



# HEALTH BEAT 2005

Cattaraugus County Health Department Newsletter  
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## COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS OF THE HEALTH DEPARTMENT

**Q.** Many of my family members have high blood pressure. What is it and how can I prevent it?

**A.** High blood pressure results from the tightening of very small arteries, which regulate the blood flow through your body. As they tighten, your heart has to work harder to pump blood through a smaller space, and the pressure inside the vessel grows. Many people do not know they have high blood pressure until a problem develops. For a complete article on high blood pressure and how to lower it, please turn to page 2.

**Q.** What is avian influenza (bird flu)?

**A.** Bird flu is an infection caused by avian (bird) influenza (flu) viruses. These flu viruses occur naturally among birds. Wild birds carry the viruses in their intestines, but usually do not get sick from them. However, bird flu is very contagious among birds and can make some domesticated birds, including chickens, ducks and turkeys, very sick and kill them. Bird flu viruses do not usually infect humans, but several cases of human infection with bird flu viruses have occurred since 1997.

**Q.** Where can I get up to date information about avian flu?

**A.** Information about Avian Flu and other diseases can be found on the Center for Disease Control website. This site is also linked through the Cattaraugus County Health Department's website.

**Q.** What is New York State doing to prevent childhood overweight and obesity?

**A.** New York State has implemented Activ8 Kids, a program designed to prevent overweight and obesity. The principles of Activ8Kids are: 5 fruits and vegetables each day, 1 hour of physical activity each day, and 2 hours or less of television or screen time daily. The complete article about Active8Kids can be found on page 4.

**Q.** My doctor would not give me an antibiotic when I was sick with a fever. Can you explain why?

**A.** Antibiotics are drugs that fight infections caused by bacteria. After their discovery in the 1940's, they transformed medical care and dramatically reduced illness and death from infectious diseases. However, over the decades the bacteria that antibiotics control have developed resistance to these drugs. Widespread use of antibiotics promotes the spread of antibiotic resistance. While antibiotics should be used to treat bacterial infections, they are not effective against viral infections like the common cold, most sore throats and the flu. Talk to your health care provider about other alternatives. Smart use of antibiotics is the key to controlling the spread of resistance.

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## High Blood Pressure - The Silent Killer

About one in four New Yorkers is aware of having high blood pressure, and the prevalence increases to more than one in every two people 65 years or older, according to a survey conducted by the New York State Department of Health.

The 2004 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) survey found that 26 percent of all New York residents have been told by a doctor, nurse or other health professional that they have high blood pressure, also called hypertension. The percentage of people diagnosed with high blood pressure rises steadily with age, from 6.9 percent of those 18 to 24 years old, to 57.6 percent of those 65 or older.

High blood pressure is often called “the silent killer” because the symptoms are not obvious. As a result, too often high blood pressure goes undiagnosed until it becomes life threatening. Untreated high blood pressure greatly increases your risks for stroke, heart attack, kidney and eye damage.

The BRFSS survey found that of those who have been told they have high blood pressure, 69 percent said they took medication to treat it. Men were less likely to report medical treatment than women, 63 percent vs. 75 percent.

High blood pressure results from the tightening of very small arteries, called arterioles, which regulate the blood flow through your body. As they tighten, your heart has to work harder to pump blood through a smaller space, and the pressure inside the vessels grows.

Your heart pumps blood through a network of arteries, veins and capillaries. The moving blood pushes against the arterial walls, and this force is measured as blood pressure.

You are at greater risk of developing high blood pressure as you get older, if you have a family history of high blood pressure, use tobacco, are overweight or lead a sedentary lifestyle.

A visit to your health care provider is the only way to find out if you have high blood pressure. It is a good practice to have your blood pressure checked at least once a year.

If your blood pressure is found to be high, the first course of treatment usually involves lifestyle changes such as:

- eating foods low in fat and sodium,
- controlling your weight,
- engaging in regular physical activity,
- learning to better manage stress,
- quitting smoking, and
- avoiding alcohol.

A healthier lifestyle will benefit all areas of your life, including your blood pressure.

For more information on high blood pressure and how it is treated, call the Cattaraugus County Health Department at 716-373-8050 or 1-800-251-2584.

### Guidelines for Healthy Meetings

Employers can make it easier for people to make healthy food choices by providing healthy food at meetings and other events they sponsor.



#### General Guidelines:

Serve low-calorie and low-fat foods

Serve fruits and vegetables whenever possible

Serve smaller portions (e.g. cut bagels in quarters)

Serve milk (fat-free or 1%), 100% fruit or vegetable juice, water or unsweetened iced tea, instead of soft drinks

Lunch and dinner **do not** have to include a heavy dessert – fresh fruit, fruit crisp or cobbler, small cookies are fine

Include a vegetarian option at all meals

Provide reduced-fat or low fat milk for coffee rather than half and half

Provide pitchers and bottles of water.



## Activ8Kids!

$$2+5+1=8$$



Today, 40 percent of third-grade students in upstate New York and 43 percent of elementary school-aged children in New York City are overweight or at risk of becoming overweight.

Contributing significantly to childhood obesity are sedentary lifestyles and poor nutritional choices. Nearly half of young people, ages 12 to 21, do not engage in regular physical activity. Most do not eat the recommended five or more daily servings of vegetables and fruit.

