

June 2008 Newsletter

Shingles Vaccine?

Many people are asking whether they should get the shingles vaccine. Shingles is an unpleasant and painful rash caused by leftover chickenpox virus that is already in your body, and it can decide to give you trouble now and then.

Typically the rash gets better by itself over about 3 weeks, but we can speed that up quite a bit with medications if we see you within a few days. In rare cases, shingles can cause persistent serious pain called post-herpetic neuralgia (PHN) in the area of the rash, and PHN can last months or years. Given that neither shingles nor its aftermath is much fun, the arrival of the shingles vaccine in 2006 for patients over 60 years old seemed like a fine thing.

However, many patients didn't jump at the chance to get the vaccine, for a couple of reasons. First, they note that it is expensive. Second, they are concerned that there are unknown long term risks.

But, if the cost was not a major issue and the risk was very small, shouldn't everyone over 60 get the shot? This is a great example of how to apply medical statistics in order to make the best decision for yourself.

The first question to ask is: *Does the shingles vaccine reduce the risk of shingles?* Indeed it does, by 51%. Impressive, yes? But let's look closer at what that statistic actually means: for every 100 people you treat there will be 1.7 fewer cases of shingles. Over a three year study, the vaccine reduced the risk of shingles from 3.3% for those given placebo, to 1.7% (which is a 51% reduction). In other words, if you don't choose to get the vaccine, there is a 98.3% chance that it will make absolutely no difference, and a 1.7% chance that you'll be sorry. Certainly not as impressive sounding as a "51% reduction".

The second question is this: *Does the vaccine reduce your risk of post-herpetic neuralgia?* Well, yes it does, by 67%. Another impressive statistic. But let's look closer at the real numbers. The actual risk reduction is on the order of 3 fewer cases of PHN for every 1000 people given the vaccine.¹

The bottom line is that some people think that the benefit from the shingles vaccine is worth it, others don't. Both opinions are reasonable. We can provide the vaccine if you'd like to get it, or it can be obtained at less expense through most pharmacies.

Either way, remember that if you get an odd, painful rash on one side of your body, hop in and get it treated. And when you hear impressive medical statistics, look at the numbers very closely:

a touch of cynicism is reasonable because the 'risk reduction' statistics are usually misleading.

Lifestyle Change Class For Nurses

Miles and Angela are currently conducting a 10 week class series on lifestyle change for a group of nurses at St. Vincent, similar to the class series we provided for patients last year. If we find that this helps nurses make substantive changes for better health, we hope to make this class an ongoing series.

New Website Under Construction

Our new website is nearing final inspection and we hope to have it available for you next month. Stay tuned for more details.

Featured Brown Rice Recipes

Take a look at the following recipes from the food and lifestyle guide written by Mea and Miles Hassell MD, *Good Food Great Medicine*. This month we have chosen to feature *Basic Brown Rice* and *Brown Rice Power Patties*. If you are a fan of power bars, power patties are a great *whole food* alternative. Try the recipe and let us know what you think. Raw almonds and dried fruit are another easy *whole food* option that doesn't require any kitchen prep. (We italicize the words *whole food* because it is such an all-important distinction to make.)

Brown Rice Power Patties

These nutty little patties are convenient for lunch at your desk, snacks when you're feeling peckish, meals on the road, or after-school snacks. They're good straight from the refrigerator or at room temperature, which makes them ideal for hiking or camping. (Recipe for *Baked Brown Rice* follows.)

(Makes 12 patties)

2 cups *cooked* brown rice
6 ounces sharp cheddar, grated (*about 1½ cups*)
1½ cups **finely**-grated carrot (*about 1 large*)
½ cup raw sunflower seeds
½ cup sesame seeds, raw or toasted
3 eggs
1 teaspoon dried basil
1 teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon freshly ground pepper
1½ cups toasted slivered almonds or dry roasted peanuts

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Mist a baking sheet with non-stick spray.

¹ NEJM 2005;352:2271-84.

- In a mixing bowl, combine *cooked* rice, grated cheese, carrots, and seeds.
- Combine the eggs and seasonings in the food processor and blend for about 5 seconds. Add seeds and nuts and process another 5 seconds. *Don't over-process the nuts; their texture is important.* Add to rice mixture and mix thoroughly.
- Use a 1/4-cup measuring cup to scoop mixture onto baking sheet, and form into plump patties about 3/4-inch thick. *I pack the measuring cup firmly and rinse it between scoops so that the mixture drops out more or less cleanly formed, ready to be patted out a bit more and shaped the rest of the way.*
- Bake at 350 degrees for 15 minutes, then turn patties over and bake 10 minutes more. Transfer patties to rack, flipping them so their toastier side shows. *(If you're not eating them the same day, keep in the refrigerator. They will easily last a week if kept cold and stored in an airtight container.)*

Toasting Slivered Almonds

To toast slivered almonds, spread them in a shallow baking pan and toast for about 10 minutes in a 325-degree oven. You want them barely golden, not browned. Cool before using.

Basic Baked Brown Rice

A lot of people think they don't like brown rice because they have only eaten badly cooked or undercooked brown rice. There is no good reason for this. If you are not familiar with cooking brown rice, try my directions below.

(Makes about 5-6 cups cooked brown rice)

- 2 cups brown rice (see note)
- 4 cups water
- 1 teaspoon salt

Preheat oven to 300 degrees.

- Bring the water to a brisk boil in a heavy 2 1/2-quart oven-proof pot with a lid. Stir in salt and rice and bring back to the boil. Cover and place in the oven for 60 minutes.
- Remove from the oven and leave it covered for 10 minutes, then take off lid and fluff cooked rice with a fork, loosening it from the sides of the pot at the same time. Cover with a paper towel until cool. Whatever you don't use the same day, store in the refrigerator, covered tightly. *(Make sure rice is completely cool before you cover it.)* Keeps well for a week.

Note:

- Different brands of brown rice absorb water differently. For that reason it is safest to stick to one source to avoid ending up with wet rice one time, and too-dry rice another time.

Finally ...

Don't forget your daily servings of good food, brisk exercise, and adequate sleep. The side effects of too much good food are usually first noticed at the waistline, but usually respond quickly to portion control and more exercise. Wouldn't it be nice if all medicine was so user friendly?

Upcoming Speaking Events

May/June 2008 – Lifestyle Change Class: Miles Hassell, MD and Angela Hahn, MD. Souther Auditorium, Providence St. Vincent Medical Center. (Contact our office for more information.)

6/6/2008 – Grand Rounds: Miles Hassell, MD and Ken Weizer, ND. National College of Natural Medicine.

6/13-15/2008 – Cardiac Conference: Miles Hassell, MD: *Statins in Women, and How Should We Live?* Mea Hassell: *Cooking Demonstration.* Leavenworth, Washington.

6/23/2008 – Cardiology CME (formerly 5/19): Miles Hassell, MD. *Ischemic Heart Disease: Are Diet and Exercise More Potent Than Drugs?* Southwest Washington Medical Center.

9/18/2008 – 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.* Souther Auditorium, Providence St. Vincent Medical Center. (This talk is open to the public and free. To register, call the Providence Resource Line @ (503)574-6595)