SPRING 2009

Health Connection

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Speedy, new registration at STRMC

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Give your baby a healthy start!
STRMC's Maternal & Newborn Center can help

Easing pelvic pain

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SOUTH TEXAS REGIONAL MEDICAL CENTER
Quality Care. Right Here.
www.strmc.com

The facts about **fibroids**

You're constantly running to the restroom, your back hurts and your periods are particularly painful. What's going on? You might be dealing with uterine fibroids, noncancerous tumors that grow out of uterine tissue.

Physicians aren't sure why some women develop fibroids, but if you're overweight or African-American or an immediate family member has fibroids, you're at increased risk.

WHAT DO FIBROIDS FEEL LIKE?

In most cases, you won't even know that you have fibroids. But consult your physician if you experience any of these signs:

- heavy or painful periods
- bleeding between periods
- constant pelvic pain
- a feeling of fullness in the lower abdomen
- an increased need to urinate
- pain during sex
- lower back pain
- reproductive problems, including infertility, multiple miscarriages or preterm labor

WHAT'S NEXT?

Your physician will do a pelvic exam to see whether your uterus is enlarged or misshapen. If he or she spots abnormalities, an imaging exam, such as an ultrasound, can confirm the diagnosis.

Treatment depends on your symptoms' severity, the fibroids' size and location, your age and whether you want children:

- If you don't have symptoms, treatment is usually unnecessary.
- If you're approaching menopause, you may be advised to do nothing, as fibroids tend to stop growing or even shrink when hormone levels drop.
- If you have occasional discomfort, try an over-the-counter pain reliever, such as ibuprofen or acetaminophen.
- If you're bleeding heavily, your physician may recommend hormonal treatments to lighten your flow or an iron supplement to prevent anemia.
- If your fibroids are large, your physician may suggest hormones to temporarily stop menstruation and shrink the growths. These hormones are sometimes prescribed before surgery to make it easier to remove the fibroids.
- If your fibroids are growing quickly or causing excessive blood loss, your physician may present several surgical options. Myomectomy (removing the fibroids while leaving the uterus intact) is the best option for women who wish to have children. Myolysis (freezing or using an electric current to destroy growths) and hysterectomy (removing the uterus) are other possible treatments.

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Take our survey and win a $50 Wal-Mart gift card!

{www.healthconnectionmag.com}

We need your input! We'd like to know what you think about our publication so we can better serve your needs. Please take a few minutes to complete our online survey. Your responses will be used to improve our services to the community and to enhance our publication.

Filling out the online survey is easy: Simply go to www.healthconnectionmag.com and complete the survey.

By completing our survey, you'll be automatically entered in a random drawing to win one of five gift cards.

All surveys must be completed online by June 1, 2009, to be eligible to win. One entry per person, please. Thank you for your time and assistance.

All responses will be kept strictly confidential.
We do not sell, rent or give away your e-mail address.

Get on track with FAST TRACK!

STRMC has a speedy new registration process

Great news! Patients seeking laboratory or electrocardiogram (EKG) exams have a direct route to registration using the new FAST TRACK service at South Texas Regional Medical Center (STRMC). Patients are welcome to bypass the general outpatient registration area and instead register directly at the laboratory department's draw area, where they'll get prescribed testing.

Future plans include expansion of services such as scheduling of preadmission testing for surgery or inpatient admissions. We're pleased to offer new opportunities for improved medical services at STRMC.

FAST TRACK quick facts

- **Servicing:** only lab or EKG services
- **Days/hours of service:** Monday–Friday, 7 a.m.–3 p.m.

To contact FAST TRACK registration, call (830) 769-3515, ext. 2712.

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LETTER FROM OUR CEO

Dear neighbors,

Michael L. Pierce, CHE
Chief Executive Officer

I'm proud to share news of South Texas Regional Medical Center's (STRMC) growth and improvements. As always, patient care and service experience are our highest priorities. We always want you to leave our hospital very satisfied!

