

B

LIFE

Section

Take home HIV test

By Maiya Norton
NATIONAL NEWSPAPER PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

WASHINGTON — The Food and Drug Administration's Blood Products Advisory Committee is in the preliminary stages of determining whether to allow HIV tests to be sold over the counter.

The pros and cons of such wide access were discussed during a recent panel discussion involving members of the FDA, HIV/AIDS activists, professors and manufacturers.

OraSure Technologies, the manufacturing company of the OraSure and OraQuick rapid testing methods, is pushing for a space on the shelf at the pharmacy. Such tests would allow people to anonymously learn their HIV status in less than an hour, without hassle and potentially without immediate counseling.

"It's kind of early to know where things stand," says Jessica Frickey, spokesperson for the Centers for Disease Control. Present at the FDA's recent panel, Frickey realized a lot more research needs to be done before the CDC takes a position on it.

"Bottom line: If more people would be willing to take a test at home and find out their status then that's the best outcome we could ask for," Frickey says. "We have data that shows when people know they have HIV, they take steps to protect their partners from infection."

Much of that data was collected by physicians. And the home test could lessen interaction with a medical expert.

Throughout her college years at Spelman College in Atlanta, Daniela Edison made regular HIV testing a way of life. Though she felt uncomfortable with the physicians discussing the testing with her, she now understands the impact they had.

"It was embarrassing, to be young and talking about safe sex and everything with a stranger," Edison says. "I've been blessed to be okay, but if I wasn't I would have needed a counselor there for comfort."

Imaginations can run wild when thinking about the implications of at-home testing. People could easily misunderstand their tests or lash out emotionally and harm themselves or others. Even though panelists were divided over where administering a test at home is the best course of action, most can agree that having some form of formal counseling and education about HIV AIDS testing, prevention and treatment is vital.

"Certainly if you take an HIV test of this nature, a test that searches for antibodies to HIV, if you get a negative test it doesn't necessarily mean that you don't have HIV," Frickey says. "It could mean that you have HIV and your antibodies aren't yet detectable."

That's why some have reservations.

"I think I would lean toward it not being available unless counseling was a part of purchasing the product which you and I both know isn't going to happen," says Clarence Stewart, certified sex educator with the American Association of Sex Educators, Counselors and Therapists. "You're dealing with something that will kill you or something that you will have the rest of your life. You mean to tell me that once you find out that you are not going to want to talk to somebody?"

With African-American women in the lead for being at risk, Stewart is concerned for those who are primarily getting infected from their male part-

Please see AIDS/2B



PHOTO/WADE NASH

Americans gain about one pound from Thanksgiving to New Year's Day. But that can be avoided.

Holidays + meals don't have to = extra pounds

By Chris F. Hodges
chris.hodges@thecharlottepost.com

'Tis the season to be jolly, but you don't have to end up round like Santa once the holidays are over.

Thanksgiving kicks off the eating season and many Americans will gain weight over this period. And how can you not when traditional holiday dinners are dripping in good taste and fat?

A recent report from the National Institutes of Health states that

Americans gain about one pound between Thanksgiving and New Year's. However, what the report doesn't address is how those pounds add up over the years.

Other medical studies, according to an article from *Stripe*, the Walter Reed Medical Center newsletter, the holiday pounds, unlike the holiday ham, don't disappear.

"These findings suggest that developing ways to avoid holiday weight gain

may be extremely important for preventing obesity and the diseases associated with it," said NICHHD Director Duane Alexander M.D.

"Although an average holiday weight gain of less than a pound may seem unimportant, that weight was not lost over the remainder of the year," Dr. Jack A. Yanovski said. When 165 of the study volunteers were weighed a year after the study began, they had not lost

the extra weight gained during the holidays, and ended the year 1.4 pounds heavier than they were the year before.

"This is a good news/bad news story," said Yanovski. "The good news is that people don't gain much weight as we thought during the holidays. The bad news is that weight gained over

Please see HOLIDAY/2B

Cancer survivors inspire screenings

By T. Kevin Walker
THE CHRONICLE

WINSTON-SALEM— Mary Gregg doesn't suit-up in combat fatigues each day. She carries no assault rifles or grenades. But Gregg is in battle against an enemy that she knows all too well.

"My two daughters were diagnosed with breast cancer. One of them died from it.... She was 38," said Gregg, who turned 71 in July.

Her daughters' diagnoses promoted Gregg to get checked. She was told that she also had breast cancer. The news came not long after her daughter's death in 2003. Gregg has been fighting the disease for about a year and a half now. Her weapons are her faith,

strength and sheer determination.

"Every day I try to put it behind me and keep on moving," she said. "It has been so far, so good."

Gregg is one of 12 local black women featured in the latest edition of the YWCA *Sister, Speak!* calendar. Pictures of the women - all breast cancer survivors - are featured, as are their personal stories of coping and surviving.

"These are their own stories, in their own words," said Betty Meadows, coordinator of *Sister, Speak!*, a more-than-5-year-old YWCA program that educates black women about breast cancer. *Sister, Speak!* also facilitates support groups and provides free mammograms

Please see CANCER/2B

So what does it mean to be southern?

