



ESTHER BUSH

## Preventive Health know your numbers

This month, the “Take Charge of Your Health Today” page focuses on preventive health. Maria Catrina D. Jaime, MPH, CPH, research coordinator at the University of Pittsburgh Clinical and Translational Science Institute, and Esther L. Bush, president and CEO of the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh, discussed the importance of prevention for overall health and well-being.

**EB:** Good morning, Catrina. It is so nice to sit down and talk again. I’m interested in learning more about what exactly preventive health means. I think for many of us it can be a little bit confusing.

**MCDJ:** It’s wonderful to talk with you again, Ms. Bush. I certainly agree—preventive health includes a wide range of services and behaviors that can improve your overall health and includes mental, physical and social well-being. Some services are cancer screenings, like mammograms and colonoscopies, and vaccinations against diseases, like polio, measles or even a seasonal flu shot. Other types of preventive services are babies and children having well-visits with a doctor or a woman’s visit with her gynecologist. They can be counseling services or health coaches that support people of many ages with quitting smoking or learning how to eat healthier foods. Depending on your age and insurance coverage, different services are provided. Many times these are covered at no cost to the individual.

**EB:** That’s a really helpful explanation. It seems then that preventive health is very broad. I know I try to schedule all these types of visits with my health care provider. Do a lot of people use these services?

**MCDJ:** Well, I did some research on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website. They report that only about half of Americans use preventive health services. Many people do not use services because of cost, such as copays or deductibles. The Affordable Care Act helped by removing some of these costs and requiring health insurance plans to provide recommended preventive services at no cost. These included things like well visits, provision of breastfeeding supplies, screenings and counseling for domestic violence.

**EB:** Yes, many people are managing difficult times and I can see why removing and/or reducing costs can help make sure more people use preventive services. Can you describe more about what illnesses these health services may help prevent? Is knowing your blood pressure numbers, blood sugar levels and how to properly take your medications part of practicing preventive health?

**MCDJ:** Yes, that’s right. Preventive health services can help reduce risk for chronic diseases. Examples are heart disease, cancer, and diabetes. These are important diseases to talk about because according to the CDC these diseases account for seven out of 10 deaths among Americans every year. Costs associated with these health issues make up about 75 percent of our nation’s health spending. When people “know their numbers”, have good relationships with their health care providers, and are able to get screenings, tests and treatment regularly, it can improve their overall health.

**EB:** It is so important that we all, no matter our age, pay attention to building and safeguarding our health, Catrina. I agree that a good, honest relationship with your doctor is one step in maintaining good health. January is a great time to talk about this, as many people make New Year’s resolutions that are about improving their health—whether it’s exercising more, eating better, going to the doctor, reducing stress or seeking a better work-life balance. The healthier the individual, the healthier the community as a whole. And, as my grandmother might have said, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of a cure.”

**MCDJ:** Exactly, Ms. Bush. From a public health perspective, it’s important to focus on preventing people from getting sick in the first place. Preventive health helps the individual. It also helps keep the cost of health care down for everyone. If each person makes good health a priority, throughout their lives from baby to senior citizen, more people will remain healthy. Be sure to talk to a health care provider to understand what preventive services you may need and what is available to you. The less sickness and disease, the healthier and happier our communities will be.

**EB:** What a great way for us to kick off this New Year, Catrina! I’m so glad we are talking about this at the start of 2017. I encourage each reader to access the preventive health services that are available to you. If you have any questions, the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh has a Health Education Office where you can get answers to your questions and connected to health services. I look forward to talking with you next month about healthy relationships.

**Any questions or comments can be sent to partners@hs.pitt.edu.**

# Take charge of your health today. Be informed. Be involved.

## An ounce of prevention goes a long way



In this Feb. 23, 2012 photo, family nurse practitioner Terrance James, left, examines Kamiyan Cooper, 1, as his mother, Kesha Wilson, holds him at the Multnomah County’s Mid County Health Center, in Portland, Ore. (AP Photo/Rick Bowmer/File)

January is a great month to set goals for the year. For many people, their goals involve being healthier—eating healthy foods, getting more exercise or losing weight. One part of being healthier is to not only reverse health problems but to stop illness or disease before they happen, which is referred to as preventive health care.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) describes preventive health care as “health services like screenings, check-ups and patient counseling that are used to prevent illnesses, disease and other health problems, or to detect illness at an early stage when treatment is likely to work best.”

