The Road Ahead

If the Women's Health Initiative were compared to raising a child, we have just completed the early years—infancy and toddlerhood—and are moving into the adolescent years. In other words, recruiting thousands of women like you to join the study has ended or is finishing for most Clinical Centers in 1998. Now we're moving into the important follow-up phase of the study! These coming years are a critical time for WHI scientists to continue to gather information about your health and well-being. It's also an important period for you to review your commitment to WHI. If everyone does their best during these fact-gathering years, the researchers will have very accurate information to work with. Every woman in every part of the study is equally important.

What You Can Do

As a Dietary, Hormone, and/or Calcium/Vitamin D Study participant, you are strongly encouraged to attend your annual or semi-annual visits at your Clinical Center and to complete all forms. The information you provide at your visits and on these forms is needed to help us find the answers about possible ways to prevent heart disease, breast and colon cancer, and osteoporosis.

Congratulations to the many participants who take their part so seriously: of those participants who have been in the study for at least one year, 94% attended their first annual visit. And of those who have been with us for at least two years, 92% came in for their second annual visit.

If you're in the Hormone Study and/or Calcium/Vitamin D Study, remember to continue to take your pills daily and report any symptoms to your clinic practitioner. Please bring along your study pill bottles when you come to the clinic for your annual visit. If you're having any problems taking the study pills, call your Clinical Center. They can give you helpful

Continued on page 2
The Road Ahead
Continued from cover

tips to control symptoms or help you find ways to remember to take your pills.

If you're in the Dietary Study and following your usual eating patterns, it's important to complete all the forms you're sent and come in for your annual visit. If you're in the Dietary Change group, we hope you'll continue to attend the sessions, and complete all forms and Fat Scans.

If you haven't yet attended your first annual visit, you'll be invited to join the Calcium/Vitamin D Study when you come in. Ask the staff at your Clinical Center about the opportunity to join this important study. And don't worry—if you already take calcium pills on your own, you won't have to stop them to join this effort.

More Matters
Starting with this issue, you'll be receiving a copy of WHI Matters twice each year. It'll be slightly shorter in length, but still filled with lots of information about the study, stories about your fellow participants, and other helpful medical news. We'll be sure to let you know about early results of the study when this information is available. We invite your comments and suggestions about the newsletter. Our address is on page seven.

Thank you for giving your time and energy to WHI. It is exciting to see so many women come together with the common goal of improving the health of all women, now and in the future. The success of WHI in finding the answers depends on your regular visits with us. You are part of the answer!

Sisters Study Together

Sue Works and Faye Cordes, sisters from Kentucky, are excited about their involvement in WHI's Hormone Study at the Cincinnati Clinic. United by their family history of heart disease, the sisters hope the research will provide answers for future generations. "WHI needed to be done and should have been done a long time ago," notes Faye.

"The success of WHI in finding the answers depends on your regular visits with us."

(Pictured from left to right: Sue Works, Faye Cordes, and Sue Goldman (former Clinic Manager))
“HaWHIlan” Spirit Touches Many

Hawaiian native Nalani Olds lives her life in the spirit of ‘Ohana. “‘Ohana,” she explains, “means ‘family,’ and in the Hawaiian style, you have your actual family and then you have extended ‘Ohana, which can be interpreted as friends of the family, your town, your community, or your whole island.”

Nalani defines her family in the largest sense of the word; decades of volunteering, educating, and entertaining her community and people around the world prove that. Part of her volunteer efforts extend to Honolulu’s WHI Clinical Center, where Nalani participates in the Hormone and Dietary programs. “WHI has been great for me,” says Nalani. “I’ve learned more about myself and what I can do to improve or help myself. I also enjoy the camaraderie of a new group of friends and health care providers.”

Nalani is eager to help provide more answers about women’s health: “In my human services work, I noticed that women’s health issues were not looked at by the medical profession the way men’s health issues were. For some time, I thought that was so unfair. This [study] was such a wonderful opportunity to help my daughters, women in general, and also Island and Asian women.”

One woman in Nalani’s life, her grandmother, taught her much about Hawaiian culture and values. “She used to say to me that I should listen with my eyes and observe with my ears,” recalls Nalani. “I need to use every part of me to know, to observe, and to feel. In the Hawaiian way, you live a life of love and caring for others and for what is around you.”

To live out this history and pass it on to others, Nalani has been performing since she was 16 years old as a hula dancer, singer, and storyteller. She has shared her talents around the world, including a 1988 performance at Carnegie Hall. She is a featured vocalist with the Royal Hawaiian Band and has performed for many years at hotels in Waikiki and on neighboring islands.

For almost a decade, she has taken her cultural classes into the Hawaiian prison system on a weekly basis and has shared the native traditions with the inmates. “I use Hawaiian culture and music as a vehicle,” she says. “In our culture, who you are and where you come from are very important, because if you don’t know that, you can’t work on where you’re going.” Nalani hopes that by giving the prisoners an understanding of their history, they’ll gain respect for themselves and plan a future where prison is no longer considered an option. For her efforts, she was chosen as the 1996 Volunteer of the Year at the Halawa Correctional Facility.

