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- News on WorldCare
- Using the Internet may help keep your brain healthy

New procedure offers benefits of weight-loss surgery without an incision

From Brigham and Women's Hospital

"A weight-loss procedure being investigated called transoral obesity surgery allows surgeons to help patients lose weight without making incisions.

Speedy recoveries were part of the reason that Christopher Thompson, MD, became the first in the nation to perform this type of procedure in the summer of 2008. The procedure, an alternative to gastric bypass or lap band surgery, is part of an FDA-approved clinical trial at Brigham and Women's Hospital (BWH) and the Cleveland Clinic. During the procedure, Dr. Thompson guides an endoscope through the patient's mouth and carefully places stitches to narrow the stomach.

Dr. Thompson, BWH's director of developmental and bariatric endoscopy, works closely with a team of dietitians, psychiatrists, nurses, and others in screening patients for the procedure and caring for them afterward. "Our goal is to give patients an alternative to traditional obesity surgery, one with a faster and less painful recovery time and a reduced risk for infections and other complications," Dr. Thompson says.

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Dear Reader,

Dealing with a sick infant is always anxiety producing. This issue brings information about a potential new test to make the process easier. In addition, there is information on a new simple weight-loss procedure and an easy way to keep your mind young and healthy.

Sincerely,

Rebika Shaw,

Regional Director, Corporate Communications

HEALTH NEWS

Test for bacterial infections may make diagnosis easier for infants

From Children's Hospital Boston

A new diagnostic marker called procalcitonin, which can be measured in a simple blood test, can help identify infants at high risk of serious bacterial infections while potentially reducing unnecessary testing, according to researchers at Children's Hospital Boston and George Washington University. Their study, published in the October *Pediatrics*, is the first to examine procalcitonin for evaluating infant fever in an emergency situation.

The researchers used a new procalcitonin test, recently approved by the FDA, in 234 babies under 3 months of age with fevers, of whom 18 percent had definite or possible serious blood infections that were independently confirmed. Procalcitonin detected all of the cases, and its overall performance as a single clinical marker of infection was almost as good as that of current strategies that involve multiple laboratory tests and clinical evaluations.

In the United States, infant fever accounts for a vast majority of pediatric visits to the emergency department, and up to 20 percent of cases have no identifiable cause of infection. While most turn out to be minor illnesses, some infants have serious infections such as meningitis, pneumonia, or urinary tract infections.

"About 12 percent of those whom we consider 'well appearing' end up having serious infections when we do an evaluation," says Richard Bachur, MD, acting chief of emergency medicine at Children's. Because clinicians cannot reliably determine which children with fever have more serious infections, many babies end up undergoing extensive evaluations, which may include blood tests and often a lumbar puncture for spinal fluid.

"We hope to identify those infants that are at very low risk of serious infection and tailor their evaluation so as to minimize invasive testing and exposure to unnecessary antibiotics," Dr. Bachur says.

The researchers are now hoping to test the use of procalcitonin on a larger scale. If it proves to be valuable, Dr. Bachur hopes it will become a standard tool for the evaluation of young infants with fever.



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NEWS ON WORLDCARE

Weight-loss surgery (continued)

Twenty patients will undergo the procedure as part of the clinical trial at BWH and Cleveland Clinic. Eligible patients must have a body mass index - a common method for assessing obesity - of at least 30.

Christine Baker, 36, became BWH's third patient to undergo the procedure. "It is amazing," says Baker, who has lost 16 pounds to date. "The recovery time was so short and comfortable that I felt I could've gone back to work the next day."

Dr. Thompson is pleased with the results Baker and other patients are experiencing. "All of the patients are doing very well," he says. "The first patient is nearly three months post-surgery and has lost more than 40 pounds. This procedure is extremely promising for patients struggling to lose the most weight and who face the greatest risk with traditional bariatric surgery."

Using the Internet may help keep your brain healthy

From UCLA

UCLA scientists have found that for computer-savvy middle-aged and older adults, searching the Internet triggers key centers in the brain that control decision-making and complex reasoning. The findings demonstrate that Web search activity may help stimulate and possibly improve brain function.

The study, the first of its kind to assess the impact of Internet searching on brain performance, is slated to appear in the American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry.

"Internet searching engages complicated brain activity, which may help exercise and improve brain function," says principal investigator Gary Small, MD, a professor at the Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior at UCLA.

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Dr. Small notes that pursuing activities that keep the mind engaged may help preserve brain health and cognitive ability. Traditionally, these include games such as crossword puzzles, but scientists are beginning to assess the influence of computer use, including the Internet.

For the study, the UCLA team worked with 24 healthy volunteers between the ages of 55 and 76. Half of the study participants had experience searching the Internet, while the other half did not. Study participants performed Web searches and read books while undergoing functional magnetic resonance imaging scans, which recorded brain-circuitry changes during these activities.

All study participants showed significant brain activity during the book-reading task, which demonstrated use of the regions controlling language, reading,

memory, and visual abilities. Internet searching revealed a major difference between the two groups. Though all participants demonstrated the same brain activity that was seen during the book-reading task, the Web-savvy group also registered activity in areas of the brain that control decision-making and complex reasoning.

"Our most striking finding was that Internet searching appears to engage a greater extent of neural circuitry that is not activated during reading—but only in those with prior Internet experience," Dr. Small notes. This may be due to less-experienced participants not quite grasping the strategies needed to successfully engage in an Internet search, which is common while learning a new activity. "With more time on the Internet, they may demonstrate the same brain activation patterns as the more experienced group," he says.



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