A Snapshot of WHI Efforts

American industrialist Henry Ford said, "Coming together is the beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success." The ongoing work and dedication of every woman in WHI is creating success. Together, women are dedicating themselves to the health questions of today so the women of tomorrow will have better answers.

What WHI women accomplish in just one day is staggering. Every day brings another form completed, vial of blood stored, or food diary finished — every day brings us closer to better health information for women of the future. So let's look at one day in WHI across the U.S. and marvel at what women can do together.

Madeleine Faenza receives her study pills from Maria Bueche, clinic practitioner at the Boston Clinical Center. 60,827 study pills are taken studywide every day by participants in the Estrogen alone and calcium/vitamin D studies. This adds up to over one ton of pills (2,260 pounds) given out since WHI began!

Clinic Practitioner Karen Barr reads Liliane Lilliefors' blood pressure at the George Washington University Clinical Center. In addition to blood pressure monitoring, Clinical Trial participants have given over 6,000 pints of blood to WHI (that's over 750 gallons!). Women in the Observational Study, WHI's largest part, have provided over 8,000 pints (more than 1,000 gallons) of blood. These important blood specimens are stored for future research.

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A Snapshot

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Clinic Practitioner Sharon Pettigrew readies Willie Thompson for an electrocardiogram (ECG) at the Atlanta Clinical Center. ECGs are done for Clinical Trial participants when they joined WHI and during their clinic visits in their third, sixth, and ninth years in the study. 14,743 ECGs were collected last year.

Anita Mastromatteo's height is measured by Boston Clinical Center's Sandra Weekes. Height is just one of several physical measurements recorded at each annual clinic visit. Last year, 54,346 such measurements were collected from Clinical Trial and Observational Study participants.

Participant Ellen Viden is interviewed at the George Washington University Clinical Center by Julia Selah. The average age of a woman in the Clinical Trial and Observational Study is 69.5 and 70.2 years, respectively. The combined ages of all of the women in WHI offers an astounding 11,315,916 years of collective wisdom!

What's in a Name?
The ten most popular first names among WHI participants are:
1. Mary
2. Barbara
3. Patricia
4. Dorothy
5. Margaret
6. Betty
7. Helen
8. Joan
9. Ruth
10. Shirley
Does Estrogen plus Progestin Affect Quality of Life?

Do women who take hormones feel better physically? Are they happier, more energetic, or have better quality of life than women who don’t take hormone pills? These questions were answered by a paper written by a group of WHI scientists, led by Jennifer Hays, PhD, Principal Investigator at the Houston WHI Clinical Center. Their findings were published in the New England Journal of Medicine.

Quality of life is a measure of how health affects one’s sense of well-being and ability to function (physically, mentally and socially). 16,608 postmenopausal women in the Estrogen plus Progestin (E + P) study received either a daily hormone pill or a placebo pill. Researchers collected information about the participants’ quality of life when participants joined the study and after one year. They also collected data from a random subgroup of 1,511 women at three years.

The results showed no clear benefits for those taking E + P on any of the quality of life measures. There were no significant improvements on perceptions of general health, energy, social functioning, mental health, depression, or sexual satisfaction. There were slight improvements in women’s physical functioning, bodily pain, and sleep disturbances at one year. These effects were very small, however. The average increase in physical functioning, for example, was less than one point on a 100-point scale. Most women would not notice such small differences in everyday life, nor would these effects outweigh the risks of E + P for heart attack, stroke, blood clots, and breast cancer.

Researchers also analyzed the data from 574 younger women (50-54 years of age) who reported having hot flashes and night sweats—symptoms that cause some women to seek treatment. While women taking E + P did find some relief for their symptoms, there were no improvements in quality of life for these women except a small improvement (1 point on a 20-point scale) in sleep disturbance.

These results came from the WHI E + P study, not the study of Estrogen alone. The Estrogen-Alone part of the WHI hormone program is still continuing, and the results are not yet known. These results also may not apply to the women who seek medical care for menopausal symptoms.

Future WHI publications will address a variety of other conditions — like diabetes, ovarian cancer, dementia, and cognitive function — that E + P may impact.


The Quilt Built with Dedication

WHI participant Betty Jacobson (left) and Lead Nutritionist Niki Gernhofer display a beautiful quilt created by the participants and staff of the Chicago Clinical Center. Over 87 colorful squares were contributed to form two complete quilts. Most of the quilters provided information about their motivation for being part of WHI and described the theme of their square when they submitted their creations. Barbara Hutton, the owner of Prints Charming Quilts in Palatine, IL, assisted with the project and donated some supplies. Over 30 women volunteered their time to assemble the quilts. To see color photos of both quilts and to read the inspiring messages written by the quilters, visit the WHI website at www.whi.org
Duct tape, the all-purpose household fix-it, can also remove warts. Researchers say duct tape is a more effective and less painful alternative to liquid nitrogen, which is used to freeze warts. Both treatments are based on provoking an irritation to trigger an immune response to wipe out the warts. In a recent study, patients wore duct tape over their warts for six days. Then they removed the tape, soaked the area in water, and used an emery board or pumice stone to scrape the spot. The tape was reapplied the next morning. This routine continued for a maximum of two months or until the warts went away, which happened 85 percent of the time.

