

# Health Connection

BROUGHT TO YOU BY SOUTH TEXAS  
REGIONAL MEDICAL CENTER

**Empower yourself**  
Become a Healthy Woman

**Tips for the caregiver**  
Taking care of someone  
with the flu

**We care for our  
community**

**The PACS difference**  
Better communication,  
enhanced results

**Breathe easy**  
Pulmonary services  
right here at home



**SOUTH TEXAS REGIONAL  
MEDICAL CENTER**

*Quality Care. Right Here.*

[www.strmc.com](http://www.strmc.com)

# Ease your arthritis pain

**M**ore than 40 million Americans suffer from arthritis, a condition that can make every move painful. Osteoarthritis is the most common form. It occurs when cartilage, which cushions bones in your joints, breaks down and causes irritation.

Luckily, the following lifestyle changes and remedies can help you manage the pain:

• **LOSE WEIGHT.** It's pretty basic: The more excess weight you carry, the more stress on your joints. But a healthy diet of fruits, vegetables and whole grains, paired with regular exercise—at least 30 minutes a day—can help tip the scales in your favor. Cut back on saturated fats, which may increase your body's inflammatory response, adding to joint and tissue inflammation.



• **GET OFF THE COUCH.** Inactivity is a joint's worst enemy. Exercise can strengthen and protect the muscles around the joints, preventing them from stiffening and causing more pain. Walking, swimming, some yoga poses and tai chi are easy on the joints. Also beneficial are range-of-motion exercises, such as raising your arms above your head; strengthening exercises, such as weight training; and low-impact aerobic exercises, such as bike riding. Before starting an exercise program, check with your physician. If needed, ask him or her for a referral to a physical therapist who has a program for people with arthritis.

• **TAKE A PILL, IF NEEDED.** Sometimes you need medication for the pain. Over-the-counter options include non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, or NSAIDs (such as ibuprofen and naproxen), and acetaminophen (such as Tylenol). Topical creams may provide hot or cool sensations to ease pain or contain pain medication that's absorbed into the skin. Your physician may prescribe pills or cortisone injections. Any drug you take can have side effects, so discuss them with your physician before starting a regimen.



• **REST UP.** Your body needs time to heal, so aim for eight to 10 hours of sleep every night, and avoid sitting or standing in one position for too long. Skip high-impact activities such as running. You may also want to look into stress-relievers such as meditation or yoga.

• **ASK ABOUT ALTERNATIVES.** Massage, acupuncture, heating pads, ice packs and supplements such as glucosamine and chondroitin may help reduce symptoms, though studies on the supplements have been mixed. Speak with your physician before trying any home remedies. Sometimes, there simply isn't a remedy that can effectively treat the pain. In that case, surgery to replace the joint may be an option to discuss with your physician.



## LETTER FROM OUR CEO



Jim Resendez, FACHE  
Chief Executive Officer

Dear neighbors,

**W**elcome to a new year and another issue of *Health Connection*. As we move ahead in 2010, South Texas Regional Medical Center (STRMC) is focused on ways to meet your individual health care needs. Last year, we welcomed several new medical staff members to our hospital:

Irfan Agha, M.D., nephrology and internal medicine; James P. Dorman, M.D., general surgery; and Gustavo A. Ferreira, M.D., pulmonology. Rest assured that recruiting new physicians to complement our talented medical staff will continue to be our top priority. Bringing new physicians to STRMC and helping you remain active in managing your health care are two ways STRMC helps keep our community healthy.

STRMC's Flu Fast Track, opened last October, was another resource that further enabled us to help keep the residents of our community healthy. We're responsive to your needs and welcome the opportunity to develop new ways to deliver quality medical care when you need it.

We look forward to sharing news throughout the year of our service line expansions, physician development and enhanced community outreach efforts. Please don't forget that we're able to provide you with information about our medical services and programs 24 hours a day at [www.strmc.com](http://www.strmc.com)!

Best wishes for a healthy new year,

JIM RESENDEZ, FACHE  
Chief Executive Officer  
South Texas Regional Medical Center

# Celebrating success!

HEALTHY WOMAN  
A SOUTH TEXAS REGIONAL MEDICAL CENTER RESOURCE

**S**outh Texas Regional Medical Center's (STRMC) Healthy Woman program thanks Atascosa County for having gone wild with them at their fifth anniversary celebration!

