IT FORWARD

“When women establish healthy habits, it does more than improve their own heart health—it most likely improves the health of their families as well,” Dr. Palmer says.

That means more young people headed for healthier lives.

Sounds like a plan. ❖

**Register
to win
today!**

High blood pressure increases the risk of heart attack and stroke. Take care of yourself by monitoring your blood pressure at home. To register to win one of five automatic blood pressure monitors, call Call-A-Nurse at 940-764-8570 or 800-982-9799 or visit www.unitedregional.org and click on the blood pressure registration link on the home page. Registration is accepted until March 31.



When joints hurt

SURGICAL SOLUTIONS FOR WEARY, SORE JOINTS

JOINTS ARE among the most hardworking parts of your body.

Hips, knees, shoulders, elbows and wrists—even your fingers—take on the stresses of daily living and eventually suffer from wear and tear.

“When joints hurt, medicines, exercise, and heat or cold applications may provide relief,” says Michael Sheen, MD, an orthopedic surgeon with United Regional’s Orthopedic and Sports Medicine Center. “But if the pain is severe, it may be time to discuss surgical options.”

What type of surgery is best for you depends on the joint that is affected and the cause of the problem, Dr. Sheen says.

JOINT SURGERIES

There are several surgical approaches to treat joint pain.

Arthroplasty is used to resurface or reline the ends of bones when cartilage has worn away and bone has been destroyed.

During joint replacement, damaged bone or joint tissue is removed and replaced with metal, ceramic and plastic parts. Replacement is



Our Orthopedic and Sports Medicine Center provides surgical and rehabilitation options just for you.

most commonly used for hips and knees. Shoulder, elbow and finger joints can also be replaced.

Arthrodesis is another treatment that involves fusing the two bones that form a joint. The fused joint loses flexibility but is better able to bear weight, is more stable and is not painful. Arthrodesis

can relieve pain in ankles, wrists, fingers and thumbs.

Arthroscopic surgery involves inserting a thin tube with a light and a tiny video camera at the end (arthroscope) into the joint through a small incision. The camera sends a picture to a monitor. The doctor can then see and repair problems, such as a torn cartilage or ligaments, using small surgical instruments inserted through incisions. Also, it can be used to smooth rough joint surfaces. Arthroscopy is used most often on knees and shoulders.

In osteotomy, bone is repositioned to correct forces on weight-bearing joints, such as knees. It’s also useful in people with hip arthritis who are too young for a total hip replacement.

THE RISKS AND REWARDS

Joint surgeries are serious procedures that carry risks as well as rewards, Dr. Sheen says.

It is important that you understand the risks and rewards of orthopedic surgery. Be sure to discuss the type of rehabilitation that might be necessary as well as what type of outcome you can expect from surgery. ❖

Sources: American Medical Association; Arthritis Foundation

Considering joint surgery: Is it time?

The decision to have joint surgery is not to be made lightly. Usually, surgery is the last resort for a painful condition.

Dr. Sheen says it may be time to talk with an orthopedic surgeon if you are experiencing any of the following:

- Increasing pain that has not been helped by medications or other methods of pain relief.
- Significant loss of ability to move comfortably. For example, you may have trouble with daily tasks, such as walking, bathing and dressing.
- Increased dependence on friends and family members to help you take care of yourself.

A story from the heart

This story is part of United Regional Foundation's annual Heart of a Woman effort to raise funds for the Cardiac Institute and patient education materials to raise awareness of the risks women face from heart disease, and to help decrease those risks by encouraging healthy lifestyles and regular medical attention.

Shortly before Christmas in 2005, Marilyn noticed her heart would often beat rapidly, sometimes feeling as if it were running away. She told herself she was too busy and needed to slow down. She was sure there was nothing wrong with her heart because she had been to the cardiologist two years before and had passed her stress test with flying colors.



She had seen her nurse practitioner, Alicia, a few times during the past year complaining of nausea, but the cause was never determined. Marilyn felt it was something she had eaten and never told Alicia about the racing heart.

In October 2006 Marilyn returned to Alicia complaining of lower back pain. As her vital signs were checked, the staff was having a difficult time getting a good blood pressure reading and pulse. Alicia ordered an EKG and told Marilyn she wanted her to see an electrophysiologist as soon as possible. Marilyn reluctantly agreed, confident there was nothing wrong with her heart.