Traveling? In addition to any drugs you take regularly, consider packing:
- Over-the-counter pain relievers (like Tylenol, Advil, aspirin) and antihistamine (such as Benadryl)
- Hydrocortisone (1.0 percent cream) for rashes and stings
- Antifungal foot powder, such as miconazole
- Bismuth subsalicylate (such as Pepto-Bismol) as preventive therapy against developing "traveler's diarrhea"; also ask your health care provider for a diarrhea-fighting antibiotic in case that fails.

Letters

We'd love to hear feedback on the newsletter and your story ideas. We regret that we cannot answer questions about individual medical conditions. Published letters may be edited. Send a letter to:

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Finding Romance by Chance

68-year-old Ruth Becker wasn’t looking for love when she dialed the phone seven years ago. But Ruth found romance unexpectedly, and after a decidedly single life, she wed for the first time in 2000.

Her phone search was for a childhood friend, Lore, who was the daughter of her mother’s friend, Eva. “My mother had died, and I was going through letters she had written in the 1930s to my uncle,” Ruth recalls. Her uncle escaped Hitler’s Germany in 1936, and paved the way for four-year-old Ruth and her Jewish family to immigrate to New York City in 1940.

“My mother’s letters asked a lot about Eva, who was already in the U.S.,” explains Ruth. “I knew Eva’s daughter, Lore, from my childhood, and I knew Eva also had a son because my mother went to his wedding about 50 years ago, so I got curious. I wanted to know if Lore was still around, and what she was up to.” Ruth searched for Lore in local phone books, but to no avail. Though she had never met him, she recalled the son’s name, found a phone number, and left a message on Herman Darnell’s answering machine. “I asked if his mother’s name was Eva, could he please call me,” says the New York Clinical Center Observational Study participant, hoping Herman could lead her to his sister.

Herman thought the message might be from a bill collector but decided the voice sounded sincere, so he called. It turned out that he lived near Ruth and had divorced long ago.

Ruth and Herman had brunch together a few days later. Ruth recalls: “I had the world’s worst toothache. I was having root canal surgery the next day. We got together and he had me laughing with his funny stories.” She adds, “Anyone who can make you laugh with a toothache is worth keeping!”

Though neither ever dreamed of marrying, they decided to wed five years later. The wedding proposal came via email, not surprising given 74-year-old Herman’s love of computers; he still works as a webmaster for a shoe company. “He wrote me a two-page poem thanking me for a trip we had just taken to Switzerland and Italy, and the last line was, ‘Will you marry me?’” recollects Ruth. “I thought about it—for about three seconds!”

Just like their courtship, Ruth and Herman’s marriage is unconventional. They’ve kept their own apartments and have dinner together on weeknights. On the weekends, Ruth heads to Herman’s.

“I think we talk to each other more than people who live together,” she says of their daily phone calls.

“We celebrate our anniversary every month... otherwise, you don’t get to 50 very easily,” she chuckles. “I get flowers and we usually eat out. We just passed our 30-something anniversary. It’s kind of romantic!”

Ruth has been retired for the last decade after a varied career, including working at a psychiatric hospital and as a reader for blind professionals. As a volunteer, she researches books for a database at City University of New York, and she reviews children’s books for an educational magazine. Ruth joined WHI to help future generations. “Without too much effort, I’m doing something positive,” she says.
How to Protect Yourself Against Telemarketing Fraud

"Congratulations! You’ve been selected to receive five magazines, free of charge, for five years. All we ask is that you send us a small fee for shipping and handling."

"Pack your bags! You’ve won a free round-trip airline ticket to Hawaii! Just make your hotel reservations through our travel agency and you’ll be on your way."

Do these offers sound familiar? Sound too good to be true? They probably are. In the case of the magazines, the shipping and handling fee probably exceeds the regular cost of the subscriptions, and you’re locked into a five-year contract with magazines you might not even want. For the “free” plane ticket, the lodging costs are likely inflated to cover the ticket.

The common thread in these scams is the telephone. Telemarketing fraud results in an estimated loss of $40 billion each year, according to Congress. AARP (formerly known as the American Association of Retired Persons) reports that over half of the people targeted by telemarketers are 50 or older. In this article, we’ll look at the common tactics of fraudulent telemarketers and what you can do to protect yourself.