In addition to her volunteer roles for countless schools and community organizations, this 60-year-old works full-time at the ‘Iolani Palace in Honolulu. The palace dates back to the late 1800s, when it housed the last king of Hawaii and his family. It is now a museum and Nalani is the head of security. She oversees care of the building and all of its artifacts.

What gives Nalani her energy and focus? “My mindset is that we need to give back,” she explains. “I receive so much all of the time from everyone, so I try to give back to my audiences. It’s living what my grandmother said: a life of love.”
Shedding Some Light on Sun Safety

It's noon on a beautiful, sunny day, and you can't wait to get outside and enjoy the rays. Sure, you know about skin cancer and wrinkling from being in the sun, but as long as you slap on some sunscreen, you'll be fine, right? Wrong.

Sunscreen use may create a sense of safety. But the fact is, our nation is experiencing an epidemic of skin cancer, which currently strikes 1 million Americans each year—a number that nearly equals all other forms of cancer combined. The incidence of melanoma, the most serious type of skin cancer, is rising fastest. It's predicted to hit one in 75 by the year 2000.

We've all heard and perhaps followed the advice to wear sunscreen daily. According to sunscreen manufacturers, if you put on, for example, SPF 15 sunscreen (SPF stands for “sun protection factor”), you can stay in the sun 15 times as long as you normally could without burning. But when researchers determine a lotion's SPF in the lab, they use about one ounce for full-body coverage—one-quarter of a standard-size tube. Most of us only apply half that amount, studies show. Even if you try to use a lot, sunscreen's transparency makes it hard to tell whether you're fully covered. Compared to every other preventive measure—avoiding peak sun, slipping on a shirt, putting on a hat—sunscreen falls short.

About five years ago, researchers discovered there is no such thing as a safe tan. Even before a sunburn appears, the sun's rays penetrate and inflame the skin, leading to wrinkling and possibly skin cancer. The most telling signs for cancer risk are being pale, freckled, or tending to burn. But darker skinned people can also get skin cancer. A few sunscreen manufacturers have created broad-spectrum sunscreen, which is the most protective. At minimum, apply the lotion generously, and don't forget your ears, lips, face, and the backs of your hands.

To really safeguard yourself, start with steps even easier than using sunscreen. Avoid the sun between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m., when the sun's rays are the strongest. You can still be outside, of course, just pick a shady spot. Wear lightweight, loose-fitting, long-sleeved, tightly woven shirts, pants, or long skirts as much as possible when in the sun. Avoid wearing wet clothes, such as a wet t-shirt, because when clothes get wet, the sun's rays can more easily pass through. If you see light through a fabric, burning rays can get through, too. Wear a wide brimmed hat, and don't be fooled by cloudy skies; at most, clouds only block 20 percent of the sun's rays. Also, be especially careful on the beach and in the snow because sand and snow reflect sunlight and increase the amount of UV radiation you receive.

Even if it's not beautiful and sunny outside right now, keep these tips in mind when warmer weather arrives.
What Skin Cancer Looks Like

One in five Americans will have skin cancer in his or her lifetime. There are three types of skin cancer: malignant melanoma, squamous cell carcinoma, and basal cell carcinoma. Basal and squamous cell carcinomas are common but seldom fatal; you may be left with a scar from their removal, but you'll probably be fine. Melanoma, on the other hand, is rare but often deadly.

Nearly 100 percent of skin cancers can be cured if caught early. Review the descriptions below, and if you see something suspicious on your body, see a dermatologist to have it checked out.

Malignant Melanoma

- Strikes 32,000 people each year and kills nearly 7,000
- Occurs when pigment cells multiply uncontrollably for unknown reasons
- Usually fatal when caught late

RISK FACTORS
- A family history of melanoma
- Three or more blistering sunburns before age 20
- Three or more summers as a teen spent working outdoors
- Exposure to intense sun
- Fair skin or hair, blue eyes
- The presence of several large, brown moles at birth
- More than 25 moles larger than 1/6 of an inch across (about as wide as a grain of rice)

WHAT TO LOOK FOR
A mole that has irregular or uneven edges, has uneven color or changes color, or is wider than the end of a pencil eraser

WHERE TO CHECK
Everywhere on your body (even places rarely exposed to sun)

Squamous Cell Carcinoma

- Diagnosed in more than 100,000 Americans each year and kills more than 2,000
- Develops when ultraviolet light causes cells in the skin's top layer to grow faster, resulting in a tumor
- Can spread to major organs when ignored

RISK FACTORS
- Decades of sun exposure
- Fair skin, freckles, blue eyes

WHAT TO LOOK FOR
- A red or white sore of almost any kind that doesn't heal in three weeks
- A scaly or crusty patch
- A small bump that turns into a wart-like lump