FAST TRACK

We know your time is valuable and your need for accurate, enhanced medical services is great. FAST TRACK, our new registration process for select procedures, has been tremendously well received by our patients. It saves time and delivers the same reliable results you've come to depend on.

OTHER NEWS

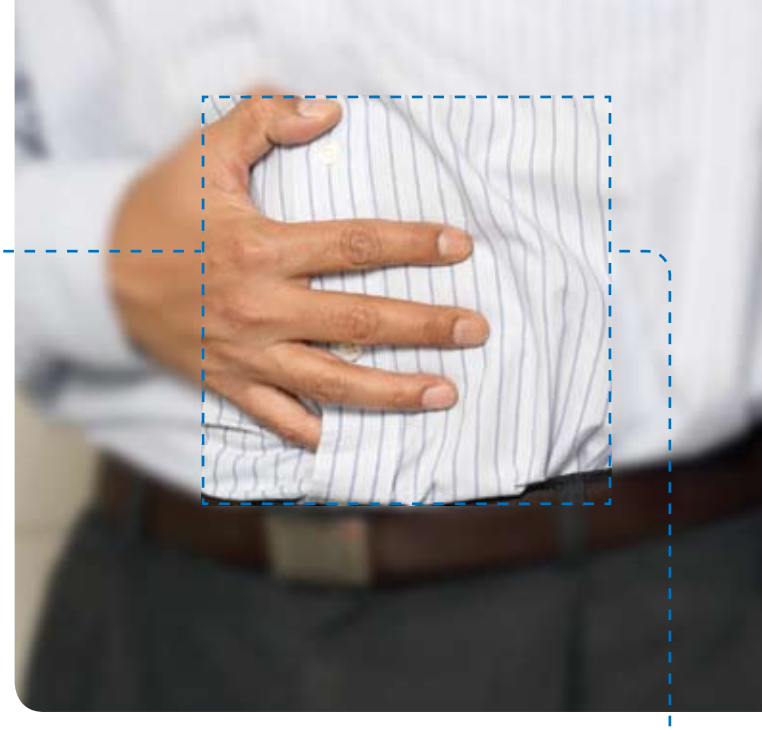
The first floor relocation of our South Texas Heart Clinic, along with expansion of services, means that the specialized cardiac care you need is now more convenient to access. I'm also pleased to deliver positive news about the benefits of STRMC for everyone in our community. The numbers speak for themselves. The community's support of STRMC has enabled us to give back to those we serve through donations, sponsorships, employment, taxes and improved quality of life. We care about our community, and we'll continue to work tirelessly to improve our processes to keep you very satisfied!

Best regards,

Michael L. Pierce, CHE
Chief Executive Officer
South Texas Regional Medical Center

Gut check

Could it be appendicitis?



What's tiny and useless but can cause a whole lot of pain if it's unhappy? Your appendix, a finger-shaped pouch attached to your lower intestine. And if your appendix ever becomes inflamed and fills with pus, you'll have a raging case of appendicitis, a potentially life-threatening illness.

WHO'S AT RISK?

Though anyone can get appendicitis, it often strikes between ages 10 and 30. It usually happens when the appendix is blocked by fecal matter or a swollen lymph node following a digestive tract infection. A small number of people are diagnosed following traumatic abdominal injury, while others are genetically predisposed. In all, about 280,000 appendectomies are performed each year in the United States, according to the National Center for Health Statistics.

NOT JUST A BELLYACHE

A hundred different ailments can cause stomach pain, but your appendix might be the culprit if you have:

- pain that starts around the belly button and moves to the lower right of the abdomen and gets worse when you move, take deep breaths, sneeze or cough
- abdominal swelling
- loss of appetite
- nausea and vomiting
- constipation or diarrhea
- an inability to pass gas
- a low-grade fever

TIME TO TAKE IT OUT?

