
February 2008 Newsletter

Diabetes Success Story!

This month's success story is J.A., a 54 year old man with a new diagnosis of diabetes in October 2007. On his first visit with Dr. Hahn his recent blood sugar had ranged from 300mg/dl to 450mg/dl, far higher than the levels associated with optimal health (<90mg/dl).

Another measure of diabetes severity is something called HbA1c. In J.A.'s case the HbA1c was 13.3%, which is far higher than the ideal of <5.5%. This was concerning because an elevated HbA1c is associated with a much higher risk of heart disease, stroke, nerve damage, and dementia, and his level was one of the highest we have ever seen. Not good.

Using information from a number of sources, including our office, J.A. did not start any diabetes medications, but instead began following a traditional whole food diet, eating most of his meals at home. The response was striking, with a drop in his HbA1c over the next two months to near-normal at 6%.

With further efforts, in particular a more vigorous exercise program, we are expecting J.A. to become a true 'ex-diabetic'. His hard work is paying off handsomely so far, and should allow him to enjoy far better health in the years to come.

Do Cholesterol-Lowering 'Statin' Drugs Help Women?

Many authorities believe that the cholesterol-lowering statin drugs (simvastatin, pravastatin, Crestor, Lipitor, etc) are the key factors for lowering heart disease risk. In fact, data from 20 years of rigorous research has allowed us to be confident that statins have an important benefit for *high-risk* males, meaning those with *multiple* risk factors for heart disease. (Risk factors include: smoking, diabetes, and previous heart disease.) However, males with *few* risk factors appear to get little or no benefit from the use of these medications.

For women, even those with *multiple* risk factors, there appears to be far less benefit. One of the largest studies in high-risk women (ASCOT) even hinted at harm. For women *without* heart disease or multiple risk factors, cholesterol lowering has *not* been shown to be helpful.

This leaves us feeling less enthusiastic about prescribing statins for women unless they are at *very* high risk of heart disease. A reassuring reminder for those men or women who have harmful effects from statin drugs, or are in a group that do not appear to benefit from these drugs, is that there are many other effective ways to lower their cholesterol and heart disease risk using thoughtful, evidence-based diet and exercise patterns.

In fact, it can be reasonably argued that appropriate diet and exercise choices lower the risk of heart disease, stroke, cancer and diabetes to a greater extent than any other interventions! Although in our office we do use prescription medicines to lower disease risk, we find that the addition of vigorous evidence-based lifestyle changes dramatically reduces the need for those medications.

For an interesting review of major opinions on this issue, see *British Medical Journal* 2007;334:982-983.

Narcotic Note

Prescription pain medicines containing narcotics (such as hydrocodone, oxycodone, or morphine) are heavily regulated at the state and federal levels. Patients who are routinely using these will be asked to see one of us every 3 or 4 months if we are to continue prescribing them. We appreciate the extra expense and nuisance that this presents for you, but we don't know of any other way to maintain the careful oversight that these drugs demand.

Insurance Reminder

Please note that Dr. Hassell and Dr. Hahn are not contracted with any health insurance companies. This means they are "out of network" providers on all health plans. To find out what level of coverage will be provided from your health insurance plan, ask your insurer what coverage they offer for visits to a "non participating" or "out of network" provider.

Would you like to pay your bill by Visa or MasterCard? Please call our billing department if you have questions or would like to make payment on your account.

Are you insured by Blue Cross Blue Shield (BCBS)? We are happy to

continue billing BCBS for your visits but we ask that you pay at the time of visit, and then keep the check that BCBS sends directly to you. By paying at your time of visit, your bill will be discounted by 15%.

Rx Reminders

Remember that the first step in getting a prescription refilled is to call your pharmacy, even if the prescription states 'No Refill.' The pharmacy will then fax our office with the refill request, which includes all the prescription details. We will return the fax to the pharmacy the same day. (Your pharmacy may tell you that the process will take four days, but that is not the case with our office.)

The Cookbook

For those of you who have asked about buying cookbooks in bulk, they are available in cases of 20, which reduces the price to \$15 per book. (The regular price is \$20.)

For anyone unfamiliar with *Good Food, Great Medicine*, the book is self published and simply presented, and was written by sister-and-brother team Mea and Miles Hassell. It offers an overview of the evidence supporting the case for a Mediterranean-style whole food diet, and suggests ways to translate that information into practical day-to-day living, cooking, and eating.

Tips for a Happier 2008

Think about making a fresh start this new year with your eating habits. (Except for your birthday, when you should be able to eat anything you like.) No improvement is too small. You may even be surprised to find your tastes changing along with your diet.

Eat less fast food. Eat more slow food. Watch TV less. Shut down your computer sooner. Get more sleep. Get more exercise. (It is a leap year, after all.)

Upcoming Speaking Events

2/7/2008 – Heart Healthy for Life

2008 Learning Series Lecture: Miles Hassell, MD: *Food Myth Busters: Good Nutrition for a Heart-Healthy Life*
6:30-7:30pm in the Souther Auditorium at Providence St Vincent Medical Center. Miles will be discussing common misconceptions about which health choices matter and which ones do not. For example, are eggs and butter bad for you?

(This talk is open to the public and free. To register, call the Providence Resource Line @ (503)574-6595)

3/8/2008 – Komen Race for the Cure

Breast Cancer Issues Conference: Miles Hassell MD and Mary Malinski RN, BA, LMT: *Optimal Nutrition and Exercise to Reduce the Risk of Breast Cancer*.

10:30-11:45am Oregon Convention Center

(To register for the conference see: <http://www.komenoregon.org>)

3/18/2008 – Internal Medicine

Grand Rounds: Miles Hassell, MD: *Ischemic Heart Disease: Are Diet and Exercise More Powerful Than Drugs?*
Providence St Vincent Medical Center. (This a physician audience)

3/20/2008 – Providence Cancer Center Integrative Medicine

Program: Miles Hassell, MD and Cindy Reuter, ND, MSOM, L.Ac., RD: *Making Your Way Through the Supplement Jungle: Vitamins, Minerals and Herbs*
Providence Portland Medical Center. (This talk is open to the public and free. To register, call the Providence Resource Line @ (503)574-6595)

3/25/2008 (formerly 2/12/2008) – **OHSU Lipid Journal Club Management of High Triglycerides** (This is a physician audience)