

# Our Healthy Lifestyles

## Make sure to get the facts before giving

Most of us have the gift of human compassion. Whether it is the victims of natural disaster or those affected by the recent economic downturn, we are glad to help out.

Unfortunately, in times of tragedy and when people are most in the need of money, there always seems to be a rise in scams. The FBI is warning people about fake charity scams, which are always out there, but which have surfaced in large numbers recently as they try to take advantage of the outpouring of support after the devastating Haiti earthquake.

Donors are encouraged to use common sense and due diligence before giving to a charity. SmartMoney



**Donna Ayer**  
Southington  
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offers a few tips for sensible giving including:

Don't offer cash to an unknown telemarketer or to people collecting donations on the street.

Give to an established charity—even a legitimate but newly formed group

isn't a great choice as they might not have the connections to get the money where it is most needed.

Be skeptical of individuals claiming to be victims or of officials asking for donations via e-mail or social networking sites.

If you are donating online, be thorough and be sure you have the correct website for the charity. Several look-alike sites have been set up aiming to steal your financial information.

To insure that donors have full confidence in the not-for-profit organizations and causes that they are asked to support, The Association of Fundraising Professionals has developed a Donor Bill of Rights.

All donors have these rights:

To be informed of the organization's mission, of the way the organization intends to use donated resources, and of its capacity to use donations effectively for their intended purposes.

To be informed of the identity of those serving on the organization's governing board, and to expect the board to exercise prudent judgment in its stewardship responsibilities.

To have the organization's most recent financial statements.

To be assured their gifts will be used for the purposes for which they were given.

To receive appropriate

acknowledgement and recognition.

To be assured that information about their donations is handled with respect and with confidentiality to the extent provided by law.

To expect that all relationships with individuals representing organizations of interest to the donor will be professional in nature.

To be informed whether those seeking donations are volunteers, employees of the organization, or hired solicitors.

To have the opportunity for their names to be deleted from mailing lists that an organization may intend to share.

To feel free to ask questions when making a

donation and to receive prompt, truthful and forthright answers.

It is a shame that those trying to give to others and show compassion need to be wary of becoming victims themselves. The good news is that a little diligence can go a long way.

As Community Development Director for the Southington Community YMCA, I encourage you to perform your due diligence before you donate to any charity.

If I can be of assistance in helping you find a charity that merits your respect and trust, please feel free to contact me at the YMCA at 860-426-9510 or email me at dayer@southington-cheshireymca.org.

## Degenerative disc disease is common cause of low back pain

Degenerative disc disease is one of the most common causes of low back pain, and also one of the most misunderstood. Many patients diagnosed with low back pain caused by degenerative disc disease are left wondering exactly what this diagnosis means for them.

Common questions that are often on patients' minds include: If I have low back pain from degenerative disc disease in my thirties, how much worse will it become with age? Will the degenerative disc disease become a crippling condition? Will I end up in a wheelchair?

Should I restrict my activities? Will the degenerative disc disease spread to other parts of the spine? Will the low back pain from degenerative disc disease



**Dr. Carol Grant**  
Alternately  
Speaking

cause any permanent damage?

A large part of many patients' confusion is that the term "degenerative disc disease" sounds like a progressive, very threatening condition. However, this condition is not strictly degenerative and is not really a disease.

Part of the confusion probably comes from the term "degenerative", which implies to most people that the symptoms will get worse with age. The term applies to the disc degenerating, but does not apply to the symptoms.

While it is true that the disc degeneration is likely to progress over time, the low back pain from degenerative disc disease usually does not get worse and in fact usually gets better over time.

Another source of confusion is probably created by the term "disease", which is actually a misnomer. Degenerative disc disease is not really a disease at all,

but rather a degenerative condition that at times can produce pain from a damaged disc.

Disc degeneration is a natural part of aging and over time all people will exhibit changes in their discs consistent with a greater or lesser degree of degeneration. However, not all people will develop symptoms. In fact, finally, many patients are confused about degenerative disc disease because many medical professionals don't agree on what the phrase describes.

