

# 15A Healthy Body/Healthy Mind

## Dealing with back pain

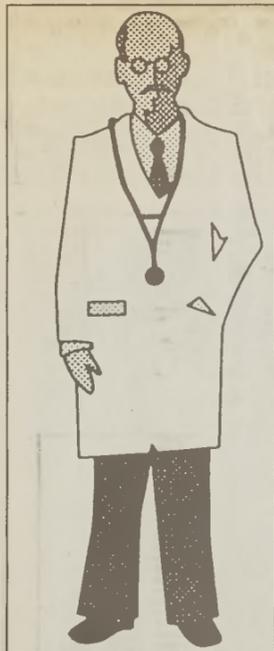
By Dr. James L. Phillips,  
National Newspaper Publishers  
Assoc.

**B**ack pain is one of the most common complaints that many doctors hear. Years ago, a patient may have been told to "just learn to live with it." Today, many cases of chronic back pain can be prevented — if you understand how your back works.

Your spine extends from the neck to the buttocks. Individual bones, or vertebrae, encircle and protect the spinal column and nerves. Your back muscles are attached to the vertebrae, which are separated by discs that cushion the bones.

Common causes of back pain are spasms, tension and muscle pulls or tears. These can occur as a result of muscles which are too weak to properly support the back.

Constant muscle tension is also believed to be a risk factor for degenerative disc disease, a more serious problem that may require surgery to prevent pain and damage to nerves.



Back pain is considered a chronic medical problem when it lasts more than six months and interferes with normal, daily activities. Many people with chronic back problems are not able to find out the cause of the pain and must rely on therapy, exercise and medication to ease the discomfort.

Eighty percent of back pain is caused by muscle or ligament strain, frequently caused by improper lifting or a sudden, awkward movement. Treatment can be as simple as rest and ice for the first 24 hours, after which walking can be resumed, while cold packs are continued.

Strong muscles in the back, legs and abdomen are important to supporting your spine. A regular regimen of exercise targeting those muscles is one good way to prevent injury. Most people recover from back pain in a few weeks, but for 65,000 people annually, back injuries are chronic and disabling. Any back pain lasting more than a few days should be checked by a physician.

## Diflucan picks up in popularity

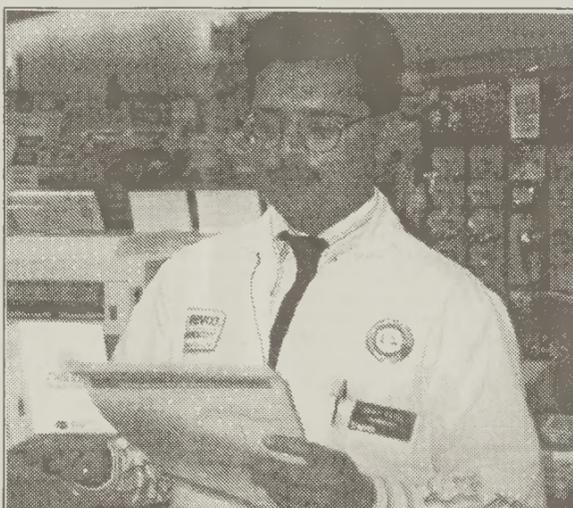
By Andrea R. Richards  
THE CHARLOTTE POST

Yeast infections are the most common type of all vaginal infections, according to the American Medical Women's Association Inc.

The infection occurs when normal bacteria in the vagina decreases. This allows vaginal candidiasis, or yeast, to grow quickly.

Most treatments take as long as a week, but researchers have developed a faster treatment that cures a yeast infection within 24 hours. It's called Diflucan.

Being pregnant, wearing tight pants or stockings, douching too often or taking antibiotics can cause the bac-



PHOTO/ANDREA RICHARDS

Revco pharmacist Shay Patel

terial imbalance. Multiple, recurrent infections are often associated with being diabetic or HIV positive.

Symptoms include a thick white or yellow discharge, vaginal itch or burning, and pain when urinating.

The infection is easily treated with over-the-counter antifungal creams or suppositories, such as Gynolotromin or Monostat-7. These methods can be messy and take about seven days to properly restore the delicate balance.

But Mike Griffin, a pharmacist at Eckerd Drugs, said he has seen an increase in requests for diflucan.

"It's slightly more expensive than using the vaginal cream

for seven days," he said. "The advantage is you take it just one time. We're beginning to dispense the tablet more often."

Diflucan costs about \$16 and is available by prescription only.

Shay Patel, a Revco pharmacist, said the tablet came on the market about a year ago.

"I've seen an increase in women using Diflucan within the last six months," he said. "Especially within the last two months because women are taking more antibiotics to get rid of their coughs and colds."

Possible side effects such as diarrhea, headache, nausea, stomach pain and vomiting may occur.

It is not common for women to have side effects from the tablet, Patel said.

## Infections killing more Americans

By Lauran Neergaard  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — Deaths from infectious diseases rose 58 percent between 1980 and 1992, with the AIDS virus, respiratory diseases and blood infections the main culprits, government scientists said this week.

The increase made infectious diseases the third-leading killer of Americans — either the main cause of death or the underlying cause — and proves the bugs are a rising, if underappreciated, threat to health, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"We have never been more vulnerable," Nobel laureate Joshua Lederberg agreed in an

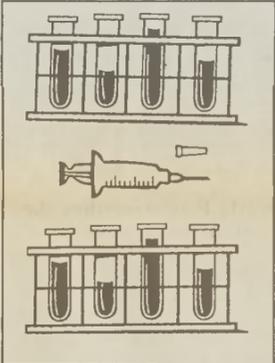
editorial accompanying the report in a special edition of the Chicago-based Journal of the American Medical Association.