### A SOLD-OUT EVENT

Record ticket sales resulted in a sold-out event in six days. On November 5, more than 300 guests gathered for the special event to celebrate a year of success with one day of celebration. Guest speaker Lisa Smartt had audience members in tears with laughter as she performed her famed "Hope for Women Who Can't Find Their Keys." Evening highlights included presentations of the 2009 Top Recruiter Award to Rita Castillo, STRMC's chief quality officer, and the 2009 Communitarian Award to Cindy Carr, owner of Nest Feathers Home Décor & Gifts.

Special thanks to 2009 and 2010 Platinum Partners: Alejandra Moreno, M.D., Cosmic Creations, Nest Feathers Home Décor & Gifts, Pleasanton Express, Sign Co. Graphics and South Texas Sleep Diagnostics.



Lisa Smartt (left), with Danielle Marie Flores, STRMC marketing director, wowed the audience with her humor and wit.



Cindy Carr accepts the 2009 Communitarian Award from Jim Resendez, FACHE, STRMC chief executive officer.

**!** Join Healthy Woman!

**T**o join our free Healthy Woman program, please visit [www.strmc.com](http://www.strmc.com)!

# Life after the ER

## Following your physician's orders keeps you healthy

**W**hen you're not feeling well and you're surrounded by the hustle and bustle of an emergency room (ER), it's easy to be confused by what a physician is telling you. All you can think about is going home. That's why many people are unclear about how to handle their care when they leave the hospital.

Case in point: A small University of Michigan study found that more than 75 percent of patients didn't understand their discharge instructions or what ER physicians had just told them—although 80 percent thought they did. Some of the patients weren't even sure of their diagnosis.

Unfortunately, these misunderstandings may increase the likelihood of complications once you leave the ER. In reality, the care you receive at the hospital is just one important part of the puzzle. Knowing what to do next—and following those discharge instructions closely—is critical to getting better. Here's what you need to do for the best health care results:

**➔ SPEAK UP.** Don't be afraid to ask questions if you're unsure of your condition, what treatments you were given, your test results or something in the discharge instructions—for example, whether a medication that's been prescribed may interact with one you're already taking. It's best to ask the ER physician caring for you,

rather than having to contact the ER later, when the physician you saw may no longer be on duty.

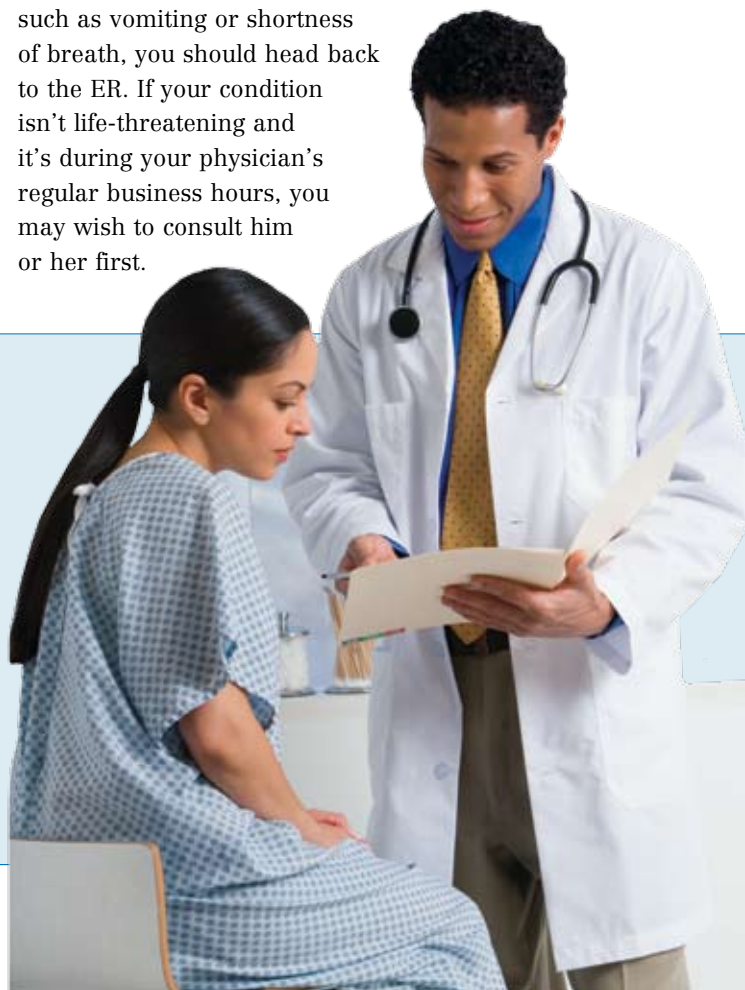
**➔ FOLLOW ALL MEDICATION DOSAGES.** Thoroughly read your discharge instructions. They should spell out what medications have been prescribed, what they treat and how often—and when—to take them.

