

Summer 2016

## Healthnet News v.31:no.2 Summer 2016

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**In this issue: sunscreens, hospital comparisons, tick ID and more!**



## Choosing a Sunscreen:

Stocking up on sunscreen for your summer vacation? Choosing your sunscreen based on Amazon customer ratings may not be the best idea. [A study in this month's](#)

[JAMA Dermatology](#) found that of the top rated sunscreens sold on Amazon, 4 out of 10 do not meet the American Academy of Dermatology's minimum recommendations (broad spectrum, SPF  $\geq 30$ , and water resistant) for sunscreens. You can find the AAD's sunscreen advice on their [website](#). The Environmental Working Group (EWG), a non-profit, non-partisan organization publishes an [annual guide](#) to selecting safe, effective sunscreens. This year's report of 750 sunscreens found almost 3/4 of the products offer inferior sun protection or contain potentially harmful ingredients like oxybenzone, a hormone disruptor, or retinyl palmitate, a form of vitamin A which may harm our skin.

Browse their top picks by category, or search by brand-name. Each product is reviewed for UVA/UVB coverage and overall health concerns, and safety of active ingredients.

## How Everyday Conditions Become Medical Disorders:

What do low testosterone, blood sugar that's a little too high, and overactive bladder have in common? They are all relatively common occurrences in everyday life that have become medicalized. These conditions have become formal medical disorders for which costly prescription drugs are now available. These drugs have health risks and may not even work. Who is profiting? Read the MedPage Today special report "[Healthy Today, Sick Tomorrow](#)" to learn more.

## What Treatment is Right for You?

The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) creates free [research summaries](#) covering the benefits and risks of different treatments for different health conditions. The summaries are based on comparative effectiveness reviews of health topics suggested by the public. Summaries cover breathing conditions, cancer, developmental delays, heart conditions, pregnancy, childbirth and more. Some of the summaries are also available in Spanish. The aim of the Effective Health Care Program is to help patients and clinicians make better treatment choices. Print copies of summaries may also be ordered from the AHRQ Publications Clearinghouse: 800-358-9295.

## How Does Your Local Hospital Stack Up?

Choosing a hospital for your procedure? How does your community hospital compare to others in your area? The CT Mirror's new [hospital database](#) provides information on hospital occupancy rates, inspections, infections, length of stay, sources of payment, profitability, assets, number of FTEs, employee

compensation and more. Data comes from publicly available sources.

### **Whole Body Cryotherapy (WBC): A Cool Trend that Lacks Evidence and Poses Risks:**

Spas and wellness centers are talking up cryotherapy as an easy way to treat everything from arthritis pain to depression and weight loss. According to the FDA, this super-cooling of the body for therapeutic purposes has not been approved as effective to treat any medical condition. Risks associated with WBC include frostbite, burns, and eye injury from the extreme temperatures. Check out the FDA's [Consumer Health Information page](#) to learn more.

### **Online Drug Information Compendia May Contain Misleading Information:**

Drug information compendia are used by both health professionals and consumers to educate themselves about drug products. A [research report in the \*Annals of Pharmacotherapy\*](#) found popular online compendia contained misinformation which could pose a risk for product misuse and patient harm. The compendia included Medscape Reference, Lexicomp Online, Lexi-Drugs, Epocrates Online, Drugs.com, and RxList. The majority of errors were found in the categories of "Dosage and Administration," "Patient Education," and "Warnings and Precautions." If you are looking for drug information, remember to consult more than one source, compare your findings, and consult your pharmacist with questions or concerns. A reliable source of drug information for consumers is the National Library of Medicine's [DailyMed](#) website which includes FDA-approved content for package inserts for 87,507 drugs.

### **Do-It-Yourself Lab Tests: Are They a Good Idea?**

With all of the bad publicity and criminal charges swirling around the diagnostic lab Theranos, are do-it-yourself lab tests ready for prime time? How reliable are they? Should you make medical decisions based on the results? Although it is empowering to order your own test (and it might save you money), there are downsides to routine blood tests or health screening tests for healthy people. [Among those downsides says \*FiveThirtyEight\* reporter Katherine Hobson](#), are poor predictive value, false positives, and overdiagnosis. Writing on KevinMD.com, physician Kenneth Lin notes that statistically, [one out of every 20 tests is likely to be abnormal simply by chance](#). Home test kits are reviewed by the FDA to make sure they are easy to use and that people can get results by following the kit's directions. The FDA does not guarantee that the results will always be correct. An [August 2015 \*Consumer Reports\* article](#) identifies several home screening kits which may be worthwhile. Will you be able to follow the kit's instructions exactly? Will you be able to interpret the results? Will your health insurance cover the test kit? These are among the questions Consumer Reports suggests you ask yourself before deciding to go the do-it-yourself route.

### **It's Tick Time!**

Your walk with Rover netted some unwanted hitchhikers -- ticks!! What should you do? You can send a photo of the ticks to the University of Rhode Island's [TickSpotter](#) service. TickSpotters identifies the type of tick and sends you a customized reply with "best-practice, next-steps advice" in 1-3 days. The service is administered by the [TickEncounter Resource Center](#). Check their website for tick-safety tools, entertaining educational videos, and helpful tips. The site includes

excellent life-cycle photo identification charts of ticks common to your geographic area.