BenefitsPulse

Discover health and benefits news for city of Houston employees and retirees

Issue 2 - 2017

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IS NIGHTTIME THE RIGHT TIME?

Benefits Q & A

Q: Can I change my medical or dental plan at any time?

A: You can only change your medical or dental plan during the Open Enrollment period from March through April for active and retired employees who are on a Cigna plan with the City of Houston. However, if you are enrolled in the Cigna Limited plan and you move outside the coverage area, you will have to change to one of the other Cigna plans to maintain coverage.

Q: Can I drop my supplemental insurance at any time?

A: You can only drop a supplemental plan at anytime if it is a post-tax benefit. You can't drop a pre-tax supplemental plan until open enrollment or if you have left the City of Houston.

HEALTH CHECK

Exercise and diet minimize cholesterol risk

When too much cholesterol is present, plaque hardens and forms in your arteries. Over time and left unmanaged, this can put you at increased risk of heart disease, heart attack and stroke – the leading causes of death for men and women in the U.S.

Your body needs a limited amount of cholesterol to function properly, but too much can cause serious cardiovascular problems.

To limit cholesterol build-up:

- Exercise regularly. Moderate-intensity physical exercise for 30 minutes most days of the week is good. Brisk walking is beneficial.
- Eat healthier. Avoid saturated fats and trans-fatty acids. Eat more fiber, such as found in fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains and nuts.
- Don't use any tobacco products.
- Manage your weight and schedule regular medical checkups.

*By **Shane Magee, M.D.***
Internal Medicine at Kelsey's Tanglewood Clinic

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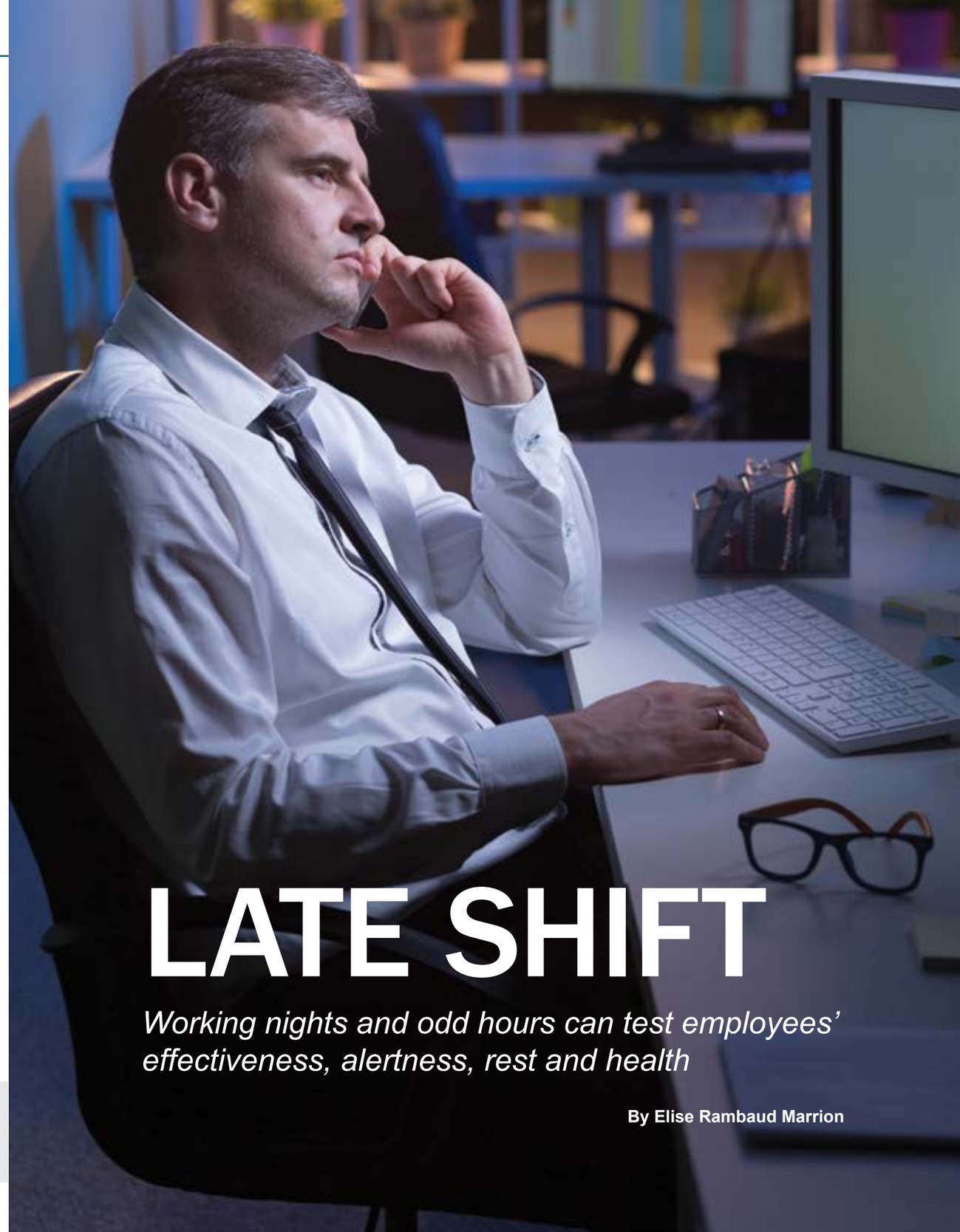
We want to know what's on your mind or what you would like to know more about. Please forward any story ideas for future issues of Benefits Pulse or comments about recent issues to David Smith at davidf.smith@houstontx.gov.