How common is fraudulent telemarketing?
The FBI estimates there are at least 14,000 illegal sales operations robbing U.S. consumers every day. Many of these unlawful businesses intentionally target older people with their illegal scams. The callers may say you are eligible to win a valuable prize or promise to get back money you lost in an earlier scam—for a fee, of course. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) says con artists often follow the headlines and then tailor their offers to prey on the fears and vulnerabilities of consumers (for instance, selling phony antibiotics after the anthrax scare, or pitching unneeded credit card loss protection during an economic slump).

Why are people over 50 prime targets?
According to the National Consumers League, seniors tend to trust strangers more readily than younger adults, and they’re also more likely to cave in to high-pressure pitches. Some older people are lonely and appreciate friendly phone calls, even from ill-intentioned telemarketers. In addition, retired people have often built substantial savings from decades of work to serve as their “nest egg.” Criminals are drawn to those retirement savings like bees to honey.

What should I do?
› Be prepared for criminal calls. These smooth-talking thieves want to keep you on the phone; the longer you stay on the line, the greater your chances of being scammed. Plan ahead to quickly say, “No, thanks” or “Not interested.” Don’t worry about appearing to be rude. You could even say you’re just visiting or in the middle of something and hang up fast.
› Ask telemarketers for their company’s name, address, and phone number, and a clear explanation of the offer they are making.
› Ask about the company’s refund policies. Even if the policy sounds good, the company may close down and leave town before you
have a chance to get a refund, or maybe even before your merchandise ever arrives.

- Call your state’s attorney general’s office or the consumer protection agency in your area and in the area where the business is located. Ask these agencies if any complaints have been made against this company.
- Ask the caller to send you written information to read before you agree to a purchase.
- Talk to family members, friends, and your attorney, accountant, or banker and ask their advice before making any large investments or purchases.
- Be wary of making even small purchases from telemarketers; you could land on a so-called “mooch list” (a list of most likely victims) used by fraudsters.
- Be skeptical of too-good-to-be-true sales pitches. If you’re told you’re a “guaranteed” winner or there’s “no risk involved,” move on. Winning is never guaranteed, so you risk losing your money.
- Tell the caller to remove your name from their list if you don’t want to be called again. By law, they’re required to obey your request. If they call again, report this illegal activity to the police. With the FTC’s help, consumers are gaining the upper hand in discouraging unwanted calls (see “Keeping Calls Away” at right).

What should I not do?

- Don’t ever pay for a prize or send any money to improve your chances of winning a contest. It’s illegal to make you pay to enter sweepstakes or claim a prize.
- Don’t allow a telemarketer to intimidate or bully you into a purchase. If the caller says you need to act “right now” or “we must have your money today,” it’s probably a scam.
- Don’t give any caller your bank account number or Personal Identification Number (PIN). Some con artists get bank account information from their victims for “verification” or “identification” purposes and withdraw money without permission.
- Unless you made the call, don’t give out your credit card numbers. Never wire money or send money by overnight delivery as a result of a phone sales pitch.
- Never give out personal information about yourself or your family over the phone or computer. This includes your driver’s license number, your Social Security number, your telephone calling card number, insurance information, or any other personal information.

What if I’m a victim?
Being conned can be so embarrassing for the victim that such crimes are often never reported to the authorities. It’s humiliating to admit you’ve been “had.” You may say to yourself, “I don’t want anyone to know I could be so naive to fall for a trick like this.” But we all are at risk unless fraudsters are reported and stopped. In addition to calling your local police, report fraudulent or suspicious calls to your state attorney general, who is listed in your local telephone book and on the National Association of Attorneys General website (www.naag.org). You may also contact the FTC for a complaint form (www.ftc.gov and click on the box marked, “File A Complaint Online”), or call 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357).

Keeping Calls Away
The FTC recently created a national “do not call” registry. You can request (via the phone or Internet) to be placed on a “do not call” list. Telemarketers are required to search the registry and honor the wishes of consumers who don’t want to be called. Violators face stiff penalties. For more information, visit the website, www.donotcall.gov or call 1-888-382-1222.
Stay In Touch

Don't forget to call your local Clinical Center if your address or phone number change!

Albert Einstein College of Medicine
Bronx, New York • (718) 931-1010

Arizona Prevention Center
Phoenix, Arizona • (602) 241-4216
Tucson, Arizona • (520) 321-7440

Baylor College of Medicine
Houston, Texas • (713) 793-6366

Berman Center for Clinical Research
Minneapolis, Minnesota • (612) 341-7900

Brigham and Women's Hospital
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Greensboro, North Carolina • (336) 272-0455
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If you have questions, use the telephone number listed above to contact your Clinical Center.