**➔ FOLLOW UP WITH YOUR FAMILY PHYSICIAN OR A SPECIALIST.** You'll especially need to do this if you've received stitches or a cast. Your discharge instructions will tell you when to go. Double-check with your physician to make sure information about your ER visit, including test results, has been sent to his or her office before your appointment.

**➔ KNOW WHEN YOU SHOULD RETURN TO THE ER.** If your condition worsens or you're noticing new symptoms, such as vomiting or shortness of breath, you should head back to the ER. If your condition isn't life-threatening and it's during your physician's regular business hours, you may wish to consult him or her first.

## How did we do?

**W**hen you check in to the ER, admitting personnel will ask you if it's OK to follow up with you once you're back home. If you agree to it, we'll try to call you within 24 hours of your discharge, asking you six questions about your visit. At that time, if you don't understand your discharge instructions or have any questions about your treatment, a nurse will call you back. This process, called Discharge Callback Administrator, or DCA, helps us improve the way we care for our patients and ensure that you're on the road to recovery.



## HEALTHWISE QUIZ

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

Take this quiz to find out.

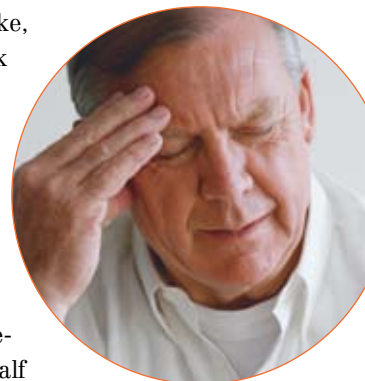
- 1** What percentage of American adults are overweight or obese?
  - a. 25
  - b. 33
  - c. 50
  - d. 66
- 2** Which of the following has not been linked to obesity?
  - a. hyperthyroidism
  - b. cancer
  - c. gallbladder disease
  - d. infertility
- 3** Obese children have a higher risk of:
  - a. asthma
  - b. early puberty
  - c. skin infections
  - d. all of the above
- 4** One problem with body mass index (BMI)—a calculation that assesses obesity—is that:
  - a. It doesn't take height into account.
  - b. It doesn't measure muscle, so a muscular person can have a high BMI.
  - c. It doesn't factor in age.
  - d. none of the above
- 5** How much excess weight do you usually have to be carrying to be considered for weight-loss surgery?
  - a. 30 pounds for women, 50 for men
  - b. 50 pounds for women, 70 for men
  - c. 80 pounds for women, 100 for men
  - d. There's no minimum weight requirement for weight-loss surgery.

ANSWERS: 1. (d), 2. (a), 3. (d), 4. (b), 5. (c)

## { MINI-STROKES }

# Heed the warning

It may not be a full-blown stroke, but a transient ischemic attack (TIA)—also called a mini-stroke—is your warning that one could be just around the corner. TIAs produce symptoms similar to strokes, but they usually only last a few minutes and don't cause damage. About a third of people who have TIAs will subsequently have a stroke, and about half of them will have it within a year.



### INSIDE A TIA

A TIA occurs when a blood clot briefly blocks an artery, cutting off part of the brain's blood supply. Like a stroke, symptoms arise without warning. They include:

- sudden numbness or weakness in the face, arm or leg—usually on one side of the body
- sudden confusion, speech problems or trouble comprehending
- sudden problems walking, dizziness and loss of balance or coordination
- sudden severe headaches
- sudden vision problems such as loss of sight in one eye

If you suffer any of these symptoms, call an ambulance or have a friend take you to the ER right away. Physicians usually have to make a diagnosis based on your medical history.