LATE SHIFT

Working nights and odd hours can test employees' effectiveness, alertness, rest and health

By Elise Rambaud Marrion

Traditional 8-to-5 business hours don't apply to the City of Houston or many of its employees.

Crime, fires and weather emergencies never take a vacation. Airports don't go on hiatus, and parks and libraries don't close on weekends. Sewers, streets and traffic lights are always on duty. When the city is open for business, which is always, thousands of city employees are working too — evenings, nights and weekends — to keep things running.

Even though we work in a 24-hour service industry, the human body needs time to rest. So, what happens when your job interferes with your sleep schedule?

Shift Work Sleep Disorder is common among people who work rotating, evening and night shifts. Those work schedules disrupt the circadian rhythms, or 24-hour sleep cycles, of about 25 percent of shift workers nationwide, according to the National Sleep Foundation. That includes thousands of city employees from dozens of job classifications.

Shift Work Sleep Disorder can impact safety and work performance, and it can also take a physical, emotional and social toll. But sleep experts suggest there are ways to mitigate effects of the disorder.

"More than half of people who work night shifts report excessive sleepiness during their shift and difficulty falling asleep during the day," said Dr. Puneet Patni, a pulmonologist and sleep medicine specialist at Kelsey-Seybold. "The misalignment of your natural sleep-wake cycle affects some people more profoundly than others, and some people struggle to adjust throughout their careers. But making changes to your routines, health and environment can make a difference."

Benefits Pulse asked city employees to share their experiences working the night shift. Responses revealed that night-shift workers may earn a little extra pay, but the night shift requires discipline and a willingness to make some personal and professional sacrifices.

Health and public safety professionals expect to work irregular hours, but firefighters' schedules are in a category of their own. HFD firefighters work 24 hours on duty, 24 hours off, 24 hours on, and five days off. And many firefighters work additional jobs on their days off.

HFD Station 8 is among the largest and busiest in the city, answering an average of 10 to 15 calls a night, or 15-20 runs for EMS teams.

"It's hard to explain it to someone who's not in the profession, but imagine being woken from a dead sleep five to 10 times a night; having to get dressed and out the door in seconds; driving a 50,000-pound vehicle down the street to possibly save lives," said Station 8 Captain David Paige, who has been a firefighter for 13 years. "It's just part of the job, so nobody complains. But it's a very physically demanding job, and we don't get the sleep that is necessary to recover. You see a lot of firefighters with different lingering injuries, high blood pressure and heart disease. The demands of the job are stressful and it affects us long term."

Paige said catching up on sleep on days off is challenging, but it is the key to recovery, even with other professional and family obligations.

"My wife is a nurse and she used to work night shifts, so she is very understanding of my schedule," Paige said. "When I come home from work she allows me to go back to sleep, closes the door, takes care of kids, doesn't let them wake me."

Patni said modifying environmental factors play a significant role for shift workers trying to sleep during the day. Exposure to sunlight stimulates the pineal gland, which produces serotonin, the hormone that wakes you up; darkness triggers a surge in melatonin, which helps you fall asleep.

"When your shift ends, you should avoid exposure to daylight and wear sunglasses on the way to your car," Putni said. "When you get home, minimize light exposure with black-out curtains. Keep your room cool – between 65 and 72 degrees is the optimum temperature. As your body gives off heat, it helps you fall asleep and stay asleep."

But some employees said that is easier said than done. They've tried all the tricks, but they still struggle to get restful sleep during daylight hours.

Dana Growden, a Houston Airport System landside operations supervisor, said he worked daytime shifts for 18 years in previous jobs. When he started his career with the city, however, he was assigned to the third shift, 10 p.m. to 6:30 a.m. Shift assignments were based on seniority. Growden paid his dues as a new employee. He was recently moved to a daytime shift and couldn't be happier, he said.

"I tried getting darkened curtains, using ear plugs and a face mask, I drank sleepy time tea. But I could not sleep during the day with phones ringing, lawn mowers, trash trucks and everything else going on," Growden said. "At best, I would get a series of two hour naps. After a while, sleep deprivation physically, mentally and emotionally drains you. I know some people prefer to work third shift, but they can have it."

