



A publication of
Bowman Gray Baptist Hospital
Medical Center

f o r y o u r health

Research for You

The first drug treatment for osteoporosis – brittle bones – that effectively reduces the rates of fracture in high risk women has been approved for use.

A clinical trial of the new drug, conducted at the Bowman Gray School of Medicine and ten other centers, showed the drug alendronate (trade name Fosamax) can reduce the risk of fracture in post-menopausal women by nearly 50 percent.

"These results are expected to have a major impact on the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of osteoporosis in post-menopausal women," said Sara Quandt, Ph.D., associate professor of public health sciences (epidemiology) at Bowman Gray and one of the study investigators.

The Fracture Intervention Trial (FIT) involved 2,027 women between 55 and 81 who already had experienced a crushing of one of the vertebrae in their backs. Part of the group took the drug and were compared to the other part that did not take the drug.

The 36-month study found that additional fractures of vertebra, the bones that surround the spinal cord, were reduced by 47 percent in the group that took the drug. It is these spinal fractures that produce the characteristic "shrinking" in height of osteoporosis.

The drug reduced hip fractures by 51 percent. FIT is the first to show a reduction in hip fractures in a general population of post-menopausal women with osteoporosis, according to Dennis Black, M.D., of the University of California San Francisco, the study's director. "The results are exciting and significant because hip fractures require hospitalization and are the cause of 20 percent of women who suffer hip fractures within a year."

Quandt said that bone is a dynamic tissue, and remodeling goes on constantly. In osteoporosis, "the destruction of bone outpaces the construction." This drug slows down the breakdown and in fact turned around the process.

More than 200 million women worldwide currently suffer from osteoporosis, according to the study investigators. In North Carolina, about 5,000 women had hip fractures in 1995.

See your doctor for more information.

Community Health Calendar

March 21-23

10th Annual Antiques Show & Sale
Benefiting Brenner Children's Hospital
Benton Convention Center
General admission \$8

March 27

Wilhelm Conrad Roentgen's birthday
Discoverer of the X-ray

Center For Health Promotion

All classes below held at
One Piedmont Plaza, Second Floor
1920 West First Street

Basic Stress Reduction Program

March 22, 9:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.
March 26, April 2, April 9, 6:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.
Cost for the four-class program is \$99.
Call for information about the advanced program.

Healthy Eating for Diabetics

Tuesdays, 2 p.m. - 3 p.m.
\$10 per class
March 25 - Good Days, Bad Days, Challenges
April 8 - Food and Your Health
April 15 - Counting Carbohydrates

Health On-Call™

For information on these events, general health care information, or to schedule an appointment with a physician, call 716-2255, or toll-free 800-446-2255.

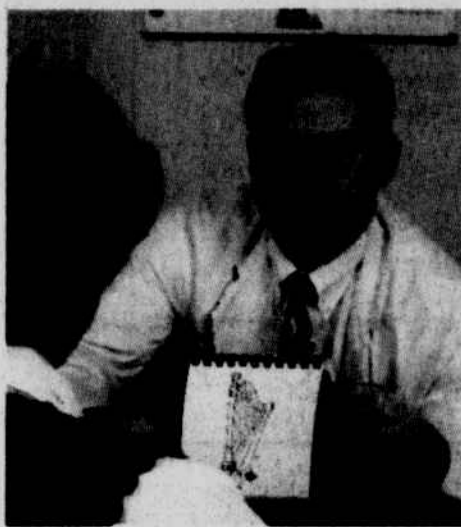
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What did you just call me, Mom?

If your mother called you by your sister's name, you probably would think nothing of it. But if she did it twice in one day, and then forgot she was coming to your house for dinner, should you worry?

Physicians at Bowman Gray/Baptist Hospital Medical Center say some memory lapses are normal, especially during times of stress, but serious memory problems should be evaluated.



John Absher, M.D., uses cognitive testing to evaluate a patient in the Alzheimer's Disease and Memory Disorders Clinic.

Diagnosis Makes All the Difference

Diagnosing the cause of memory problems is important because some disorders can be reversed. And even if the problem isn't curable, such as Alzheimer's disease, new drugs can slow down memory loss and control symptoms such as depression, agitation or sleeping problems.

"There are more than 100 different causes of memory problems," said Paul McGann, M.D., associate professor of internal medicine and clinical director of the J. Paul Sticht Center on Aging. "It's absolutely essential that every older person with a serious memory problem be evaluated."

When to Seek Help

A memory problem is "serious" when it interferes with routine activities, said Bev Jones III, M.D., assistant professor of psychiatry and behavioral medicine and director of adult psychiatry inpatient services.

