metropolitan familyhealth network

Healthwise

Metropolitan Family Health Network Telehealth Removes Barriers to Health Care

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A Message from the President and CEO

Dear Friends,

March is Women's History Month. Women have always played important roles in health care – as doctors, nurses, midwives, scientists, administrators, public health experts, activists, mothers, and caregivers. While women are the health care market's primary consumers and decision makers, for centuries gender stereotypes impacted their care. Many researchers believed men made better test subjects, resulting in treatments and medications not formulated for women. As some health care providers thought women exaggerated symptoms and pain, women were not correctly diagnosed, or their pain was ill-managed.

Every month MFHN conducts "Straight Talk" surveys and asks for candid opinions about MFHN. On average, eight out of ten respondents are women, and eight of ten give relationships with our providers, clinicians and staff members a "10" (highest) rating. The majority also say MFHN staff carefully listens to their needs, treats patients with respect, and answers questions.

We encourage women to protect their own "history" – and that of their families – by getting the head-to-toe preventive care they need ... and that includes dental and emotional care. Remember, we never turn anyone away because of lack of insurance or inability to pay.

Warm regards,

Joan Dublin

Joan Dublin, RN, MPA, ACHE
President & Chief Executive Officer

MFHN Telehealth Removes Barriers to Health Care

Prior to 2020, community members had to physically travel to Metropolitan Family Health Network to see their providers. Many faced barriers such as transportation issues, childcare costs, and work obligations. As a result, patients didn't schedule or skipped appointments, potentially putting their health in jeopardy. These challenges were exacerbated as the COVID-19 pandemic prompted New Jerseyans to mask up and stay home to reduce the rate of infections.

Thanks to a generous grant from the New Jersey Primary Care Association (NJPCA) and Novartis, MFHN Telehealth was established in 2020 to provide remote, simultaneous, telehealth connectivity between all MFHN sites and departments. The grant helped MFHN establish a robust telehealth infrastructure that includes hardware, laptop PCs, telehealth carts, vital signs monitors, and digital scopes as well as training, legal research, and policy development. Unlike laptop PCs and cell phones that establish a face-to-face video connection only, telehealth carts allow for advanced examination. Lens attachments for ears, nose and throat, skin, vision, hearing, women's health, general medical exams, dental, and behavioral health are a few potential options. MFHN expects to build on this foundation.

Since April 2020, MFHN Telehealth managed more than 15,000 virtual visits. MFHN Telehealth patients connect with their providers from the comfort and safety of their homes. Telehealth can be used for established patient visits, annual wellness visits, medication refills, and consultations for aches and pains, common rashes, infections, toothaches, smoking cessation, stress management, and more.

MFHN Telehealth also addresses language barriers, as it can be offered in multiple languages. A link between MFHN's telehealth technology and its language service allows patients and staff to communicate through certified medical interpreters, including American Sign Language interpreters.

To schedule a MFHN Telehealth appointment, call 201-478-5827.

Drinking Responsibly: Less is Best!