Conversely, Jericho Leftwich said he enjoyed working nights when he was a paramedic. These days, Leftwich is a public health investigator supervisor for the Houston Health Department, but he still considers himself a night owl.

"I actually prefer working at night. I find it more peaceful and less stressful," Letwich said. "I'm not a morning person, so it takes me a little longer to get myself together. By mid-morning I can fully function, and my thoughts and ideas are more fleshed out during the night hours."

Kimberly Chavez is a rookie firefighter at HFD Station 8. On the job less than a year, Chavez said diet, exercise and focusing on the big picture help her stay awake on shift, and fall asleep at home.

"I don't think you can train your body or really ever adjust to the schedule, but I've learn how to run on an empty tank. That's what is expected of you, and other people are depending on you, so that motivates you to do your job beyond well," Chavez said.

She watches her diet and avoids eating foods that make her sleepy during her shift.

"Some of these guys give me a hard time about the things I eat, but I think the cleaner you eat, the better you feel, and the better you sleep," Chavez said. "When I have a hard time falling asleep on my off days, I work out twice a day — one workout in morning in my gear at the Fire Academy, and then CrossFit® at night, so I wear myself out well enough to get to sleep at night."

Patni advises shift workers to eat frequent but smaller, lighter meals and snacks to stay awake through night shifts.

Late shift *continued on Page 13*

Did you know?

In addition to police officers and firefighters, employees from all around the city work night or evening shifts. Here are a few you might not expect:

- Jail attendant
- Fingerprint technician
- Laundry worker
- 9-1-1 telecommunicator
- Stable attendant
- Court interpreter
- Municipal Courts judge
- Customer service
- Court security
- Juvenile case manager
- Electrician
- Inspector
- Plant operator
- Sludge processor
- Traffic signal operator
- Utility mechanic
- Dispatcher
- Airport communications
- Airport security investigator
- Carpenter
- Cement finisher
- Stationary engineer
- Custodian
- IT Help Desk coordinator
- Recreation assistant
- Recreation facility manager
- Urban park ranger
- Clinic assistant
- Jail medical specialist
- Nurse practitioner
- Public health investigator
- Animal Enforcement Office
- Parking compliance officer
- Mechanic
- Truck driver
- Technical hardware analyst

HEALTHY FIVE-INGREDIENT GRANOLA BARS

Prep time, 10 minutes / Cook time, five minutes / Total time, 15 minutes

Healthy, no-bake granola bars with just 5 ingredients and a sweet, crunchy texture. Peanut butter and maple syrup complement each other perfectly in this ideal portable breakfast or snack.

Author: Minimalist Baker
Recipe type: Breakfast, Snack
Serves: 10 bars

Nutrition Information

Serving size: 1 bar Calories: 217 Fat: 8 g Saturated fat: 1 g Carbohydrates: 31 g Sugar: 19 g Fiber: 4 g Protein: 6 g

INGREDIENTS

- 1 heaping cup packed dates, pitted
- 1/4 cup maple syrup or agave nectar (or honey if not vegan)
- 1/4 cup creamy salted natural peanut butter or almond butter
- 1 cup roasted unsalted almonds, loosely chopped (see instructions for roasting nuts)
- 1 1/2 cups rolled oats (gluten-free for GF eaters)
- optional additions: chocolate chips, dried fruit, nuts, banana chips, vanilla, etc.

HOW TO MAKE IT

1 – Process dates in a food processor until small bits remain (about one minute). It should form a dough-like consistency.

2 – Optional step: Toast your oats (and almonds if raw) in a 350-degree oven for 10 to 15 minutes or until slightly golden brown. Otherwise, leave them raw.

3 – Place oats, almonds and dates in a large mixing bowl and set aside.

4 – Warm honey and peanut butter in a small saucepan over low heat. Stir and pour over oat mixture and then mix, breaking up the dates to disperse throughout.

5 – Once thoroughly mixed, transfer to an 8-by-8-inch baking dish or other small pan lined with plastic wrap or parchment paper so they lift out easily. (A loaf pan might work, but will yield thicker bars.)

6 – Press down firmly until uniformly flattened. (You can use something flat, like a drinking glass, to press down and really pack the bars, which helps them hold together better.)

7 – Cover with parchment or plastic wrap, and let firm up in fridge or freezer for 15 to 20 minutes.

8 – Remove bars from pan and chop into 10 even bars (or nine squares). Store in an airtight container for up to a few days.

just so you know

Heard that saturated fat no longer matters?

New U.S. Department of Agriculture dietary guidelines suggest that people should "consume less than 10 percent of calories per day from saturated fats." The Dietary Guidelines are for 2015-2020.

