

HEALTH FAQ

Examining treatment options for gallstones

DEAR DR. ROACH: What advice do you have for the treatment of gallstones? — N.W.

ANSWER: Gallstones are common (6% of men and 9% of women will get one over a lifetime) and are mostly composed of bile salts and cholesterol. The goal of treatment is to reduce symptoms and the risk of complications. Depending on the size and composition of a person's gallstones, there are different therapies available.

The most common treatment for symptomatic gallstones is surgery. Surgery is highly effective, although there are complications such as bleeding, infection and leaks. About 10% of people will develop diarrhea after surgery, which tends to get better over weeks to months but sometimes requires treatment with a bile-acid-binding drug like cholestyramine. Surgery is performed laparoscopically, which means faster healing times.



Dr. Keith Roach
Contributing columnist

For people who are not good candidates for surgery (such as those with significant medical illnesses) or people who do not want surgery, there are other options. Medications

given by mouth, such as ursodiol (Actigall), can dissolve gallstones, but this can take a long time, usually several years. People with smaller stones that are mostly made of cholesterol can be good candidates for this treatment. However, it is not 100% effective.

Another option is a tube placed into the gallbladder through the abdominal wall to drain bile, which is also sometimes done to remove stones, but I have seldom seen it done. Similarly, shock-wave treatment, which is commonly used for kidney stones, is rarely used but can be a reasonable option in people with only one or two stones.

DEAR DR. ROACH: I am a soon-to-be 84-year-old woman with a question about excessive hair shedding. I've always had very thick, good hair, and in fact, I get a lot of compliments on my beautiful hair. I get my hair cut every four to five weeks, and my hairdresser always thins my hair at each visit. On my last visit, she asked me if I had been ill. While my hair was not coming out in clumps, she said it was shedding more than she has ever seen before with my hair. I, too, have noticed during the past month that there is more hair on my brush, shower drain and clothes. With my hair being so thick, I've always had some shedding that appears on my clothes, but nothing to this extent. I'm not on any new medicines. What could be causing my hair to shed so much? This is the last thing I thought I would be a problem for me. Is it something serious? Can it be treated and reversed? I hate to think that I am about to lose the only good asset I have. — J.M.W.

ANSWER: The most common cause of hair loss I see in older women is female pattern hair loss, but your story sounds more like acute telogen effluvium, which means the loss of hair during the resting phase. This condition is sometimes but not always associated with a stressful event. There are other medical causes, but in a third of cases, no underlying cause can be identified.

The good news about telogen effluvium is that the hair usually comes back, often around six to 12 months. However, I know how important hair can be to both men and women, so I always recommend a visit with a dermatologist, especially one who has expertise in hair disorders as they have additional tools to evaluate patients for other causes

Dr. Roach regrets that he is unable to answer individual questions, but will incorporate them in the column whenever possible. Readers may email questions to ToYourGoodHealth@med.cornell.edu.



Metro

Staying active with mobility issues

Metro

Physical activity is crucial for overall health and well-being. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advises that most people can benefit from 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic exercise per week, particularly when that physical activity is paired with two days of strength training. Seniors also should incorporate activities that challenge their balance to improve these skills and offset the risk for falls as they age.

Many seniors face mobility issues. For these individuals, meeting activity goals might seem extra challenging, but it is entirely possible and highly beneficial to exercise even when mobility is limited. Health professionals say gentle, adaptive exercises can improve strength, flexibility, balance, and

mood, while reducing pain and preventing further decline. The key is to focus on what people can do and to adapt movements to suit specific needs. Consulting with a doctor or physical therapist before starting a new exercise regimen is recommended. Here are some accessible exercise options.

Chair exercises

Chair exercises build strength and flexibility while providing support and reducing the risk of falls.

— While seated, lift knees alternately as if marching, engaging core and leg muscles.

— Stand up slowly from a sturdy chair without using your hands, then gently sit back down. This builds leg and core strength.

— Lift arms to the sides or front, strengthening the shoulders and upper back. Use light

weights for added resistance.

— Tap feet and circle your ankles to improve ankle mobility and circulation, which is crucial for balance.

Water therapy

The buoyancy of water reduces strain on joints and can help anyone with mobility issues.

— Walking through a pool or in a natural body of water creates gentle resistance that increases the potential of the workout.

— Perform controlled movements with your arms and legs through the water.

— Kick feet through the water while walking or when swimming.

Balance training

Improving balance and stability is critical for fall prevention. Rely on a wall or chair for support as needed.

— Shift your weight from side to side and

front to back while holding on to support.

— Lift one foot slightly off the ground while holding on to a support. Alternate to the other leg. Gradually increase the time spent balancing.

— Use a support to stand to help build core strength and strength in the legs.

Flexibility

Flexibility helps anyone who is physically active. Gentle stretching, tai chi, yoga, and even working with a physical therapist can improve flexibility and mobility.

Seniors with mobility issues who want to exercise should always start slowly and build up gradually. Wearing non-slip shoes is essential as well. Small, consistent efforts can make a big difference in maintaining one's independence and enhancing quality of life.

Grant to fund local Uber Health program

Amanda Crabtree
For The Robesonian

LUMBERTON — UNC Health Southeastern has been named a 2025 recipient of a \$40,000 Social Impact Mini-Grant from the North Carolina Healthcare Foundation. The grant will be used to implement an Expanding Access to Care with Uber Health program, which will address transportation challenges for medical services.

Robeson County faces persistent transportation barriers that impact access to care, particularly for low-income, elderly, and rural residents, which creates challenges related to travel to and from medical appointments and wellness screenings.

“A transportation grant can have a significant impact on a rural community, providing reliable transportation to medical appointments, which will assist with reducing missed appointments and obtaining the necessary medical care,” said UNC Health Southeastern Senior Vice President and Chief Operating Officer Lori Dove.

The project will utilize the Uber Health platform to create a free transportation system that enables patients of UNC Health Southeastern and affiliated clinics to access essential healthcare services.

Utilizing the existing Uber technology

and infrastructure, the program will coordinate transportation for patients, reducing no-show rates and improving continuity of care. The initiative will partner with UNC Health Physicians Network (UNCPN) and engage frontline staff and patients in the implementation of the program.

Uber Health is a HIPAA-secure transportation solution that enables care coordinators to arrange rides for patients using the Uber network, even for those without smartphones or the Uber app. Trip details are communicated via SMS or landline calls,



Dove



and multilingual support is available. Rides can be scheduled in advance or requested on-demand.

Within UNC Health Southeastern's medical center, Uber Health will be integrated into the inpatient discharge process to reduce delays caused by lack of transportation.

Amanda L. Crabtree is the director of marketing & public relations at UNC Health Southeastern. Reach her by email at Amanda.Crabtree@unchealth.unc.edu.

Full range of Women's Health Services

UNC Health Southeastern has enhanced its women's health services through a two-year, multi-phased initiative to upgrade its hospital services for women, mothers, and babies, as well as to consolidate its women's health clinics into one combined setting.

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Women's Health: (910) 735-8040**

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