### IS A TIA IN YOUR FUTURE?

You're at higher risk for a TIA if you:

- have a family history of TIA or stroke
- are 55 years or older
- are a man
- are African-American

Those are things you can't control, but you can help change other risk factors:

- blood pressure 140/85 mm Hg or higher
- high cholesterol
- heart disease, carotid artery disease and peripheral artery disease
- obesity
- cigarette smoking
- heavy drinking
- physical inactivity
- diabetes
- a high-fat, high-sodium diet

# Caring for someone with the flu

**G**iven the statistic that between 5 percent and 20 percent of the U.S. population gets the flu each year—and up to 200,000 cases annually are serious enough for hospitalization—chances are you may be caring for a sick family member. Taking precautions during any flu season can help reduce the chances that you'll get infected.



## THE CAREGIVER'S ROLE

To reduce the likelihood of others getting sick, assign the duty of primary caregiver for a sick family member to one adult. Pregnant women and those who are at an increased risk of severe illness from flu shouldn't care for anyone who has the flu. As caregiver:

- **Avoid close face-to-face interaction** with the sick person. If close contact is unavoidable, consider wearing a face mask or respirator.
- **Talk with your physician** about whether your personal medical condition makes it advisable for you to take anti-viral medication.
- **When holding a small child** who's sick, place the chin on your shoulder so he or she won't cough in your face.
- **Clean your hands** with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer after you touch a sick person or handle used tissues or laundry.
- **Monitor yourself** and household members for flu symptoms, and contact your physician if symptoms occur.

It's important to keep the sick person away from other people as much as possible—especially those who are at high risk for complications from influenza. Keep the sick person in a room separate from the common areas of the house. His or her bathroom should be cleaned daily with disinfectant. Try to keep the sickroom door closed and have the ill person wear a face mask if he or she needs to be in a common area of the house.

## PROTECTING YOUR FAMILY

It's always a two-pronged challenge for caregivers to juggle care of a sick loved one and prevent well family members from getting sick, too. This flu season, proper infection control is more important than ever. By practicing these precautions, you can provide the necessary care to help a family member shorten their bout with the flu virus and minimize the spread of flu to other family members, including yourself.

**!** We're here for you

**F**or more tips on caring for someone with the flu, visit [www.strmc.com](http://www.strmc.com).



## Our community's best interest is STRMC's first interest

**W**hen our community is in need, South Texas Regional Medical Center (STRMC) responds. Throughout this medical center's history, we've demonstrated time and again that when our patients talk, we listen. Community concerns about the H1N1 flu virus prompted STRMC to take action!

Events surrounding the H1N1 flu virus led to soaring patient volumes in our emergency department during evening and weekend hours. Our staff understood the

### **!** Better health is just a click away!

If you haven't visited STRMC's Web site at [www.strmc.com](http://www.strmc.com) lately, a quick stop there can provide valuable information for you and your family about the H1N1 virus and seasonal flu.

Along with information about the flu, you'll find an award-winning online health library that includes 12,000 adult and pediatric health topics in both English and Spanish. Also available are daily health news headlines, audio podcasts, interactive health assessments, a drug interaction checker and much more. Click the "Health Resources" tab to get started!

Quality medical care and comprehensive health information are available close to home—right here at STRMC.

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STRMC's Flu Fast Track meets the growing needs for patient care and helps prevent widespread community illness.

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convenience of the emergency department's 24-hour availability but was focused on the best interest of every patient.

#### **FLU FAST TRACK OPENED**

To prevent patients from enduring longer-than-necessary wait times and possibly compromising the health of other patients if they were contagious, STRMC opened a Flu Fast Track in the heart of Pleasanton on October 22.

The Flu Fast Track was the first of its kind ever offered by the hospital. The program is caring for hundreds of patients of all ages, after hours and on weekends.

This proactive approach has helped resolve many of the challenges that both the seasonal flu and H1N1 flu virus present. STRMC's Flu Fast Track meets the growing need for patient care and helps prevent widespread community illness.

#### **COMMUNITY FIRST**

STRMC's responsibility to the community it serves contributes to the overall improvement and general welfare of each resident. Trust STRMC to be your health care leader whose first interest is always in our community's best interest.