The guidelines recommend "that saturated fat be replaced with unsaturated and especially polyunsaturated fat," says Frank Hu. "It basically says that we should eat a low-saturated fat diet rather than simply a low-fat diet."

Hu, a diet researcher at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health in Boston, served on the 2015 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee that provided the groundwork for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Guidelines.

"The recommendation is a target based on evidence that replacing saturated fats with unsaturated fats is associated with reduced risk of cardiovascular disease," he explains.

Which foods to watch out for?

While we usually connect saturated fat with animal foods like beef and butter, almost half of the saturated fat in the American diet comes from non-animal foods.

— Nutrition Action

Making time for family meals benefits everyone: Mayor Clinic

As back-to-school routines fill calendars with homework and after-class activities, it may be tempting to skip family dinners. However, Mayo Clinic dietitian Kate Zeratsky says that time around the table can offer some of the most important lessons of the day. She suggests turning off phones and tablet screens and turning on the stove to make family meals.

"Anytime you can enjoy a meal with someone, I would encourage you to do so," says Zeratsky. "It has benefits not only for kids but adults as well."

Zeratsky says cooking in your own kitchen gives you more control over ingredients and portion sizes.

"And, so, if you have more control over the food and the portion, you're likely going to consume less calories and more nutritious foods," adds Zeratsky.

Studies show family meal time can offer social benefits, too, including reducing the chance children will engage in risky behaviors.

— The Mayo Clinic

Good posture can have benefits for better health

Sit up straight! This common request may have been how you first heard about posture, the way you hold your body. Posture isn't just about how you look. How you position yourself can help or hurt your health over your lifetime.

"Posture is not only about how well you sit, but how well you move and go about your daily life," says Dr. George Salem, a National Institutes of Health-funded researcher at the University of Southern California who studies how movement affects health and quality of life.

You may think that sitting with slumped shoulders or bending at your back instead of your knees sometimes won't hurt you. But small changes in how you hold yourself and move can add up over a lifetime.

Years of slouching wears away at your spine to make it more fragile and prone to injury. Holding your body and moving in unhealthy ways often leads to neck, shoulder, and back pain. In any three-month period, about one in four adults in the U.S. has at least one day of back pain.

— National Institutes of Health

facebook.com/groups/COHEmployeeNews/
twitter.com/COHEmployeeNews

Walking for weight loss

City employees step into good health through Fitbit challenges

By Lucha Morales

Yadira Gonzales has long struggled to get a good night's rest. A chronic asthmatic for more than 30 years, she has difficulty breathing, suffers from asthma flare-ups at least twice a month, and experiences pauses in breathing while she sleeps due to a diagnosed sleep apnea disorder.

But an email about the City of Houston's pilot Fitbit program would spark an inspiring health journey for Gonzales and give her the motivation she needed to make meaningful lifestyle changes.

"I saw it and I thought it would be a great opportunity to get involved." said Gonzales, an airport supervisor for the city's Houston Airport System. "I signed up, qualified, picked it up, and have loved it ever since."

Launched by the city's Wellness team in July 2016, the program offers city employees Fitbit activity trackers free of charge to use and participate in wellness challenges. Once participants receive their Fitbit, they can download the Fitbit app and sync their trackers to their smartphones. The Fitbit app allows users to set health goals and track exercise, calories, water intake and sleep.

"We know that physical activity helps to improve health, reduce chronic conditions, and helps to manage overall health," said Ashley Freeman, an administrative coordinator for the Human Resources Department's benefits division.

City departments with high incidents of certain chronic conditions or medical claims cost were recruited for the program, Freeman said.

The city's Fitbit Corporate Platform started in January 2017 and allows the Wellness team to track employees' activity and motivate them through Fitbit challenges.

"We can attach 5,000 Fitbits to it," Freeman said. "Right now, we have 350 spread across seven city departments."

Fitbit distribution depends on participation, Freeman said.

"Whoever wins challenges gets more Fitbits for their departments. Once they get more Fitbits, they can create more interdepartmental teams," she said.

Challenges fuel motivation for change

Gonzales said the increased physical activity was not easy but that family, friends and co-workers encouraged her.

"It was hard at first. Walking 3,500 steps a day was unbearable for me," Gonzales said. Then I noticed my steps increased. I set my goal to be 5,500 steps per day.

"I gradually advanced to 7,000 steps a day," she said. "Right now, I'm averaging anywhere from 11,000 to 16,000 steps a day."

Since June 2017, Gonzales has taken more than 1 million total lifetimes steps thanks to her participation in various internal and external Fitbit challenges. That's almost 500 miles, or nearly the equivalent of walking from Houston to Little Rock, Ark.

City employees across participating departments have combined to take more than 200 million steps from January 2017 to August 2017. That amounts to more than 90,000 miles.