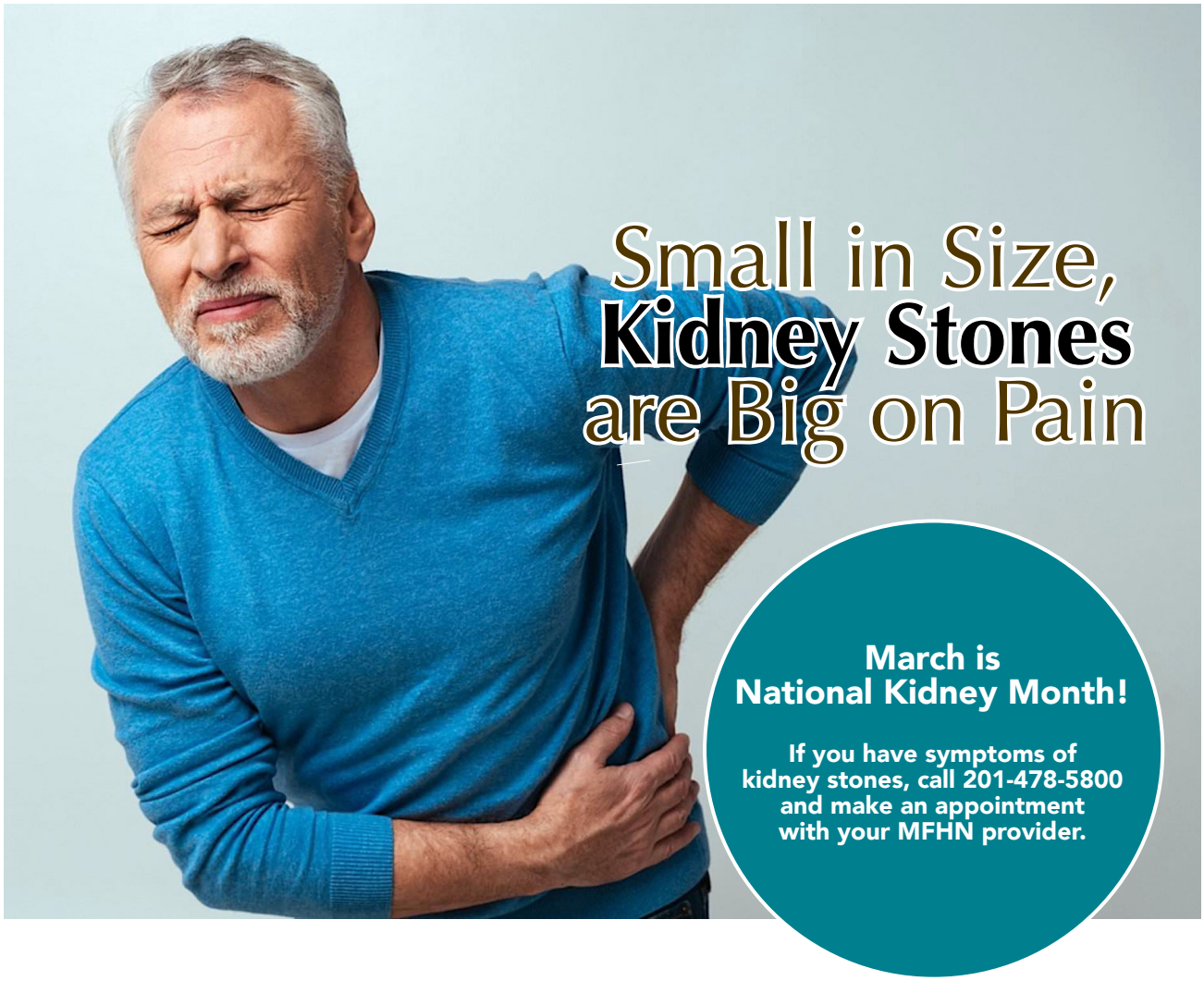
Enjoying a glass of wine, beer, or mixed drink at a party or the end of a long day may seem like a great way to relax or socialize, but only when done in moderation. Generally, that means two drinks or less a day for men; and one drink or less a day for women. Drinking even small amounts of alcohol can be harmful and should not become a daily habit. Nor should "binge" drinking when you consume four or more drinks in a day.

March is Alcohol Awareness Month. Two in three adults reported drinking above moderate levels at least once a month, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). It's easy to lose track because the effects of alcohol can take anywhere from 15 to 45 minutes to be felt. Intoxication "sneaks up" on you. Alcohol dulls the parts of the brain that control bodily functions, influence mood, and can trigger depression or aggression. Drinkers may feel a temporary warmth and rapid decrease in blood pressure. As more alcohol is consumed, drinkers can turn from happy and uninhibited to sad and angry. They may experience slurred speech, blurry vision, and loss of coordination.

Regular drinking can lead to higher tolerance, alcoholism, and health issues. Excessive alcohol consumption is associated with more than 140,000 deaths a year in the U.S. Alcohol is a factor in motor vehicle crashes, falls, drownings, sexual risk behaviors, high blood pressure, various cancers, and violence. Risks increase with the amount of alcohol consumed in a set time frame. It takes an hour for the liver to process one unit of alcohol. Drinks with fruit juice are absorbed slower than fizzy drinks. Waiting an hour or longer for a second or third drink – or eliminating it altogether – can prevent poor decision-making, risky behavior, conflicts, embarrassment, or tragedy.