## Sending out an SOS:

# Texting can be bad for your health

It's not uncommon to see people crossing busy streets or even driving with their cell phone or BlackBerry® in hand, dashing off a quick message. Texting shifts your focus away from the task at hand and can be downright dangerous.

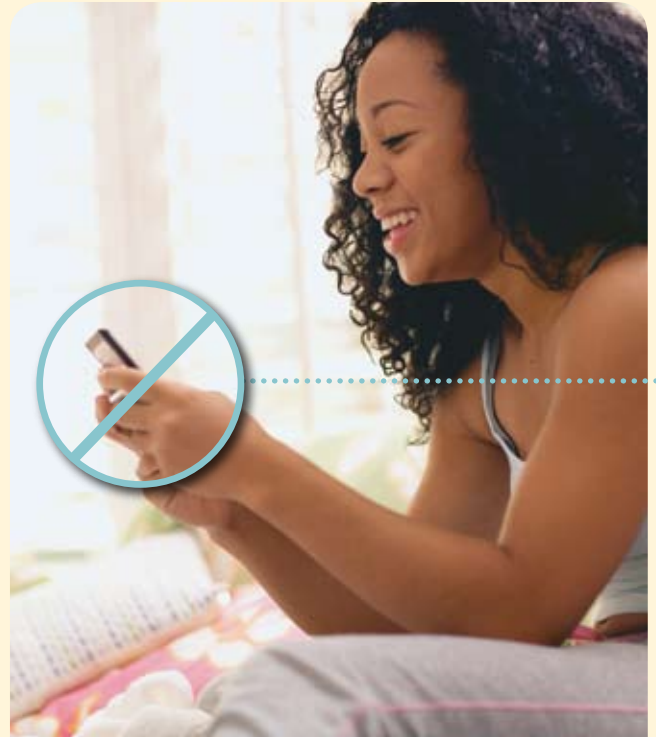
While no hard numbers exist, the American College of Emergency Physicians has reported an anecdotal rise in serious and fatal injuries involving texting—especially among teens and young adults. That includes face, chin, mouth and eye injuries for those who trip and fall while texting, and fatal trauma stemming from car accidents. Texting has also been linked to medical phenomena like “BlackBerry thumb” and “teen texting tendonitis”—catchphrases for conditions that result from the repetitive thumb motions of texting. These conditions can cause pain and numbness in the thumbs and joints of the hand.

### BE TEXT SAVVY

Steer clear of texting troubles by following a few guidelines:

- Avoid texting while doing things like walking and driving. Turn your phone off to avoid temptation.
- On the road, pull over if you need to text immediately.
- Set a good example behind the wheel: Don't engage in distracting behavior in front of your kids.

- Contact your cell-phone provider if you're worried about your child's texting habits. Some companies now offer services that ban texting at certain times of the day.



## A healthy lunch is in the bag!

Every day at noon, workers around the country run to the corner deli for a sandwich, hit a local eatery with co-workers or order in. But if you're watching your waistline—or your wallet—packing your own lunch is a smarter solution. A homemade lunch is more nutritious and economical, as long as you pack it correctly. The recipe for a healthy lunch includes:

- **PROTEIN** Try lean turkey, ham, roast beef, tuna or a bean-based entree, such as hummus or a black bean burrito.
- **GOOD GRAINS** Pack whole-wheat pasta salad and sandwiches made on multigrain bread.
- **FRUITS AND VEGGIES** The deeper the color of the vegetable or fruit, the more vitamins and minerals it contains. Slice up baby carrots, peppers, broccoli, apples, blueberries and oranges.



- **CALCIUM** Slip fat-free yogurt, cottage cheese or string cheese into your bag.
- **H<sub>2</sub>O** Water has no calories, so it's a perfect choice, but if you need a little more flavor, try adding a squeeze of lemon, lime or orange. Watch out for fruit juices, energy drinks and sodas, which are loaded with sugar.
- **FLAVOR APPEAL** Switch it up a bit by adding interesting items, like walnuts in a salad or horseradish spread on a roast beef sandwich.
- **MINIMAL SODIUM** Thinking of one of those “healthy” frozen meals? Watch out for sodium. Total daily intake for a healthy individual shouldn't exceed 2,300 milligrams (mg), and some frozen meals can contain a big portion of your day's allotment. Follow the FDA's recommendation for a healthy frozen meal by choosing one that has 480 mg of sodium or less per serving.