"If I could take a shortcut, I would," Gonzales said. "Now, I tend to take the long route."

Gonzales' persistence has helped her reach some long-desired health milestones.

"In the last couple of months, I haven't had to use my CPAP machine to sleep," said Gonzales who has used a continuous positive airway pressure therapy device to treat her sleep apnea since January 2017. "And it's been while since I've had an asthma flare-up.

"I sleep, I rest, I wake up and I'm energetic," she said.

Gonzales' improvements in breathing and sleeping aren't the only health benefits she's experienced since joining the program.

So far, Gonzales has lost 15 pounds, reduced her waistline by four inches, increased her water intake from 16 ounces to 48 ounces a day, and has eliminated soda and Starbucks from her diet.

And that's not all.

Each year city employees enrolled in a city health insurance plan who complete a biometrics screening, an online health assessment, and wellness activities, receive a discount on their health insurance premiums.

After completing her biometrics screening in August 2016, Gonzales was told she had a reduction in her total LDL cholesterol, or "bad" cholesterol, and an increase in her HDL cholesterol, or "good" cholesterol. LDL cholesterol can increase a person's risk for heart attack and stroke, whereas HDL cholesterol can reduce the risk of heart attack and stroke, according to the American Heart Association.

"It has helped me tremendously," said Gonzales of her participation in the program.

"The ultimate goal is for the participants to increase their physical activity, which will in turn hopefully improve their health and help them manage any chronic conditions they may have," Freeman said.

To learn more about the pilot Fitbit program, contact Ashley Freeman at Ashley.Freeman@houstontx.gov.

TIPS FOR POWER WALKING

Sedentary behavior can cause a range of medical problems. Instead of putting your feet up, get moving with these five tips for power walking.

Set goals: Whether you're a walking newbie or a veteran, it's best to set goals for daily activity. Beginners can opt for 20 to 30 minutes of walking a day. You can break activity into 10-minute segments. Also, aim for at least four to six walks a week. Once you build your endurance, you can increase the time and intensity of your walks.

Track your steps: Activity trackers can capture your daily steps and help motivate you. You don't have to break the bank when it comes to activity trackers. Even simple pedometers can keep track of your steps.

Wear the right shoes: Comfort plays a big role in your exercise. Make sure you wear lightweight and breathable shoes that fit well. Take note of flexibility, heel cushion, and overall fit.

Warm up & cool down: Start at a slower pace for a few minutes before going full speed. Take deep breaths and slowly pick up the pace as you walk. Once you have a rhythm, try to keep that pace for at least 15 minutes. End your walk at a slower pace and take deep breaths.

BY THE NUMBERS

Total steps taken by each participating department from January to August 2017. (Number of participants in parentheses.)

- HAS (263): 127,483,698
- MCD (149): 150,428,335
- FMD (19): 24,890,537
- ARA (5): 2,622,490
- HFD (13): 12,047,657
- HR (63): 52,535,877
- SWD (23): 18,577,922

Health After Harvey

Beware Tetanus

In the wake of Harvey, many people whose residences were flooded have had to find temporary housing at hotels and motels, through Airbnb, or new rental leases. Many have received assistance with meals from food banks, grocery stores and other donations. Now work to restore homes is well underway. But homeowners and and those volunteering to help them clean up their flooded homes may be at risk.

Floodwaters are dangerous for a number of reasons. As the long cleanup and recovery efforts continue in and around Houston, local health officials are urging residents to take precautions. It's difficult to know what exactly the dangers are that lurk in floodwaters and their aftermath, but one of the concerns for officials now is tetanus.

The Houston Health Department warns that people 7 years of age and older with puncture wounds or cuts that were exposed to Harvey floodwaters or residue in houses being gutted and renovated may be at risk for contracting tetanus.

The Houston Health Department offered specific precautions for those cleaning flooded homes, including using "a N-95 rated dust mask if heavy concentrations of mold are already growing in your home." The department also recommended washing all surfaces with soap and warm clean water before sanitizing them with a mixture of household bleach and clean water.

Gloves and long clothing could also help reduce potential exposure. Despite the risks, large numbers of private residents are organizing on NextDoor, Facebook and other networking platforms to rescue stranded neighbors and help strangers clean up their homes. And as reports of skin infections begin to surface on social media, those same residents are also organizing efforts to get people the medicine they need.

Tetanus Shot:

1) Had a puncture wound or cut that was exposed to floodwaters;
2) Have not received a tetanus boost shot in the past 10 years;
3) Older than 7 years of age.

(Source: Houston Health Department)

You would do anything to keep Grandchildren safe.

BUT DID YOU KNOW THESE STARTLING FACTS?