WHERE TO CHECK
Parts of your body most often exposed: scalp, ears, face, neck, back, and shoulders

Basal Cell Carcinoma

- Diagnosed in 500,000 Americans each year; rarely spreads or leads to death
- Develops in much the same way as squamous cell carcinoma

RISK FACTORS
- Decades of sun exposure
- Fair skin, freckles, blue eyes

WHAT TO LOOK FOR
- Any sore that changes in size or color; hurts, itches, or bleeds; and doesn't heal in three weeks
- A flesh-colored, pearly, or red bump
- A scaly, off-white or yellow patch that looks like scar tissue
- A blue, brown, or black lesion

WHERE TO CHECK
Parts of your body most often exposed
Once again, your mother was right. Remember being told as a child to wash your hands before eating, after playing outside, or after going to the bathroom? Well, it's fortunate for us that old habits die hard. The practice of washing your hands—properly—can keep away many common illnesses, and even some life-threatening ones. According to the Centers for Disease Control, hand washing is the single most important way to prevent the spread of illness and infection and to maintain food safety.

A little soap and water can often prevent sicknesses that can take lots of time to go away: colds, flu, and intestinal illnesses. Unfortunately, the simple "splash and go" method of hand washing that many of us do without much thought is not enough. To really clean your skin, you must wash the front and back of your hands and between each finger for at least 15 seconds, using plenty of warm water and soap. It is just as important to thoroughly dry your hands with a clean towel or paper towel, as moist skin is an ideal environment for bacteria. When using a public restroom, many experts recommend using a paper towel to turn off the faucet and to open the door. Never underestimate the number of people who don't wash their hands and could infect you when you touch the faucet handle or door knob with your clean hands.

The main way soap combats illness is by loosening the oil and dirt that carry germs, helping water rinse them away. So-called antibacterial soaps are made with chemicals that kill germs, but it's unclear how big the advantage is. A recent study found that when people cleansed their hands with regular soap and water, 96 percent of staph, a common skin bacteria, were washed away. Antibacterial soap wiped out 97 percent. Many people find that regular use of antibacterial soap leaves their hands especially dry. Studies have found liquid soaps are more effective than bar soaps in ridding our hands of germs.

During the cold and flu season, viruses are the bugs you most want to avoid. Experts say detergents in all soaps break down the protective fatty coating on many viruses. A study in 1993 showed that hand washing disposed of the more serious viruses that cause polio and hepatitis A.

While it's virtually impossible to keep your hands germ-free, there are times when it's critical to wash up:

- Before you handle or eat food
- Before caring for an infant
- After you visit the bathroom
- After handling uncooked food (especially meat or poultry)
- After blowing your nose, or sneezing or coughing into your hand
- After playing with a pet
- After handling garbage
- After handling money
- After changing a baby's diaper

You can't avoid touching things and certainly don't need to feel paranoid, but a good dose of common sense and soapy water are sure to wash away many health worries.
Creating a Family Portrait

Think of a family member with whom you are especially close.

Do you know the details of her first kiss? What about his first job? What did she hope for her children's future? Why did she decide to leave her hometown? What was the proudest moment of his life? What's her biggest regret? What was his grandfather like?

These are not necessarily easy questions to answer, but the replies can be fascinating. Likely, there's someone who would also like to know the same things and more about you. Indeed, one of the greatest gifts you can give younger generations is a glimpse of your own and your family's past. A collection of memories, whether written or recorded, is a priceless treasure.

More than a snapshot, if you record your family memories, you will build a connection of strengthened family ties between the people who came before you and those who follow. Your history will continue to influence future generations of your family and offer them a sense of continuity.

Many community colleges and neighborhood and senior centers offer reminiscence writing classes to help you get started. Through one of these courses, or on your own, you can begin remembering and researching your family's history. Try looking through old photo albums, letters, high school and college yearbooks, and newspapers. Libraries and alumni associations can be especially helpful. To record your recollections, you can write about your past, videotape yourself reminiscing, or talk into a tape recorder and ask someone to transcribe your words.

Some people find it easiest to be "interviewed" by someone, while others want to be alone with their thoughts at first. Either way, here are some questions to help you get started:

- "What do you remember most about your childhood home?"
- "What do/did you especially admire about your parents?"
- "If you could return to a day in your life, what day would it be?"
- "Who was your first love?"
- "What is your favorite memory of your grandparents?"
- "What was your best job?"
- "Who was your most beloved teacher?"
- "What historical events during your lifetime affected you the most?"
- "How did you meet your spouse or closest friend?"
- "As a youngster, what were your hopes and dreams for your life?"
- "What were your children like as babies?"
- "How does the world seem different now than when you were young?"

Taking some time to reconnect with your past can be joyful, humorous, and healing. Your memories will likely be a precious keepsake to those who love you.
Stay In Touch

Don’t forget to call your local Clinical Center if your address changes!

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