## PROBLEMS IN PREGNANCY

# Know the warning signs

If you're pregnant, it may seem like your swollen ankles keep getting bigger and bigger. While some swelling is normal, at what stage—or size—should you worry? The following conditions and symptoms should never be ignored and require prompt medical treatment:

### PREECLAMPSIA

**SYMPTOMS** You may experience sudden swelling of the hands, legs or feet; significant and sudden weight gain; vision problems; and severe headache.

**WHY IT'S DANGEROUS** If left untreated, preeclampsia, or pregnancy-related high blood pressure, can be life-threatening for mother and baby. Preeclampsia develops after the 20th week of pregnancy. The only way to cure the condition is to deliver the baby. However, if it's early in the pregnancy, your obstetrician may be able to treat the condition with medications or bed rest and delay delivery until the baby is more developed.

### PRETERM LABOR

**SYMPTOMS** Signs include menstrual-like cramping, diarrhea, four or more contractions in 20 minutes, an increase of fluid or bleeding from the vagina or unexplained back pain or pelvic pressure when you're less than 37 weeks pregnant.

**WHY IT'S DANGEROUS** The earlier your baby is delivered, the more likely he or she will experience complications, such as breathing problems and infections. Call your obstetrician immediately or go to the ER right away if you're experiencing these symptoms. Your obstetrician may be able to give you medication to stop the contractions.

### INFECTION

**SYMPTOMS** You may experience fever, chills and fatigue.

**WHY IT'S DANGEROUS** You may have contracted a virus or bacteria that could be harmful to you and your baby, such as cytomegalovirus or listeriosis. If your fever is accompanied by burning when urinating, you could have a bladder infection. You may be prescribed antibiotics, depending on your condition.

### PLACENTAL PROBLEMS

**SYMPTOMS** Signs include painless vaginal bleeding during the second or third trimester.

**WHY IT'S DANGEROUS** Bleeding after the fourth month of pregnancy could indicate that something's wrong with the placenta (it could be covering the cervix or it could have separated from the wall of the uterus). Your obstetrician may prescribe bed rest or, in some cases, hospitalization. In severe cases, a cesarean section may be needed to deliver the baby.

### FETAL PROBLEMS

**SYMPTOMS** You may have fewer than 10 fetal movements over a two-hour period after 28 weeks.

**WHY IT'S DANGEROUS** Your baby could be in distress. Call your obstetrician right away if you notice a dramatic drop in movement. Depending on the cause, your obstetrician may prescribe bed rest or you may need to deliver early.



# Helping you breathe easy!

## Pulmonary services, right here at home



Gustavo A. Ferreira, M.D.  
Board-Certified  
Pulmonologist

**M**issed work, distant drives, frustrating maps and the wrong exit ramps. Does this sound like fun? Probably not. But for many locals, this does sound like their last trip to San Antonio for a visit to a physician.

Fortunately, residents of Atascosa County can finally say goodbye to the days of hitting the road to find a skilled pulmonologist. This is

because Atascosa Pulmonary & Sleep Associates (APSA) offers a full range of pulmonary care like that of big-city practices without the big-city drive. APSA is located in Jourdanton.

### MEET DR. FERREIRA

Board certified in both pulmonary diseases and internal medicine, Gustavo A. Ferreira, M.D., pulmonologist with APSA, is this area's only full-time pulmonologist and your newest neighbor! Dr. Ferreira calls Pleasanton his

newfound home. You're likely to encounter Dr. Ferreira, his wife and two young children at a local supermarket or park. Their family enjoys this area's pace of life and contributing to a stronger localized medical community.

Dr. Ferreira has more than 25 years of medical experience throughout the United States and abroad. Dr. Ferreira is no stranger to south Texas. He practiced pulmonary care in the cities of Brownsville and Alice from 2002 to 2005 and enjoys the opportunity to come back to the area.

Serving as an independent member of South Texas Regional Medical Center's medical staff, Dr. Ferreira's skills have enhanced the hospital's intensive care unit by adding 24-hour coverage and expanded services for critical pulmonary care patients.