Examples include getting lost in familiar places; asking the same questions repeatedly; getting confused about time, people and places; forgetting to take medications; neglecting personal care; and becoming unable to handle personal finances.

"If there's a year-long history of these kinds of things happening on a weekly basis, then it should be evaluated," McGann said. "The question families need to ask themselves is 'Compared to five years ago, how often do I find myself going over every week, or even every day to make sure the bills get paid or the clothes get washed?'"

At the Medical Center, patients with memory problems can get a thorough evaluation and diagnosis at the Alzheimer's Disease and Memory Disorders Clinic. The clinic also treats patients who have already been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease by offering the latest treatments to control disease symptoms.

"The clinic is designed so people have immediate access to the kind of help they need," said John Absher, M.D., assistant professor of neurology and the clinic's director.

Patients receive a comprehensive evaluation to reach an accurate diagnosis.

"Correct diagnosis is important because about 15 percent of memory disorders can be reversed or stopped," Absher said. These include memory problems caused by thyroid disorders, side effects of medications, complications of diabetes and vitamin deficiencies.

Stressed out?

Can't eat? Can't sleep? Feel sick to your stomach? Stress might be getting the best of you. We all experience tension from time to time, and that tension can show itself in many ways. The trick to staying healthy is learning how to manage that stress. The Center for Health Promotion at Bowman Gray/Baptist Hospital Medical Center offers a class to teach just that: the Comprehensive Stress Reduction and Relaxation Therapy Program. The class is led by a professional counselor.

Tips the program offers for managing stress include:

1. Stop the stressful thoughts.
2. Breathe slowly in and out, focusing on each breath.
3. Reflect on what caused the stress.
4. Choose a positive reaction.

For more information or to sign up for the class, where you can find out how to make those four steps work, call (910) 716-4982. (See calendar for dates.)

"Very often, memory loss can be related to a medical problem that needs to be addressed," Absher said.

Memory impairment can be the result of silent strokes, for example, which occur in half of people age 70 and over. Identifying and treating this hidden problem can help prevent a major stroke.

Early Action Affects Alzheimer's Disease

Early diagnosis and treatment is also important for patients with Alzheimer's disease, because new drugs have the potential to improve memory and can control behavioral symptoms.

Many families don't realize that depression and agitation are common symptoms of Alzheimer's disease and can be treated.

"If we can treat depression aggressively, we can lessen the burden on the family," said Jones, who noted that the ability of Alzheimer's patients to care for themselves is related to their level of depression.

The clinic can also help family members cope and avoid caregiver stress. "The best way to treat caregiver stress is to prevent it," McGann said.

Services include a directory of community resources, family and patient education, and family counseling. Information on the legal and ethical issues surrounding Alzheimer's disease can be provided in conjunction with the Wake Forest University law school.

As Independent as Possible

The goal of the clinic – and other specialized Medical Center services – is to help the patient stay independent as long as possible.

For example, the Department of Internal Medicine and Gerontology has a Geriatric Assessment Clinic that uses a team approach to develop care plans for frail elderly patients with complex medical problems. An Alzheimer's

patient with a host of other medical problems would be referred to this resource.

In the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Medicine, a geriatric psychiatry team is devoted to providing the most effective care to dementia patients with severe or recurring depression. A thorough evaluation of medical problems, combined with a full range of treatments, including medications and psychotherapy, as appropriate, are used to treat depression.

Day treatment programs in the J. Paul Sticht Center for Aging and Rehabilitation serve as a link between hospital and home for dementia patients who have been hospitalized for depression

or physical problems. Patients can often be discharged earlier than usual because of the intensive support the programs provide. Patients receive treatment during the day and return to their homes at night. In some cases, the programs can help avoid premature placement in nursing homes.

For more information, call Health On-Call at 716-2255.

Dementia facts

- Memory loss and confusion used to be considered a normal part of aging. Now scientists believe that people can remain alert as they age, though it may take longer to remember things.
- Dementia isn't a disease itself but a loss of intellectual functioning that is severe enough to interfere with routine activities. Dementia can be caused by a variety of diseases.
- In older people, the two most common causes of dementia are Alzheimer's disease and vascular dementia, which is caused by small strokes or changes in blood flow to the brain.
- Alzheimer's disease is a degenerative disease of the brain and results in impaired memory and behavior. It affects about 4 million Americans.
- Two drugs approved by the FDA for treating Alzheimer's disease have potential to slow down memory loss in some patients.