Drinking responsibly means waking up without hangover, thirst from dehydration, and regrets! Detoxifying by taking a break from alcohol is recommended if one drinks regularly. Abstaining from drinking altogether is a must for those who are pregnant, younger than 21, have certain medical conditions, are taking medications that interact with alcohol, or are a recovering alcoholic.

MFHN Behavioral Health team is here to help patients and family members with sobriety issues. Call 201-478-5800 for an appointment.



Kidneys are the body's master chemists. They filter waste from blood, regulate blood pressure, balance minerals, and direct the production of red blood cells.

The most common kidney problems are kidney stones. Made of mineral and salt deposits that stick together and harden, kidney stones can range in size from a grain of sand, pebble, or even a golf ball. Kidney stones must be passed, usually by drinking plenty of water. Otherwise they can obstruct urine flow and cause kidney damage. No matter how big or small they are, kidney stones can cause extreme pain when they are stuck or travel through the urinary tract to exit the body.

One out of every 10 Americans goes to the ER due to kidney stones every year. Symptoms of kidney stones may include a burning sensation while urinating; blood in the urine; cloudy or bad-smelling urine; frequent need to urinate; severe lower back pain; sharp lower abdomen and groin pain that comes in waves; fever; and vomiting.

Dehydration, excessive salt or sugar intake (especially high fructose corn syrup), family history, frequent urinary tract infections, diabetes, high blood pressure, digestive diseases, excessive use of some supplements and medications such as laxatives, and calcium-based antacids can trigger kidney stones.

Staying well hydrated reduces the risk of getting kidney stones, which are more likely to occur if you make less than one liter of urine a day. Every day, the average male needs to drink about 4 quarts of water, and the average female about 3 quarts. If one rarely feels thirsty and their urine is colorless or light yellow, they are generally drinking enough water.

Eating healthful foods can help prevent or pass kidney stones. These foods include nutrient-rich leafy green vegetables like kale and bok choy; cashews, peanuts, walnuts, and pumpkin or sunflower seeds; sweet potatoes, broccoli and kidney beans; and dried figs. Lemon juice and apple cider vinegar are naturally acidic and can break down stubborn stones.

Kidney stones often come back. Your MFHN provider may perform a urinalysis to check for crystals or blood in urine, advise you to make dietary changes such as reducing animal protein, salt, and sugar, and prescribe medication.

How Your Emotions Affect Your Gut Health

A divorce, death of a loved one, graduation, birth of a grandchild, new love, and new job. Major life events like these produce a variety of feelings such as anger, anxiety, sadness, nervousness, love, and joy. These emotions are felt in the brain and the gastrointestinal system, which are closely connected and communicate in response to emotions.

The brain-gut communication runs through interconnected nerves both share. What one feels in one's head transmits to one's stomach and intestines. "Gut feelings" come from the more than 100 million nerve endings in the digestive system plus body chemicals like dopamine, adrenalin, serotonin, and norepinephrine that affect mood, sleep, digestion, sexual desire, pleasure, heart rate, breathing, and more.

The brain and gut are so in tune with each other that even the thought of something pleasant or scary can produce physical changes. When one is hungry, the thought or image of a juicy steak can make the stomach growl and secrete enzymes. When one is stressed, digestion may slow and hunger subside.

The stomach contains trillions of "good" and "bad" bacteria that must be balanced. The gut releases metabolites, toxins, and hormones that can change eating behavior and mood when one is stressed. Turning to comfort foods may negatively affect the tummy.

"Butterflies in the stomach" describes a fluttery feeling in the tummy. These feelings may come before giving a speech, going on a date, starting a job, or moving. The physical sensation is triggered by the release of chemicals that may increase the heart rate and send more blood to muscles in response to fear or desire. The gut may respond with unpredictable symptoms including nausea, gas, diarrhea, bloating, and constipation.

Grief and fear have a powerful impact on the gut. It's not uncommon to not eat for days following trauma or loss. However, this can greatly upset gut health and cause problems like acid reflux and chronic fatigue.

Keep your brain-gut connection healthy by controlling how you respond to physical changes brought on by emotions and by adopting a healthy lifestyle. Eat fruits, veggies, lean meats, whole grains, and yogurt (as a probiotic). Get enough sleep. Exercise at least 15 minutes a day. Practice breathing exercises. When the body and mind are healthy, one can respond better to emotions that tend to overwhelm.