4 BUS LOADS OF CHILDREN PER DAY VISIT THE EMERGENCY ROOM

ER

FOR MEDICINE POISONING

= **1** EVERY 8 MINUTES

IN **86%** OF ER VISITS, THE CHILD HAD EASY ACCESS TO THE MEDICATION

CHILDREN **MOST COMMONLY** FIND MEDICATIONS ON COUNTERS, NIGHT STANDS & DRESSERS; IN PURSES & BAGS; OR ON THE GROUND

HOW ARE CHILDREN GETTING THE MEDICINE?

IN **38%** OF CASES, THE MEDICINE BELONGED TO THE **GRANDPARENT**

EVERY MINUTE A POISON CONTROL CENTER ANSWERS A CALL ABOUT A YOUNG CHILD GETTING INTO MEDICINE

500,000 CALLS PER YEAR

ELECTRICAL OUTLETS ARE THE **#1** SAFETY CONCERN OF GRANDPARENTS

BUT IT'S **36x** MORE LIKELY THAT A CHILD WILL GO TO THE ER FOR MEDICINE POISONING

TIPS FOR GRANDPARENTS ON SAFE MEDICINE STORAGE

- Store all medicines and vitamins **UP AND AWAY** and out of sight.
- Keep purses, bags, and coats that contain medicines or vitamins out of reach and sight.
- Always lock caps tightly and put away medicines after every use. Remember that weekly pill reminder kits often don't have child resistant closures.
- Never leave medicines or vitamins out on a table, countertop, or sink.
- Set a daily reminder to take your medicines and vitamins since they will be out of sight.
- Program the national Poison Help number, 1-800-222-1222 into your phone.

Infographic data source: Safe Kids Worldwide. 2014. Keeping Families Safe Around Medicine

Doctor visits are just a CLICK away

Telemedicine takes off at Kelsey for certain common conditions

By David Smith

Ever feel a common cold coming on — or some other minor, garden variety health concern for that matter? Or turn your ankle playing basketball?

You have a pretty good idea what the problem is, but you need a doctor to confirm it and prescribe medicine. The most painful part, though, may be the doctor visit: the traffic, the parking, that wait . . . then the traffic again.

If you can relate, maybe you should do what Dean Setiono did — try telemedicine.

Setiono's City of Houston health benefits plan is with Kelsey Seybold. He said he remembered seeing something about Kelsey's telemedicine plan several months ago when he was feeling under the weather.

"I had a cold and wondered if I should see a doctor or not," recalled Setiono, a Storm Water Quality supervising engineer with the Houston Permitting Center. "I thought, well, let's give this a try."

He's glad he did. And he's not alone.

Telemedicine is growing on people. The Wall Street Journal has reported that telemedicine is increasingly popular in the U.S. and around the world, driven by faster internet connection speeds.

Locally, City of Houston employees are at the forefront of Kelsey Seybold's growing year-old program. Internist Dr. Donald Aga leads Kelsey's telemedicine program. He said it features online e-visits and video visits.

"What's most commonly being used are the e-visits," Aga said. "And, actually, the City of Houston currently is our No. 1 user of e-visits out of all the clients we have. It's been pretty well subscribed to by you guys, which is really good."

Of Kelsey telemedicine's more than 2,300 e-visits since September 2016, over 1,000 are patients with City of Houston benefits.

"These e-visits are what I would call simple but urgent type of conditions. Typically not real complex type of care," Aga said. "When we started last September, this was a big way for us to take care of people very quickly for cold and flu, bronchitis and those kinds of things."

Kelsey telemedicine is set up to handle appointments for allergies, back pain, cough, cold, heartburn, pinkeye, sinusitis (inflammation of nasal sinus), urinary tract infection and vaginal discharge.

People who log on for e-visits indicate which condition they need treated, complete a very brief online questionnaire about the health issue and pay for the service.

"It's a very quick and rapid turnaround for these kinds of conditions. Our goal is that we're going to respond to the patient, have a diagnosis and a treatment plan within one hour," Aga said.

"The benefit we have on our end is that we have their electronic medical records and the patient's chart," he added. "We can see what medications they're taking, what allergies they have, if they're had this condition before, how was treated. It gives us the advantage of having a lot of data and information, to be able to see what the problem is and to solve it pretty quickly."

Kelsey's telemedicine program is evolving, too. Aga said they continue to add doctors and physicians' assistants to handle e-visits and video visits.

All of that produces a high level of customer satisfaction. Aga said more than 90 percent of e-visit patients and almost 100 percent of video visit patients report being satisfied.

"It's very rare to get a complaint because they're so happy that they didn't have to go anywhere," Aga said.

Count Setiono among the satisfied customers.

"I'm happy with it," he said. "I would definitely recommend it."

KELSEY TELEMEDECINE
Phone: 713-442-0427

KelseyCare health plan members may choose Telemedicine Services for a number of conditions and receive the same quality care, minus a visit to the doctor's office.