In practical terms, this means that few practitioners agree on what does and does not constitute a diagnosis of degenerative disc disease. Even medical textbooks don't usually attempt to give an accurate description.

Therefore, while many

practitioners believe that degenerative disc disease is a common cause of low back pain in young adults, very few agree on the implications.

While there is still a lot of debate in the medical community about degenerative disc disease, a few aspects of the condition are known. This article will discuss aspects of degenerative disc disease that are more commonly accepted, such as the theory of the degenerative cascade, as well as some areas of theory that are still a source of debate in the medical community.

Generally, the pain associated with degenerative disc disease is thought to stem from two different factors: Inflammation and abnormal motion causing instability.

The proteins in the disc space can cause a lot of inflammation, and inflammation in the disc space can lead to low back pain radiating to the hips. The associated pain can also travel down the back of the legs.

Both the inflammation and instability can cause muscular spasm in the low back. The muscle spasm is the body's attempt to stabilize the low back. It is a reflex, and although the body's response of muscle spasm is not necessary for the safety of the nerve roots, it can be quite painful.

*Dr. Carol Grant, a local chiropractor, does not intend this column to substitute for medical advice. She urges you to always consult with your personal physician before changing any current program.*

## Pediatricians would like to see choking hazards listed on food

By LINDSEY TANNER  
Associated Press

When 4-year-old Eric Stavros Adler choked to death on a piece of hot dog, his anguished mother never dreamed that the popular kids' food could be so dangerous.

Some food makers including Oscar Mayer have warning labels about choking, but not nearly enough, says Joan Stavros Adler, Eric's mom.

The American Academy of Pediatrics agrees. The nation's largest pediatricians group is calling for sweeping changes in the way food is designed and labeled to minimize children's chances for choking.

Choking kills more than 100 U.S. children 14 years or younger each year and thousands more

\_ 15,000 in 2001 \_ are treated in emergency rooms. Food, including candy and gum, is among the leading culprits, along with items like coins and balloons. Of the 141 choking deaths in kids in 2006, 61 were food-related.

Surveillance systems lack detailed information about food choking incidents, which are thought to be underreported but remain a significant and under-appreciated problem, said Dr. Gary Smith, director of the Center for Injury Research and Policy at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio.

Smith is lead author of a new policy report from the pediatricians academy that seeks to make choking prevention a priority for government and food makers. The report

was released Monday in the journal Pediatrics.

Doctors say high-risk foods, including hot dogs, raw carrots, grapes and apples \_ should be cut into pea-sized pieces for small children to reduce chances of choking. Some say other risky foods, including hard candies, popcorn, peanuts and marshmallows, shouldn't be given to young children at all.

Federal law requires choking warning labels on certain toys including small balls, balloons and games with small parts. Unless food makers voluntarily put more warning labels on high-risk foods, there should be a similar mandate for food, the pediatricians academy says.

Adler, a Warren, New Jersey attorney who pushed for more warning

labels after her son died in 2001, says she hopes the academy's efforts will work. Several efforts to pass federal legislation for labels have failed in Congress.

The group also urges the Food and Drug Administration to work with other government agencies to establish a nationwide food-related choking reporting system; and to recall foods linked with choking.

The academy says the food industry should avoid shapes and sizes that pose choking risks.

Something as simple

as making lollipops flat like a silver dollar instead of round like a pingpong ball can make a big difference, said Bruce Silverglade, legal affairs director at the Center for Science in the Public Interest, which also has lobbied for more attention to choking prevention.

Grocery Manufacturers Association spokesman Scott Openshaw declined to say whether food makers would consider warning labels or new designs, but said making parents aware of choking dangers

is key to keeping kids safe.

Openshaw said the industry would continue working with the FDA and USDA ``to ensure that our products are as safe as possible."

At the FDA, spokeswoman Rita Chappelle said the agency will review the academy's analysis and recommendations. She said the FDA also would continue consulting with the Consumer Product Safety Commission on assessing choking hazards associated with food and take action on a case-by-case basis.

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