

HEALTH FAQ

Understanding what hyperbaric oxygen can do for hearing loss

DEAR DR. ROACH: I was just diagnosed with sudden sensorineural hearing loss. They gave me a steroid injection into the ear and more steroids by mouth, but they say it's up to me whether I want to try hyperbaric oxygen.

Do you have any opinion on it? How does breathing pure oxygen at 2 atmospheres help anything? Is there some underlying theory to explain why people do this? It seems to me all this accomplishes is that it raises my blood oxygen level from 97% to 100%. How can this help anything? — D.J.L.

ANSWER: Sudden sensorineural hearing loss is an uncommon condition. It can often be misdiagnosed, and since some people get better on their own, it is sometimes never diagnosed at all.

I suspect there isn't one single cause in all cases as several causes have been proposed, including infections (especially viral), medications and recreational drugs, brain tumors, autoimmune diseases, head trauma, and associations with other diseases. But most cases have no clear underlying cause.

Dr. Keith Roach

Contributing columnist

In addition to a careful exam, hearing tests and an MRI of the brain are generally recommended. Early treatment with steroids (either by injection, orally, or both) has been shown to enhance recovery.

In people with more severe hearing loss, hyperbaric oxygen has been shown to improve outcomes compared to steroids alone. It is thought that the high amount of oxygen delivered via the hyperbaric chamber may be able to deliver oxygen to areas of the cochlea that were damaged, but the mechanism of action isn't completely clear.

The benefit of hyperbaric oxygen isn't that it gets your red blood cells more oxygenated. You can't do better than 100%, and 97% is very close to 100%. With hyperbaric oxygen, the fluid of the blood itself carries much more oxygen, which is then dissolved in the plasma — not in the red blood cells. The oxygen in the fluid is 60 times higher with 3 atmospheres of oxygen compared to room air, which is enough to deliver oxygen to your tissues without red blood cells.

Carefully done, the risks of hyperbaric oxygen are small. The high pressure can cause pain and pressure in the ear and sinuses, which can be relieved by equalizing pressure through maneuvers that open the Eustachian tube (such as yawning or swallowing).

While I understand why physicians want to get your opinion on your treatment, it doesn't sound like they gave you enough information to make an informed choice. In my opinion, they should have gone over the risks and benefits, then given you a clear recommendation.

DEAR DR. ROACH: In a recent column, you stated that the body works to keep blood pH levels steady. My urologist has recommended that I drink baking soda in water to alkalize my urine. Is it true that urine pH levels can be changed even though blood pH levels cannot? — C.T.

ANSWER: This is true. Your urologist is taking advantage of the fact that your kidneys will excrete the bicarbonate ion into your urine very quickly after you take it in by mouth. (Baking soda is sodium bicarbonate. We sometimes use potassium bicarbonate for this purpose, too.) Your blood pH will stay normal, but the urine pH will go up into the alkaline range.

Kidney stone specialists use this to reduce formation of uric acid stones. Potassium citrate also has the same effect on urine pH levels. With a higher urine pH (even just to 6.5 or 7), uric acid cannot form stones. Long-term treatment with urinary alkalization dramatically decreases stone formation.

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.



UNC Health Southeastern

Rust Tower at UNC Health Southeastern.

UNC Health Southeastern expands heart program welcoming 3 new cardiologists

Amanda Crabtree
For The Robesonian

LUMBERTON — UNC Health Southeastern recently welcomed three new physicians to its cardiology program: Interventional Cardiologists Muhammad Ahsan, MD, and Ishtiaque Mohiuddin, MD, PhD, and Cardiologist John Brooks, MD.

The new physicians are part of a growing cardiology group, which offer general and intervention heart care including cardiac catheterizations. The health system continues to invest in heart care and maintains the most clinically complex rural program in the region. The clinical offerings provided by UNC Health Southeastern include UNC Health Southeastern Cardiology and Cardiovascular Care, located on the campus of Biggs Park Mall, with satellite clinics in Pembroke and Gray's Creek, as well as services offered at the medical center, including the cardiac catheterization lab, interventional cardiology, and electrophysiology.

Interventional Cardiologist Dr. Muhammad Ahsan's areas of special interest include preventive medicine to help prevent heart attacks, strokes, and limb loss, treating acute heart attacks, and making a difference in the lives of his patients.