This isn't a wait-and-see kind of problem. Removal is the only effective treatment for appendicitis, so if you're having symptoms, head to the emergency room, stat. Once there, a physician will check for pain location and tenderness, run a blood test for infection and send you for a computed tomography (CT) scan to confirm the diagnosis. He or she will also look to rule out other possibilities for your symptoms, including ectopic pregnancy, ovarian cysts, kidney stones and Crohn's disease. If you do have appendicitis, your appendix will be surgically removed before it can rupture. It may be done laparoscopically (the surgeon makes a few small incisions in your abdomen) or with traditional open surgery (the surgeon makes one large incision). Since experts have been unable to pinpoint the appendix's function, it's unlikely that you'll suffer any long-term effects.

Delay treatment and your appendix will likely rupture. If that happens, chances are good that you'll develop an infection of the abdominal cavity called peritonitis and then pain will take over and your entire abdomen will swell. Fever, thirst and low urine output will likely follow. This infection can cause organ failure, infertility and even death if not adequately contained with an abdominal cavity cleaning and intravenous (IV) antibiotics.

Where does it hurt?

After migrating from your navel, pain from appendicitis nearly always settles at a place on your abdomen called McBurney's Point, named after the 19th century surgeon Charles McBurney, an authority on appendicitis. Find it by drawing an imaginary line from your belly button to your right hip bone; you'll feel tenderness about halfway between the two points.

IMAGE © ISTOCKPHOTO/SUMMERSGRAPHICSINC

HEALTHWISE QUIZ

How much do you know about **allergies?**

Take this quiz to find out.

1 **Approximately how many people suffer from allergies?**

a. 50 million
b. 35 million
c. 27 million
d. 18 million

2 **You're more likely to develop allergies if you:**

a. eat shellfish
b. have a family member who has allergies
c. had pets as a child
d. regularly garden

3 **Which does *not* aggravate allergies?**

a. cigarette smoke
b. cockroach droppings
c. pet saliva
d. they all can trigger allergies

4 **Where does pollen first appear in the spring?**

a. weeds
b. trees
c. grass
d. mold

5 **What reduces pollen allergies in the spring?**

a. not drying laundry outside on a clothesline
b. removing your shoes before coming indoors
c. not going outside before 10 a.m.
d. all of the above

ANSWERS: 1. A; 2. B; 3. D; 4. B; 5. D

Get your blood pressure under control

High blood pressure truly is sinister: You can have it but not know it until you suffer a heart attack, stroke or another serious health complication. Hence, its nickname: the silent killer. Seeing your physician regularly is the best way to determine whether you have high blood pressure—or hypertension. He or she will measure the force of blood in your arteries by looking at your systolic (the higher number) and diastolic (lower number) pressure. Elevated levels (140/90 mm Hg or more) indicate hypertension, while numbers ranging from 120/80 to 139/89 point to prehypertension, a condition that puts you at risk for high blood pressure in the future. Normal blood pressure is under 120/80. Although hypertension has no cure, you can take steps to control it and protect your health:

- **Eat a healthy diet.** High-fat and sugary foods contribute to high blood pressure, so reach for foods from the DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) diet. They include whole grains, fish and poultry, nuts, fruits and vegetables and low-fat and low-sodium foods.
- **Get moving.** Aim for 30 minutes of cardiovascular activity most days of the week. If you're short on time, break up your workout into three 10-minute segments over the course of the day. Take a walk around the block, dance to your favorite CD or work out to an exercise DVD.
- **Take your meds.** Sometimes medication is the only way to lower your blood pressure. Because hypertension drugs work only when they're regularly in your system, you should never miss a dose or stop taking them.

Growing our community— one baby at a time

South Texas Regional Medical Center's (STRMC) Maternal & Newborn Center began delivering babies in Atascosa County more than 50 years ago. In 2008, the center made history by proudly delivering the highest number of newborns—308—since its inception.

The increasing number of newborn deliveries signifies this community's growing trust in STRMC, as well as the greater need for quality women's healthcare close to home.