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CARY — The joke around here is that this town's name is really an acronym for "Containment Area for Relocated Yankees."

As far as Vernon Yates is concerned, they haven't been contained well enough.

Nearly surrounded by pricey subdivisions, the cinderblock Yates Grocery and Farm Supply sells neither anymore. As if things weren't bad enough, style maven Martha Stewart has chosen this Raleigh suburb to build a signature neighborhood of houses

designed after her homes in Maine and New York.

Holding court near a potbellied stove, the 69-year-old man in the suspenders and NASCAR shirt laments that his old customers have been replaced by fast-talking, SUV-driving Northerners who don't

seem to be able to read a STOP sign.

"It's all gone," Yates, pausing for another spit of tobacco juice, says of the Southern town of his youth. "Everything is completely different from what it used to be."

Please see WHAT/3B

Dispelling everyday misconceptions about epilepsy

By Joshua C. Johnson
DALLAS WEEKLEY

DALLAS — To some, having just one seizure is a terrifying experience-whether it happens to an adult or child-but being diagnosed with epilepsy can be even more frightening.

For Dallas-native Christi Phifer, it was all too easy to tune out the symptoms and downplay the seriousness of the deadly and sometimes-shameful disorder-epilepsy.

"Christmas morning 1995 I was getting out of bed and went into a seizure and I hit my head on a coffee table and blanked out for a minute," said Phifer. "It

totally changed my life."

Now, Phifer isn't able to hold a steady job or legally drive. But she copes.

"I have learned to deal with it and take my medication. This is something I was born with," she explained, adding that she would like to work.

"The last job I had was at UPS," she recalled. "I was interviewed and hired and on my first day of work I got up and had a seizure that morning and bit my lip and had to get stitches."

Consequently, Phifer is no longer employed at UPS. Instead, she stays at home and is constantly under supervision by her family and friends.

Phifer's story isn't too different from the other 350,000 African-Americans who suffer from epilepsy. Although African-Americans are enjoying gains in education, economics and employment, the racial gap in health is widening, according to the Centers for Disease Control.

Epilepsy is a neurological disorder that, from time to time, produces brief disturbances in the electrical patterns of the brain. When someone has epilepsy for brief periods of time, the electrical patterns are more intense than usual.

African-Americans are the largest demographic when it comes to new cases of

epilepsy. According to the Edelman for Epilepsy Foundation, about 24,000 new cases are diagnosed among Blacks every year.

Limited access to health-care, misinformation and stigma within the community further compound the effects of epilepsy.

"There are many stigmas that surround epilepsy," said Stephanie Melson, Greater North Texas Epilepsy Foundation executive director. "People are not aware of the different kinds of seizures and the type that most people know of is tonic-clonic or convulsions where people fall on the floor."

There are a number of



Comfort foods not so great for women

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ALBANY, N.Y.—Comfort food for women often means snuggling up with tub of mint chocolate ice cream to wallow in their blues. For men, it serves as a reward when life is looking rosy.

Just what triggers people to turn to comfort foods—and which ones they pick—often depends on whether you are asking a man or a woman, a new study shows.

It turns out that women are a bit more likely to choose foods high in fat and sugar, such as cake and ice cream—along with a hefty serving of guilt, loneliness and depression.

Men, on the other hand, are more likely to turn to hearty foods like steak and pasta as a reward when they are feeling upbeat.

That's significant because those who associated comfort foods with positive emotions were more likely to pick healthier fare, the study recently published in the journal *Physiology & Behavior* found. The

study was drawn from an online survey of 277 people, more than two-thirds of them women.

"Comfort foods don't have to be high in fat and sugar. Comfort foods can be healthy," said Jordan LeBel, a Cornell University professor and lead author of the study. "This shows we can re-educate people so that comfort foods aren't always about negative emotions."

Foods high in sugar and fat are more efficient in alleviating negative feelings, according to the study. That finding is supported by past research.

But the study also found that those who named comfort foods low in calories—like soups, fruits and vegetables—were more prone to associate them with positive emotions.

"Not everyone uses comfort foods to alleviate stress," LeBel said.

For example, women were 50 percent more likely than men to admit feeling guilty about indulging in comfort foods. At the same time, 40 percent of the women picked high-calorie sweet foods, while 35 percent of men did.

The steaks, pastas and pizza that men generally gravitate toward are not necessarily optimal choices, but are better than the sugary fat-traps chosen by women, LeBel said.

myths and misnomers about seizures and epilepsy. One myth is that seizures and epilepsy are different, when in fact seizures are a symptom of epilepsy.

"One of the major myths is when a person first experiences a seizure there is something they did to set it off," said Dr. Gregory Sterling-Carter, a neurologist at Veteran Affairs Hospital. "For example: fatigue, stress or diet. Something they did rather than something they could avoid."

In about seven out of 10 people with epilepsy, no cause can be found. Among the rest, the cause may be

Please see DISPELLING/2B