The morning of the appointment began with a sonar and echocardiogram of the heart. While waiting for a stress test, Marilyn's doctor asked her if she could feel her heart

beating. She told him yes and said her heart had been beating like that for so long she thought it was normal. He told her what she had been experiencing for the past year was not normal.

He sent her straight to the hospital with a heart rate of 188 beats per minute, far more than the normal rate of 65. Following further testing and observation, she was diagnosed with atrial fibrillation—a condition fortunately controlled by medication.



THE GIFT OF A SMILE: 4-year-old Justin Dozier received a stuffed animal and book for Christmas from a Children's Miracle Network donor. Nurse Robin Grissom joined in on the fun.

Spirit of Giving

Each year United Regional employees make contributions to assist with hospital and community projects through their Spirit of Giving campaign. For 2008, employees have made gifts totaling \$224,097 to projects such as:

- Children's Miracle Network: \$81,299
- Friendship Fund: \$45,991
- United Way: \$39,326
- Capital Campaign: \$39,307
- Rathgeber Hospitality House: \$18,174

Funds raised through Children's Miracle Network help provide state-of-the-art pediatric technology and care in all United Regional departments that treat infants and children.

The Friendship Fund provides short-term, interest-free emergency loans to employees who experience unexpected, catastrophic financial difficulties.

Contributions to the Capital Campaign will assist in building and equipping the new Bridwell Tower.

Rathgeber Hospitality House operates solely on contributions, providing a home away from home for families of United Regional patients who live outside Wichita Falls.

This past year, 82 percent of United Regional's 1,815 employees participated by attending a Spirit of Giving presentation, and 67 percent—1,231 employees—made a contribution. ❖

Heart disease is the number one cause of death for women because they often ignore the warning signs. If Marilyn had discussed all of her symptoms—rapid heart beat, nausea, back pain—with Alicia she may have prevented a year of discomfort. Fortunately, she has no damage to her heart.

Can you relate to this story? Communication and regular visits to your doctor are the best tools for heart disease prevention. ❖

Surgery

—Continued from front page

- If you are a smoker, you can do yourself a favor by quitting—or at least cutting back—before surgery. Smoking delays healing.
- Ask your doctor if you should stop taking aspirin or other medications before surgery. Tell your doctor about any prescription and over-the-counter medicines or dietary supplements you use.

DEALING WITH DETAILS

Before your surgery, you'll be given any special instructions—they will likely include not eating or drinking anything after the previous midnight.

Other general advice:

- Ask your doctor about home

health care if your recovery may be extensive.

- Consider having someone help with household tasks while you recover.
- Arrange for transportation to and from the hospital.
- Leave any valuables at home.

Need a doctor?
Go to www.unitedregional.org and click on "Find a Doctor."

GETTING BETTER

To help your recovery, a nurse or other medical professional will help you start

walking as soon as possible after surgery—walking aids healing. Pain medication may help you feel more comfortable.

Once you are home, you can help speed your recovery by following your discharge instructions, which give advice about your diet, activities and symptoms to watch for. And as always, don't hesitate to call your doctor if you have questions. ❖



HEALTH INFORMATION

Just a call or click away

UNITED REGIONAL'S Call-A-Nurse hotline is staffed by registered nurses who are available to answer general health questions and make physician referrals. The nurses are available Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

United Regional also provides health information via our new, updated website. You can access information regarding hospital services, see biographical information on our medical staff or learn about a variety of health topics by clicking on "Health Watch" in our news category.

Visit us at www.unitedregional.org. ❖

Second Annual Rubber Duck River Derby



Thousands of yellow rubber ducks will race to the finish line on Sunday, May 4, at Castaway Cove in Wichita Falls during the Second Annual Rubber Duck River Derby to benefit Children's

Miracle Network.

For information on adopting a duck, or a "quack pack" of five ducks, contact Juliet Baber at **940-764-8238**.



HEALTHY YOU is published as a community service for the friends and patrons of UNITED REGIONAL HEALTH CARE SYSTEM, 1600 11th St., Wichita Falls, TX 76301, telephone 940-764-7000, website www.unitedregional.org.

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