The Ortiz family, with baby Christian, are living proof of life's miracles!

BIG-CITY TECHNOLOGY, SMALL-TOWN ATTENTION

Our compassionate team and qualified medical staff are technologically equipped to provide patient care that rivals any metropolitan area hospital. You'll discover that from admission to discharge, our smaller size translates to more personalized care with attention to detail.

Advanced technology includes a $238,000 perinatal central monitoring system, which was installed in January. This system enables nurses to simultaneously monitor each newborn's fetal activity from any patient room or a centralized workstation. We also have a transcutaneous bilimeter, a rare find in South Texas, which prevents heelsticks in newborns, for increased infant comfort.

Each of our nurses has earned training and certifications for Advanced Cardiac Life Support, neonatal resuscitation and high-risk stabilization and transportation of newborns.

The center operates with a lockdown system for infant safety and features two labor/delivery/recovery suites and four postpartum rooms. Operating rooms are located within the center, ensuring that mothers are never transported to another facility. And our private patient rooms maintain a family-centered setting.

ONE FAMILY'S EXPERIENCE

We've helped many families, including the Ortiz family. For Judy Ortiz, a Pleasanton Primary School teacher, deciding to start a family was an exciting occasion. As a teacher, Ortiz wanted to obtain

the best information to plan for a safe and healthy start.

"My established Ob/Gyn physician was located in San Antonio," says Ortiz. "I telephoned his office to schedule an appointment for prenatal advice and care before my husband and I tried to conceive." To her disappointment, Ortiz's physician scheduled her consultation six months in the future.

HIGH MARKS FOR LOCAL PHYSICIAN

Edward B. Blackmon Jr., M.D.
Obstetrics/Gynecology

"A minimum of a half-year wait just to receive an initial consultation to plan our pregnancy was too long for our preference," says Ortiz. "After talking about my dilemma with several co-workers, they recommended that I call Edward B. Blackmon Jr., M.D., from Advanced Ob/Gyn Care of South Texas in Jourdanton and within the hospital."

Ortiz moved quickly on her colleagues' advice and called Dr. Blackmon. "I was pleasantly surprised when Dr. Blackmon scheduled me for an appointment within one week of my call," says Ortiz. "After meeting him, I felt at ease and confident about his knowledge and experience. I asked a lot of questions during my visits. Dr. Blackmon always responded to my inquiries with very thorough and easy-to-understand explanations. I never left feeling confused."

One month after Ortiz's initial appointment, she received thrilling news—they were pregnant! Thanks to Dr. Blackmon's convenient location and flexible scheduling, Ortiz never missed a day of work during her pregnancy.

LOCAL SUCCESS

Ortiz describes the care she received at STRMC as one-to-one. The Ortizes welcomed a healthy baby boy, Christian, to their growing family. They highly recommend delivering at STRMC's Maternal & Newborn Center for the convenience of local, personalized care.

"My husband and I agree that we should support our local physicians whenever possible so our medical community can continue to thrive," says Ortiz. "If we don't use the resources we have locally, soon there may not be specialized care options available."

Delivering more than babies

If you're expecting, start off by enrolling in the Tiny Toes OB Club offered by STRMC. Tiny Toes makes your childbirth experience an even more treasured lifetime event. Members receive an array of gifts and exclusive discounts from participating merchants.

BENEFITS GALORE

tiny toes
A TIP-TOP OB CLUB

- **free dinner or lunch for two in your room**
- **free mommy-on-the-go tote bag**
- **free portrait-taking and uploading of your baby's first digital photo to our 365 Nursery Web site (with your approval)**
- **free baby album**
- **commemorative footprint birth certificate**
- **exclusive discounts for mommy and child goods and services from participating merchants**
- **the bestselling book, *What to Expect When You're Expecting***

BECOME A MEMBER

Members are special guests at STRMC. We'll provide you with information, guidance and comprehensive care before, during and after your delivery. You'll be offered free preparation classes with topics ranging from childbirth to postpartum and newborn care. Each class is taught by our registered nurses who want to make your delivery stress-free! Call (830) 769-5252 to become a member today, or visit us online at www.strmc.com/tinytoes.