Adults and children can receive medical care with e-visits or video visits from a Kelsey-Seybold provider who has access to your medical records and can send secure updates to your primary care doctor or pediatrician.

An e-visit or a video visit is available through MyKelseyOnline accounts at mykelseyonline.com/MyChart/default.asp.

If you don't yet have a MyKelseyOnline account, call the help line at 713-442-6565.

ADULT E-VISITS: Available to patients 18 years and older.
Monday-Friday, 8 a.m.- 9 p.m. / Saturday-Sunday, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.
The e-visit charge is $25

PEDIATRIC E-VISITS: Available for children ages 4-17.
Monday-Friday, 8 a.m.- 9 p.m. / Saturday-Sunday, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.
The e-visit charge is $25

VIDEO VISITS: Real-time conversation with a provider from a smartphone using the MyChart app or by using a camera-enabled desktop/laptop and logging in to your MyKelseyOnline account.
Available to members 18 years and older.
Monday-Friday, 8 a.m.-5 p.m.
The video visit charge is $35.

The MyChart Mobile App

You can schedule a telemedicine appointment online from your mobile device (Android or Apple) by downloading the free app.

Step 1
Android users: Search for the MyChart app in the Google Play store.
Apple users: Search for the MyChart app within the App store.

Step 2
After you download the app, you'll be prompted to search for your medical provider. Click on Kelsey--Seybold Clinic and then click the "plus" icon to automatically go to the MyKelseyOnline log-in page.

Step 3
You're now ready to schedule a telemedicine appointment!

Use the app to directly schedule appointments for:

- Allergy
- Dermatology
- Endocrinology
- Family Medicine
- Gynecology
- Internal Medicine
- Lab
- Nutritional Services (Dietitian)
- Pediatrics
- Rheumatology
- Neurology

For all other specialties and services, call our 24/7 Contact Center at 713-442-0427.

Benefits Contacts

Medical and Dental

City of Houston Benefits Division
832-393-6000 • 888-205-9266
cityofhoustonbenefits.org
benefits@houstontx.gov

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832-393-6192 • 832-393-6194

Cigna 24/7 Customer Service
800-997-1406 • *mycigna.com*

Delta Dental
DHMO: 800-422-4234 • 844-282-7637
DPPO: 800-521-2651 • 855-242-1549
deltadentalins.com

Superior Vision
800-507-3800 • *superiorvision.com*

EAP
855-378-7485 • 800-687-0353
guidanceresources.com
Web ID: HOUSTONEAP

Medicare Advantage

Aetna
800-307-4830 • *aetnamedicare.com*

KelseyCare Advantage
866-534-0554 • *kelseycareadvantage.com*

Cigna HealthSpring
800-846-2098 • *texashealthspring.com*

TexanPlus
866-556-4614

Medicare supplement plan F
800-392-7537

United MedicareRX
888-556-6648 • *uhc.com*

Retirement

Empower Retirement
713-426-5588 • 800-701-8255

Houston Municipal Employee Pension System
713-759-9275 • *hmeps.org*

Houston Firefighters' Relief and Retirement Fund
281-372-5100 • *www.hfrrf.org*

Houston Police Officers' Pension System
713-869-8734 • *hpops.org*

The city of Houston reserves the right to change, modify, increase or terminate any benefits.

Late shift *continued from Page 3*

"It's the same for people who work during the day. You're going to feel sluggish after a heavy lunch," Patni said. "At night, it's especially important. If you eat a heavy, fatty meal with lots of carbohydrates and sugar, you are more likely to have a rapid drop in your energy. Space your meals out and keep it light to sustain energy at night."

William Bentley is a Municipal Courts security officer. He works from 6:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., but his sleep disorders make it challenging to stay awake day or night.

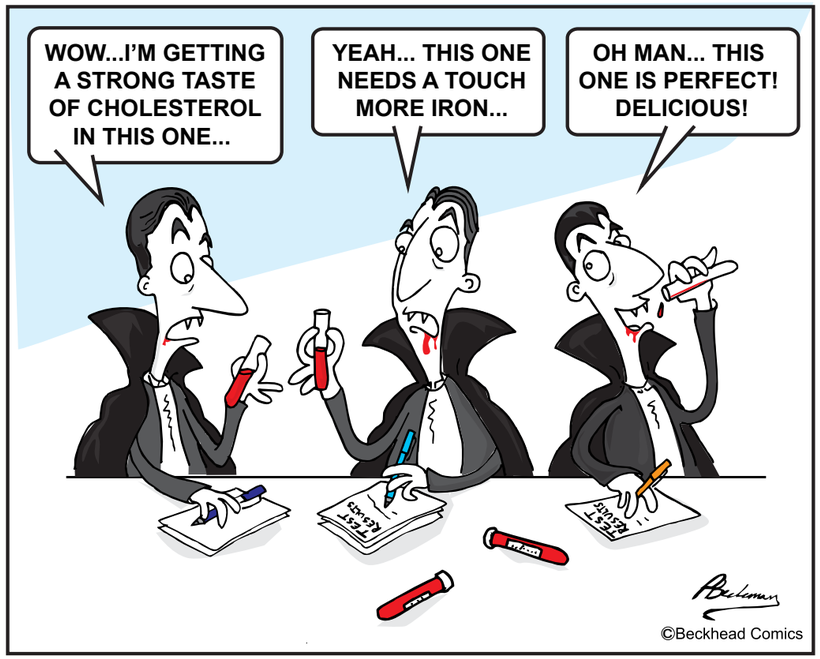
"I have sleep apnea and narcolepsy, which is a misunderstood condition. It just means that I fall asleep very quickly in comfortable situations," Bentley said. "Since I am in a safety-critical position, I know I cannot doze off, even if I have a medical excuse. I could sit down during my shift, but I try to stand up and walk around the courtroom when I can."