### IN-HOUSE PATIENT SERVICES

Dr. Ferreira specializes in treatment of pulmonary conditions such as asthma, allergies, pulmonary disease and sleep disorders. Additional patient services offered include care for:

- asthma
- chronic obstructive pulmonary disease
- critical care
- emphysema
- insomnia
- lung cancer
- lung disease
- pulmonary function testing
- sleep apnea
- sleep disorders

Located at 1901 Highway 97 East, Suite 220, on the second floor of the Steidle Medical Office, APSA is certain that you'll be satisfied with the experienced and friendly care that Dr. Ferreira and his staff provide to each patient.

### ! Catch your breath today!

**D**on't allow yourself to surrender to the Texas winds, rains and other allergens that make you feel miserable! Patients can schedule consultations Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Schedule yours today by calling (830) 769-APSA (2772).



# Keep your beat

**M**illions of people suffer from heart arrhythmias, a type of heart disorder that causes the heart to beat too quickly, too slowly or irregularly. For many, these arrhythmias occur occasionally—a flutter here or a racing heartbeat there—and don't need to be treated. But for others, arrhythmias can be dangerous. If your arrhythmia requires treatment, it's important that you manage it properly to avoid potential complications such as heart disease, stroke or sudden cardiac death.

## HELP YOUR HEART KEEP ITS RHYTHM

• **Take your blood-pressure and heart meds.** Don't stop taking your medication just because you feel better or you're having side effects. Controlling blood pressure is key to prevent certain types of arrhythmia. Talk with your physician if you want to stop any medication for any reason. To prevent interactions, let him or her

know about any other medications, supplements, vitamins or over-the-counter drugs you're taking.

• **Avoid arrhythmia triggers.** These include caffeine, alcohol, tobacco (including second-hand smoke), cold medications and certain prescription drugs, such as psychotropic drugs that treat mental illnesses.

• **Reduce stress.** Try meditation or yoga to lessen the strain on your heart.

• **Get healthy.** Arrhythmias can signal underlying heart disease, so it's important to make lifestyle changes. That means subscribing to a low-fat, low-sodium diet and staying active with physician-approved exercises, to help reduce your blood pressure and cholesterol levels and help you maintain a healthy weight.

## Check your pulse

If you have a pacemaker to correct an arrhythmia, your physician may suggest checking your pulse periodically to ensure that the device is keeping your heart rate in its target range (normal rates range from 60 to 100 beats per minute). The American Heart Association offers these tips on taking your pulse:

- Put the index and middle fingers of one hand on the inside of the wrist of the other hand, just below the thumb, or on the side of your neck, just below the corner of your jaw.
- Feel for your pulse, counting the number of beats in one full minute. Take note of any irregular beats.
- Record your pulse in a journal to share with your physician. Include the day and time taken and a description of how you felt at the time.

## Signs of an arrhythmia

- fluttering in the chest or chest pain
- racing heartbeat or a slow heartbeat
- shortness of breath
- lightheadedness or dizziness
- fainting or near-fainting



*Health Connection* is published as a community service of South Texas Regional Medical Center. There is no fee to subscribe.

The information contained in this publication is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice. If you have medical concerns, please consult your health care provider.

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# Better patient care through enhanced communication

## PACS makes it possible

**S**outh Texas Regional Medical Center's (STRMC) recent purchase and implementation of the new picture archival and communication system (PACS) from Carestream Health will provide radiologists with immediate electronic access to medical imaging exams and enable faster and more efficient distribution of radiology reports and images to referring physicians and patients.

### RAPID RESULTS

"This investment will provide a more efficient workflow for medical imaging exams, which can save time and provide added convenience for our patients, referring physicians and staff," says Barbara Lewis, director of imaging at STRMC.

To enhance PACS, the hospital ordered the Carestream computed radiography systems that capture patients' medical imaging exams digitally, instead of on radiographic film. These systems offer rapid results and reduce the need for retakes.

"With a film-based system, patients must wait while the film is being processed and checked for quality," says Lewis. "Digital imaging systems provide faster image capture and also require fewer retakes due to the built-in flexibility of digital imaging and display technology."

STRMC is providing faster, more advanced service with the same recognized quality care you've come to expect. This is another way we're providing quality care, right here.



Barbara Lewis  
Director of Imaging



**!** Experience the digital difference!

**N**eed to pick up your imaging studies? Ask us for a CD of your medical images instead of X-ray films to take to your physician. For more information about radiology services at STRMC, call (830) 769-5258.