A healthy start at STRMC!

At STRMC, we know that having a baby is one of the most joyful experiences in a woman's life. For more information about programs or to schedule a tour of STRMC's Maternal & Newborn Center, call (830) 769-5252. Visit www.strmc.com and click on "Health Resources" to access current information about pregnancy and childbirth.

Warding off water illness

As the weather warms up, we all look forward to swimming laps in the pool; splashing in the ocean, stream or river; or lounging in a hot tub. But those waters may mask something ominous: Contaminated water can lead to recreational water illness (RWI). Touching or swallowing water in pools, lakes, spas, rivers and oceans can lead to gastrointestinal, outer ear, eye, skin, respiratory and neurologic infections—and children, pregnant women and people with compromised immune systems are at greatest risk.

HOW DOES WATER GET CONTAMINATED?

When it comes to swimming pools, water parks and play fountains, most disease comes from fecal matter on the bodies of sick splashers. If chlorine and pH levels aren't carefully calibrated, other swimmers could swallow live bacteria. In hot tubs, naturally occurring germs can cause rashes and respiratory problems, ranging from the common cold to pneumonia. Large bodies of water—from rivers to the ocean—can be contaminated by sewage, animal waste, swimmers' feces and even parasites.

HOW CAN I AVOID CONTRACTING RWI?

Take these precautions to stay healthy when you swim, dive or just splash around:

- Avoid pools with murky or chemical-smelling water (properly chlorinated pools don't have an odor).
- Don't share towels, kickboards or toys.
- Keep water out of your mouth and never swallow it.
- Stay on dry land if you have open sores.
- Skip bodies of freshwater on very hot days, since bacteria flourish in warm water.
- Plug your nose when swimming in freshwater to keep parasites out.
- Shower before and after swimming and wash your hands after using the toilet or changing diapers.
- Take children on frequent bathroom breaks and change diapers in the bathroom, not poolside.

Be a **fruit-and-veggie** role model

Whether you're driving the car or stepping into high heels, your little ones want to be just like you. So why not use your power for good? Follow these tips, and the eating habits your children copy will positively influence their health—and yours—for years to come:

1 **Restock the pantry.** Keep healthy snacks around. Say goodbye to cookies loaded with high-fructose corn syrup and bright orange cheese puffs and hello to baked veggie chips and sugar-free applesauce.

2 **Drink right.** Switch out your super-acidic, high-sugar soda for water and 100 percent juice—little teeth and waistlines will thank you.

3 **Start the day right.** No time to sit down to breakfast? Send your kids off with a banana and a baggie filled with dry whole-grain cereal. Studies show that breakfast eaters boast improved math grades, less incidence of hyperactivity and better school attendance. And teenagers who eat first thing tend to weigh less, exercise more and generally have a healthier diet than their breakfast-skipping pals.

4 **Turn off the tube.** People who eat in front of the television are more likely to eat unhealthy foods.

5 **Eat together.** Children who dine with their parents tend to consume more fruits and veggies and fewer unhealthy snacks.

6 **Pack a lunch for *everyone*.** You'll save cash while making sure the whole family is eating well. Be sure to include a lean protein, low-fat dairy, grains, a vegetable and a piece of fruit (try sliced turkey and low-fat cheese on whole-wheat bread with carrot sticks and an apple).