The development of antibiotics once had doctors predicting that infectious diseases would be conquered by now. Instead, in the last decade new infections such as HIV suddenly began killing thousands and such older diseases as tuberculosis re-emerged, sometimes strong enough to defy treatment.

"Despite historical predictions that infectious diseases would wane in the United States, these data show that ... mortality has actually been increasing in recent years," said Dr. Robert Pinner, who

headed the CDC study.

The study examined every death certificate filed between 1980 and 1992. Infectious diseases sometimes were the obvious cause of death, such as pneumonia, but Pinner delved



further to see if deaths attributed to, for example, heart disease really were endocarditis, an infection of heart tissue.

Pinner found that 65 deaths among every 100,000 people in 1992 were caused by infectious diseases, up from 41 of every 100,000 in 1980.

Even when he adjusted for the aging of the population during those 12 years — because the elderly are most vulnerable to infectious agents — the rise in fatal infections was 39 percent, the study found.

Only heart disease and cancer killed more people in 1992, Pinner said. Infectious diseases were the No. 5 killer of Americans in 1980.

The AIDS virus accounted for the largest portion of the mortality increase. When Pinner excluded HIV-related deaths, the infectious disease mortality rose just 22 percent between 1980 and 1992.

Mortality from septicemia, a rapid form of bacterial blood poisoning, increased 83 percent, and deaths from respiratory tract infections rose 20 percent.

The increase in respiratory deaths stems mostly from an aging population, but Pinner said public health specialists must discover how greatly antibiotic resistance and other factors may have affected the numbers. He was at a loss to explain the rise in septicemia.

## Winter weather can bring on the blues

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DAYTON, Ohio — While frosty temperatures and snow-blanketed landscapes give some people a lift, they bring on a kind of depression known as the wintertime blues for many.

Kevin Huban, a clinical psychologist at Miami Valley Hospital, said the blues can hit as people decrease their activity and spend more time indoors.

"I get down because of the weather," Jessie Walker, of Dayton, said Monday. "I lose energy. It's like I want to stay in bed."

January is usually the busiest month for psychotherapists, said John Rudisill, director of applied psychology at Wright State University's school of medicine.

"When people are cooped up, we also see an increase in domestic violence and conflict erupting because people don't have other outlets," Rudisill said.

Add to that the trauma of bad weather, which limits activities and forces changes in routine.

"Initially, a change of routine is great," said Tom Rueth, associate professor of counselor education at the University of Dayton.

"That's what a vacation is. But after a while, that becomes kind of a chore to deal with because you want to get back to the routine."

Rose Christian has noticed a change in mood among shop-



pers at the Dayton Mall, where she works as an assistant manager of the Discovery Zone, a children's play store.

"People are just edgier," Christian said. "When you check them in, they want to be in quicker. They're just not as happy. None of us are. We're all getting a bit tired of it."

So, faced with months of winter yet to come, what's the cure?

Keep active, psychologists said.

Rudisill also said people should lower their expectations. Instead of seeing snow drifts as obstacles, look at them as an excuse to stay put and read more, catch up on a hobby or spend more time with family.

"Try to put some structure in your life," Rueth said. "When you're down, it's hard to energize what to do next because you say, 'I don't have

enough energy.' But if you just passively watch TV or something, that has a tendency to decrease energy rather than increase it."

Rueth said the blues is a normal reaction to stress.

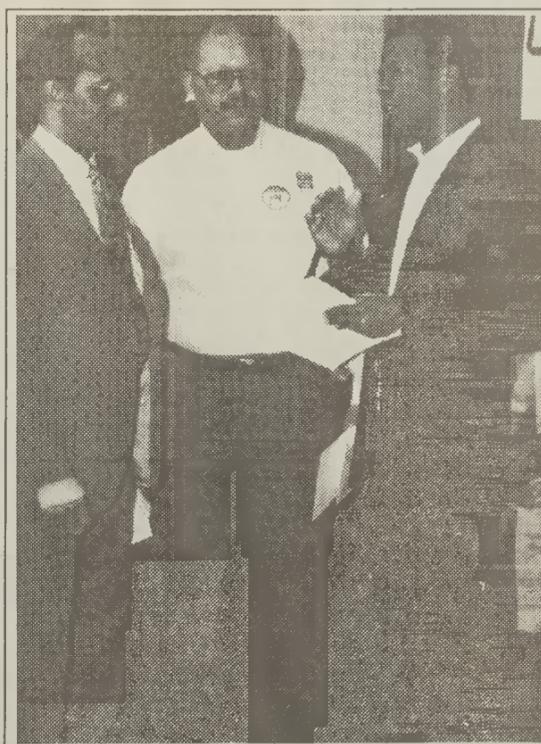
"But there's a tendency in a lot of us to tough it out, to say, 'I don't need help just because I feel depressed,'" he said. "If it lasts a long time and begins to impair your function, then you ought to do something about it."

And then there are people like Barbara Bowman, who loves the winter.

"It's absolutely my favorite time of year," said Bowman, 42, of Dayton. "I don't get the winter blues, absolutely never."

Get out more, she advises. People "really need to find the positive things about the winter. Go out and shop for yourself."

## RED CROSS



PHOTO/CHARLES CLARKSON

The 26th annual WBTW-WBT Sunny FM Blood Give-In was held Jan. 11. Actor Clarence Gilyard (right) of Walker Texas Ranger made a guest appearance. More than 980 people participated. The American Red Cross Sickle Cell program was a big part of this year's event. Many children with sickle cell require regular blood transfusions as part of their treatment. The goal of the program was to find six or more donors whose blood make-up matches that of the sickle cell patient. Because children with sickle cell receive transfusions every two to four weeks, six to 10 matching donors are needed for each child. Donations can be made every 56 days and takes about 10 minutes.

—Andrea Richards