He completed medical school at Services Institute of Medical Sciences Lahore in Pakistan and an internal medicine resi-

dency at Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska. He also completed a cardiology fellowship at Iowa Heart Center in Des Moines, Iowa, as well as an interventional cardiology fellowship at Baylor University Medical Center in Dallas, Texas.

"As an interventional cardiologist, my goal is not only to extend life but also to improve quality of life," said Dr. Ahsan. "I believe that while timely procedures are critical in treating acute diseases, long-term health depends just as much on preventive care to reduce future risk and improve overall heart health. I am committed to evidence-based, patient-centered care that prioritizes shared decision-making and transparency at every stage of diagnosis and treatment while treating patients with empathy and respect. I know that for my philosophy to truly make a difference, I must not only care for my patients but also pass these values on to future doctors, so they can carry them forward in their own practice. I strive to contribute to the advancement of cardiovascular care through research, mentor the next generation of physicians, and lead by example in promoting teamwork, integrity, and lifelong learning in the clinical environment."

Interventional Car-

diologist Dr. Ishtiaque Mohiuddin's area of special interest is coronary intervention, a minimally invasive procedure used to open blocked coronary arteries, improving blood flow to the heart and alleviating symptoms of coronary artery disease.

He completed medical school at Dhaka Medical College and Dhaka University in Bangladesh. His extensive training includes a PhD and cardiology fellowship in Kyoto University, Japan, a pathology residency at UCLA/Wadsworth VAMC, a cardiac prevention and rehabilitation fellowship at Brokton/West Roxbury/VAMC in Massachusetts, and an internal medicine residency at University Medical Center, University of Nevada School of Medicine, Las Vegas, Nevada. He also completed a cardiac imaging fellowship at Cleveland Clinic Foundation, Cleveland, Ohio, a cardiology fellowship at Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio, and an interventional cardiology fellowship at East Carolina University in Greenville.

"The patient experience begins and ends with compassion and care," said Dr. Mohiuddin when asked his philosophy of care. "I strive to provide patient-centered care, with empathy, compassion, respect, and sen-

sitivity to patient's emotional, social and physical well-being."

Cardiologist Dr. John Brooks' areas of special interest include managing heart failure, echocardiography, and educating the community about cardiology.

He completed medical school at East Carolina University School of Medicine in Greenville. He completed an internal medicine residency at Medical University of South Carolina in Charleston, South Carolina, and a fellowship in cardiology at Brody School of Medicine at East Carolina University.

"I am genuinely excited to join UNC Health Southeastern's cardiology team to care for patients and participate in training the next generation of heart specialists through the new fellowship program," said Dr. Brooks about UNC Health Southeastern's new cardiology fellowship program which began in July 2025.

To learn more about UNC Health Southeastern's heart program, visit <https://www.unchealth-southeastern.org/care-treatment/heart/>. To schedule an appointment or referral at UNC Health Southeastern Cardiology and Cardiovascular Care, which is located at 2936 North Elm Street, Suite 102, Lumberton, call 910-671-6619.

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



Brooks



Ahsan



Mohiuddin

CDC launches campaign to address youth substance use and mental health

Staff report

WASHINGTON — The back-to-school season is a great time to engage with youth about mental health and substance use to promote their well-being throughout the academic year. To support these conversations, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has launched Free Mind, a new national campaign that provides

youth ages 12-17 and their parents and caregivers with resources and information about substance use, mental health, and the connection between the two.

The drug overdose crisis is constantly evolving and remains an important public health issue. In 2024, more than 80,000 Americans died from a drug overdose. From 2020 to 2024, 75% of overdose deaths among youth ages 10 to 19 involved

illegally made fentanyl. In addition, the number of teens reporting poor mental health has increased in the past decade. In 2023, 40% of high school students stopped regular activities because of persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness and one in five students seriously considered attempting suicide.

"Teens may use alcohol and other substances to help them cope with stress, anxiety, and depression," said Dr.

Allison Arwady, director of the CDC's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. "Talking openly about mental health and substance use, and knowing when to get professional help, is critical to helping teens stay healthy. That's why this campaign supports youth, parents, and caregivers in having those conversations early, before an issue arises."

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Questions? Email SECARolinaCare@unchealth.unc.edu.