Guarding against falls

You stumble getting out of the shower, catch your foot on the throw rug in the kitchen or lose your balance climbing the stairs. Falling down at home happens more often than you might think. Each year, one in three Americans ages 65 and older suffers a fall. As a result, nearly 2 million seniors end up in the emergency room with bone fractures and serious head injuries. But taking a tumble isn't a natural consequence of growing older. Many times other age-related issues are to blame. Declining vision, problems with spatial orientation and faulty balancing mechanisms inside the ear can make older adults unsteady on their feet. Other triggers include weakened muscles, medication side effects and unsafe conditions at home. The good news: You can reduce your risk of slips and falls. Take the following steps to stay on your toes:

- **Be active** to maintain flexibility, strength and balance. With regular practice, the ancient martial art of tai chi has been shown to decrease falls. Talk with your physician to decide whether tai chi or another activity is right for you.
- **Fall-proof your home** by removing throw rugs, electrical cords, clutter and anything else you can trip over. And install brighter lighting and safety features such as grab bars in bathrooms and handrails alongside stairs.
- **Dress safely** by wearing sturdy shoes with nonslip soles. Avoid walking in slippery socks, stockings or loose-fitting slippers.
- **Take your medications** as directed to avoid becoming lightheaded or disoriented. If your medicines make you tired, confused or dizzy, tell your physician. He or she may be able to change your dosage or drug.
- **Have your eyes checked** at least once a year to make sure your prescription is adequate and you don't have any other conditions that might impair your ability to see clearly.

If you fall

If you can't catch yourself from falling, try to fall forward or land on your backside, not your side, which can result in a fracture to your hip. Once you're on the ground, lie still and breathe deeply. You want to be calm and certain that you're not hurt before you attempt to get up. When you're ready to rise, roll onto your side and then crawl to a sturdy chair. Stand up slowly, using the chair as support. If you hit your head when you fell, see your physician right away to rule out injury to the brain.

Serving the *heart* of our community

The specialized cardiac care you need is available at the South Texas Heart Clinic. Our cardiac team comprises a board-certified cardiologist, interventional cardiologist and certified physician assistant with 10 years of experience in cardiac surgery. Together, our team of professionals will develop individualized patient-care programs for your most delicate cardiac needs. Experience combined with technology allows us to deliver enhanced cardiac care close to home—where you need it most.

MEET OUR STAFF

CHUN WANG TAN, M.D., FACC

Board certified in cardiology and internal medicine, Chun Wang Tan, M.D., FACC, serves as the medical director for the Heart and Lung Center and the cardiac catheterization lab at South Texas Regional Medical Center. Dr. Tan also brings experience and a high level of personal care to every patient.

CHAD CHRISTOPHERSON, M.D.

Chad Christopherson, M.D., an interventional cardiologist, is board certified in internal medicine with a secondary specialization in cardiovascular diseases and nuclear cardiology. Dr. Christopherson's private practice is Rivercity Cardiovascular, based in San Antonio. He holds a clinic for local consults every Wednesday.

CAROLYN DOWD, P.A.-C.

A 23-year veteran, Carolyn Dowd, P.A.-C., is a certified physician assistant. Dowd worked for more than a decade in New York, assisting with cardiac surgery, and joined the South Texas Heart Clinic in February 2007.

CONDITIONS TREATED

The South Texas Heart Clinic treats:

- angina (chest pain)
- cardiac arrhythmias or palpitations
- congestive heart failure
- cardiac valve disease
- high blood pressure/hypertension
- coronary artery disease
- edema (extremity swelling)
- other heart-related conditions

SERVICES

We provide comprehensive services, including:

- pacemaker and defibrillator implants, including continued device maintenance checks in the office
- cardiac and vascular catheterization
- carotid and leg circulation evaluations
- stress tests
- echocardiograms
- electrocardiograms
- Coumadin management
- cardiac clearance for surgical procedures

Get the care you need

At the South Texas Heart Clinic, we serve the *heart* of this community to help you work toward a healthier tomorrow. Our friendly staff will guide you through our scheduling process to ensure you're provided with an appointment that best suits your schedule. Our staff can answer all of your insurance questions.

Located at 1901 Highway 97 E., Suite 110, the clinic is open Monday through Friday, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., for scheduled appointments. New patients are welcome, and most insurance is accepted. Call (830) 769-3271 to make an appointment. Visit www.southtexasheartclinic.com to learn more!