How Oral Health Impacts Overall Health

The MFHN Dental Department will provide a free oral cancer screening with your checkup.

Call 201-478-5800 to schedule an appointment.

Healthy teeth and gums give people the confidence to talk freely, eat well, and smile big. Maintaining a beautiful smile can prevent diseases. Poor oral health is associated with tobacco smoke, alcohol, and sugary foods and beverages as well as chronic diseases like diabetes and heart disease, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

April is Oral Cancer Awareness Month.

The American Cancer Society estimates there will be about 54,540 new cases of oral cavity or oropharyngeal cancer, and about 11,580 deaths from these oral cancers in 2023. Oral cancer occurs most often on the tongue, tonsils, throat, gums, floor and other parts of the mouth. The average age of people diagnosed with these cancers is 64. About one in five cases occur in people younger than 55.

Symptoms of oral cancer may include growths, lumps, or sores in the mouth that do not heal; red or white patches inside the mouth; unexplained bleeding, numbness, loss of feeling, or pain/tenderness in any area of the face, mouth, or neck; difficulty or pain chewing or swallowing; ear or mouth pain; hoarseness, chronic sore throat or changes in the voice; and a feeling that something is caught in the throat.

Men are twice as likely than women to develop oral cancer. Smokers are six times more likely than nonsmokers to develop the disease. Other risk factors include excessive consumption of alcohol (healthy limits are one drink per day for women; two for men) and family history of oral cancer.

Adopting a healthy lifestyle by quitting smoking, reducing alcohol consumption, and eating lots of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains can help prevent oral cancers. Preventive care also includes brushing and flossing twice a day, and receiving a professional dental cleaning and checkup at least once a year.

MFHN Surpasses Mental Health Screening Goals

Mental and physical health are closely connected. About half of all people in the U.S. will be diagnosed with a mental disorder, such as depression, at some point in their lives, and according to the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF), only half will receive the care they need.

The USPSTF "Healthy People 2030" program focuses on goals for the prevention, screening, assessment, and treatment of mental health disorders and behavioral conditions. Metropolitan Family Health Network (MFHN) strives to achieve these goals, and monitors progress – how many patients are screened for depression, identified at risk, and connected with a Behavioral Health provider – every month. In 2022, with help from everyone, MFHN surpassed its depression screening goals by 9%! The highest score was in Adult Medicine, at 87%, and the OB/GYN Department was most improved, with screenings going from 8% to 72%.

Congratulations and thanks to all who helped achieve this milestone!

Our Mental Health Screening Team, pictured from left: Yeraldin Cabrera, Population Health Outreach Specialist; Olga Navarro, Referral Coordinator; and Judy Hoang, Senior Care Team Leader.

Kids' Corner:

Wow! You Woke Up

Taller!

Your body changes a lot while you are in elementary school. Your muscles and bones get bigger and stronger. You have growth spurts. You may get about 2½ inches taller and gain six pounds every year. You will probably grow to be as tall as one or both of your parents. Girls will stop growing taller by age 15. Boys can grow taller until around 18.

Here is what to expect from growth spurts that may last two to five years:

You may always be hungry. Growing bodies need nutrition. Eat a LITTLE of everything but not too much of one thing! It's fun to try different foods to discover likes. Enjoy fruits, veggies, whole grains, lean meats, and your favorite snacks, even some sugary snacks.

Your clothes might not fit. Humans grow taller before they get wider. Legs grow before other parts of your body like your waist. If your pants are too short, your leg bones grew. Your feet grew too if last year's sneakers pinch your toes.

You may sleep more. You need about 10 hours of sleep. Go to bed at the same time every night. Take a shower, put on your pajamas, brush your teeth, and read before bed. Up to 80% of your growth hormones are released while you sleep. You will wake up taller!

You might feel "growing pains." If you feel pain in your legs and it wakes you up at night, your growing muscles are sore and tight from daytime physical activity. The biggest muscle groups are in your legs, so you will feel the changes around your calves, knees, and thighs. That's normal. The pain will go away.

Every kid grows at her or his own pace. Your body will adjust. All of these changes are part of what makes you unique!