In response to this shadow over children's health, New York Governor George E. Pataki has launched Activ8Kids! as part of a \$9.6 million initiative to fight childhood obesity and promote healthy lifestyles among children.

The goal of Activ8Kids! is to instill in children before the age of eight daily habits that include: eating at least five servings of vegetables and fruit; engaging in at least one hour of physical activity; and reducing time in front of TV and playing video games to fewer than two hours.

Overweight children are at greater risk of diabetes and other serious health problems. Children who are not encouraged to be physically active and make healthy nutritional choices, grow up to become adults who are more likely to have heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure and other life-threatening diseases.

Besides health problems, overweight and obesity can lead to poor self-image, insecurity and learning problems in schools.

The epidemic of childhood obesity is a serious health problem that can only be controlled by attitudes toward how we eat and live. Activ8Kids! assists schools and community organizations in promoting healthy lifestyle choices through sponsorship of community nutrition and physical activity events that involve families.

Schools are encouraged to partner with community agencies, families, school staff and students to promote nutrition and physical activity in all school activities, from fund-raising to after-school programs.

The Cattaraugus County Health Department encourages parents, teachers and school administrators to support the goals of Activ8Kids! by offering healthy meals, snacks and drinks; increasing opportunities to be physically active; reducing time spent in front of the television or computer; and setting a good example yourselves.

Activ8Kids! messages and goals are being incorporated into many New York State Department of Health programs reaching out to school staff, physicians, health care providers, childcare providers, children and parents. The programs include community involvement so that lasting changes in the environment and in people's behaviors can be achieved.

To learn more about how you can participate in Activ8Kids!, visit the program's page on the New York State Department of Health web site at: [www.nyhealth.gov](http://www.nyhealth.gov).

### The New Food Guide Pyramid

Do you want to get a personalized recommendation for your dietary needs based on your age, gender and activity level? If so, be sure to visit **MyPyramid.gov**. These guidelines provide authoritative advice for people two years of age and older about how proper dietary habits can promote health and reduce the risk of major chronic diseases. MyPyramid was developed to carry the messages of the dietary guidelines and to make Americans aware of the vital health benefits of simple and modest improvements in nutrition, physical activity, and lifestyle behavior. **MyPyramid.gov** is an excellent resource. Let it help make the right choices for your health.

## November is Diabetes Awareness Month

November is Diabetes Awareness Month, a time to remember that diabetes is an epidemic and the sixth leading cause of death in America. Diabetes Awareness Month is a perfect time to be tested for diabetes.

If poorly controlled, diabetes can lead to many problems, including blindness, kidney failure, loss of circulation in legs, heart disease and stroke. In fact, diabetes is the leading cause of new cases of blindness in the United States. But the good news is diabetic eye disease, also called diabetic retinopathy, can be prevented if detected early.

There are two types of diabetes. Type 1 occurs when the pancreas cannot produce insulin. It most often appears during childhood or adolescence. Type 2 diabetes occurs when the body cannot properly use the insulin produced by the body. It most often affects adults over age 40. Type 2 is the most common form, affecting 90 to 95% of people with diabetes. However, obesity and a lack of physical activity are contributing to a sharp increase in the number of children who develop Type 2 diabetes.

About 17 million Americans have diabetes, yet half of them are not aware they have the disease. Symptoms include: frequent urination, abnormal thirst, excessive appetite accompanied by weight loss, fatigue, recurrent vaginal yeast infections, and visual changes.

If you have diabetes, the best way to prevent vision loss is to keep your blood sugar levels well controlled and have a yearly eye exam by an ophthalmologist, who can detect eye disease in its earliest stages. You can control your blood

sugar level by following your diet and taking medications exactly as prescribed.

Poorly controlled diabetes can damage and narrow blood vessels, causing them to leak or swell. In the eyes, this leakage can cause vision loss. Unfortunately, some people can have diabetic eye damage without knowing it because they do not yet have symptoms. Blurring of vision, decreased vision or black spots may mean permanent damage already has occurred. If eye disease is present, laser treatment can be used to seal blood vessels and stop leakage.

Not everyone with diabetes will develop eye disease. For children with Type 1 diabetes, evaluation for diabetes-related eye disease is not necessary until age 10. For children with Type 2 diabetes, a dilated eye exam should be performed annually and at diagnosis.

To prevent diabetes and reduce complications if you already have it:

- Follow a healthy eating plan.
- Engage in regular physical activity.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Do not smoke.

Protect yourself from diabetes-related eye disease by having yearly eye exams and maintaining an appropriate blood sugar level. Blood sugar can be controlled by diet and engaging in regular physical activity and taking medication as prescribed.

### **Your Local Health Department - Making your Community Healthier**

Whether helping someone bitten by a rabid animal, investigating an outbreak of foodborne disease, providing education about West Nile Virus, or giving flu shots, your local health department is a valuable resource. Every county in New York State, as well as New York City, has a local health department which is working to reduce illness, promote wellness and prepare for, and respond to public health emergencies. If you have any questions regarding these issues, contact the Cattaraugus County Health Department or visit the website for updates and current information.