Working the night shift is a necessity for many employees – somebody's got to do it – but Patni said employers can lessen the effects of Shift Work Sleep Disorder with careful scheduling. Ideally, employees who work safety critical jobs that require sustained vigilance should work shorter shifts, or have the opportunity for breaks or naps. He also advises having a system of redundancy, or cross training, to give shift workers a break.

"It's easier for the body to adapt to a constant schedule as opposed to rotating schedules," Patni said. "But if it's necessary, it's best to rotate the schedule forward gradually – day to evening to night, not the reverse."

Drawing Conclusions

By Paul Beckman



How the lab really evaluates your blood test.

Retiree *Health Notes*

Smoking linked to frailty in seniors, study finds

Seniors who smoke may be more likely to become frail, a new British study suggests.

Researchers tracked more than 2,500 people 60 and older in England and found that current smoking boosted that risk by about 60 percent. The scientists determined that the participants were frail if they had at least three of five conditions: unintentional weight loss, self-reported exhaustion, weakness, slow walking speed, and low physical activity.

Frail people are at higher risk of problems such as falls, broken bones and hospitalization. Researchers have also linked frailty to poor quality of life and dementia.

The research team also found evidence that chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), a respiratory condition that is typically brought on by years of smoking, boosts the risk of frailty.

But the study did not prove that smoking caused frailty risk to rise, just that there was an association. The study was published recently in the journal Age & Ageing.

— *HealthDay News*

More than half of Americans may need nursing home care

More than half of Americans will find themselves in a nursing home at some point in their lives, a new study shows. That eclipses the 35 percent estimate used by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the researchers added.

"Lifetime use of nursing homes is considerably greater than previously thought, mostly due to an increase in short stays of less than three weeks," said lead researcher Michael Hurd. He is director of the RAND Center for the Study of Aging, in Santa Monica, Calif.

Increased nursing home care begs the question of who will pay for it and how will they pay for it, he said.

The risk of long stays and correspondingly large out-of-pocket spending is fairly large — 5 percent of patients will spend more than 1,500 days in a nursing home, and 5 percent will spend more than $50,000, Hurd said. For married couples, the financial risks are even larger, he noted. As baby boomers start needing more nursing home care, costs will be staggering.

— *HealthDay News*

Writers wanted for retiree perspectives

Attention retirees:

Benefits Pulse is looking for a few good writers to contribute to our publication. We are seeking guest writers to explore topics related to retiree health and wellness.

If you are interested, email David Smith at DavidF.Smith@houstontx.gov or call 832-393-6160.

Prolonged sitting and watching TV heightens health risks for seniors

New research suggests that increased sedentary behavior, combined with low physical activity and increased TV watching time, drastically raises the risk of walking disability among seniors.

The study at George Washington University's Milken Institute School of Public Health in Washington, D.C., examined data from the NIH-AARP diet and health study to better understand the link between diet and health.

Researchers tracked participants' sedentary behavior and exercising habits, recording how much TV they watched and how much physical activity they did, as well as recording what kind of activity the participants engaged in.

— *Medical News Today*

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- You may receive mail and phone solicitations from private vendors offering Medicare Advantage plans. If you enroll in a private-vendor plan, **you will lose your city coverage and the advantages that come with being members of the city's Medicare Advantage plans.**
- The city continues to offer its own low-cost Medicare Advantage plans. You may contact our representatives at 832-393-6000 if you have questions or concerns about your plan.

If you are enrolled in a City Medicare Advantage plan, and you are happy with your plan, you don't need to make any changes.

When you become Medicare-eligible, your medical coverage (Cigna) will end. To enroll in a city-sponsored Medicare Advantage plan, you must first enroll in Medicare Parts A and B through the Social Security Administration. You can switch city Medicare Advantage plans at any time, with coverage effective the first day of the following month.

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