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10 steps to a healthy colon

No one wants to talk about it, but keeping your large intestine healthy is a big deal. If you don't, you risk developing colon cancer, the third most commonly diagnosed cancer and the second leading cause of cancer death. But it doesn't have to be that way. Follow these tips to keep your colon working well:

1. **Choose whole grains.** While recent research shows no correlation between fiber intake and colon cancer, there is evidence that whole grains lower your risk.
2. **Work it out.** Aim for 45 minutes of vigorous activity five or more times a week. Swim laps in the pool, take an aerobics class or play outside with your children or grandchildren.

3. **Pop pills.** Ask your physician about taking a daily multivitamin with folic acid to keep your colon happy.
4. **Choose chicken, not beef.** Diets high in processed and red meats are linked to an increased colorectal cancer risk, so skip 'em.
5. **Get a colonoscopy.** Schedule your first exam when you turn 50 and repeat every 10 years after that. If you have inflammatory bowel disease or a family history of colorectal polyps or cancer, talk to your physician about getting screened earlier and more frequently.
6. **Be a quitter.** Smokers are more likely to develop and die from colorectal cancer.
7. **Go green.** Eat five or more servings of fruits and veggies each day.
8. **Drop the pounds.** Obesity has been linked to colon cancer. Talk to your physician about getting your body mass index (BMI) below 25.
9. **Bone up.** Increase calcium and vitamin D intake. Just keep calcium below 1,500 mg if you're a male—any more and you could raise your risk of prostate cancer.
10. **Drink responsibly.** Heavy alcohol use is associated with colon problems; limit intake to two drinks a day for men, one for women.

Relax!

A colonoscopy is your best line of defense in the prevention and early detection of colorectal cancer. It takes 10 to 15 years for abnormal cells (polyps) to develop into cancer. With this screening, the physician can find and remove polyps. And when colon cancer is found early, it's treatable: 90 percent of people diagnosed early survive at least five years after diagnosis.

So what can you expect? You'll prep your colon at home for 24 hours before the screening. This may include taking laxatives, drinking clear nonalcoholic beverages, avoiding iron and fasting. At the hospital, your physician will administer a mild sedative and pain reliever to minimize discomfort. Then he or she will insert a flexible tube the size of your finger into your rectum. The camera on the end looks for polyps. If the physician finds any, he or she will usually remove them. The whole screening takes between 20 and 60 minutes and could just save your life.

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SPRING 2009

All for one and one for all!

2008 Community Benefit Report

The growth of our hospital proves to be a constant source of prosperity for our community. In 2008, South Texas Regional Medical Center (STRMC) employed about 352 professionals and contributed more than $18.2 million in salaries and benefits.

STRMC understands the connection between providing our citizens with quality jobs and steadily stimulating economic wealth to our local businesses and enterprises. This is why we work diligently to expand our current hospital and increase the capital investment in the area. Last year, STRMC contributed more than $1.9 million in capital investments for our medical center.

EXTENDING OUR REACH

STRMC's reach extends beyond Jourdanton and penetrates surrounding communities. About $45,000 in sponsorships and charitable contributions were distributed to our schools, clubs, sports teams and agricultural organizations in Atascosa and neighboring counties. Plus, more than $3 million of charity and uncompensated medical services were provided to community patients in need.

Thank you for allowing us to serve your community. We look forward to seeing the positive impact on your quality of life become surpassed in the near future. Your loyal support of our local medical staff and services in 2009 is instrumental to our success!

Visit us online!

To learn more about STRMC's services, visit www.strmc.com.

▲ STRMC serves the community.

▲ STRMC friends and family, Kevin Steinle and Jorge Flores, supported hospital efforts at the Relay For Life event.

▲ At STRMC's annual Texas Size Health Fair, we worked with local authorities who care about the health and safety of our smallest patients. Eric Kaiser, Jourdanton chief of police, performed child fingerprinting.