Researchers have determined which preventive services are most helpful based on a person’s age and health status. There are many different tests or procedures that people can have to monitor their health throughout their lifetime. Health care professionals will make suggestions based on people’s age and personal and family health history. But, in general, preventive health services include:

- **Appropriate vaccinations according to age**—The CDC reports that 42,000 lives are saved when children get their recommended vaccinations. The CDC also notes that only 46 percent of Blacks—and 67 percent of Whites—get the pneumococcal vaccine recommended for all people 65 and older.
- **Cancer screenings**—Breast, cervical, prostate and colon cancer screenings are important for adults.
- **Health tests**—It’s also important for you to know your blood pressure, cholesterol level and whether you have a disease like diabetes. All of these are important health markers.
- **Regular health visits**—It helps to have regular conversations

with health care providers. They can be partners in keeping people healthy.

- **Healthy lifestyle coaching**—Health care providers can discuss different issues that can affect people’s health, like mental health screenings, healthy eating, weight loss, appropriate exercise, quitting smoking and avoiding sexually transmitted diseases.

*(For more information on specific preventive health services according to age group and sex, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/prevention/>.)*

Screenings and tests are an essential part of preventive health. But don’t forget about the everyday decisions that are a large part of preventive care. According to Kathleen McTigue, MD, MPH, MS, associate professor of medicine at the University of Pittsburgh, “It’s easy to forget that the everyday decisions—like what we decide to eat for every meal or whether or not we’re going to exercise—are choices that directly affect our health. They may seem like small choices, but they are the choices that determine how healthy we are.”

Dr. McTigue cites years of re-

search that suggests smoking is harmful to people’s health, that flu shots help prevent people from getting the flu and data that strongly suggest that healthy diet, exercise and weight loss will lead to overall better health. But people don’t always take disease prevention into their own hands.

“Our health system focuses on and is really good at treating

health problems,” says Dr. McTigue. “It’s easier for people to ignore preventive health and seek help only when they think something’s wrong.”

“People should talk with their health care provider about what’s best for them. But taking steps to prevent illness and disease sounds like a great idea for the new year to me,” she says.



In this May 6, 2010 photo, Toborcia Bedgood, left, prepares a screen-film mammography test for patient Alicia Maldonado at The Elizabeth Center for Cancer Detection in Los Angeles. (AP Photo/Damian Dovarganes/File)



Tyrone Harvey talks with his doctor Gail Nunlee-Bland, M.D., about his diabetes. (AP/Jacquelyn Martin/File)

## Research Opportunity: MyPaTH Story Booth Project

Everyone has a personal story to tell about facing a health problem or accessing health care. And researchers at the University of Pittsburgh want to hear those stories. People are invited to share their stories for the MyPaTH Story Booth project. During a conversation with a project staff member or with a friend, people’s experiences will be recorded in an audio booth set up in Oakland or shared over the phone. The recordings will be stored in an archive to which researchers will have access.

“We hope researchers will listen to these stories and get a better idea of what it’s like to be a patient or what it’s like to struggle to be healthy,” says Kathleen McTigue, MD, MPH, MS, associate professor of medicine at the University of Pittsburgh. “We’re trying to get patients involved in the research process. If researchers want to be answering questions that are going to make a difference to patients’ care, we need to get patients involved so that we find out about what it’s like for patients to be ill, to

stay healthy, in what ways it’s difficult to practice preventive health care and what it’s like to access the health care system.”

When people share their stories, they also have the option to say whether they want to be a part of the research process. “With patient-centered research, researchers aren’t just looking for people to be participants in their studies,” says Dr. McTigue. “They’re often looking for patients to join their research team and help shape a project to make sure it’s something of value.”

The “PaTH” network is a collection of researchers at universities, health care plans and other institutions that focus on patient-centered outcomes research. The network’s goal is to make it easier for researchers to do patient-centered research.

“We hope to help the researchers understand the patients’ perspectives and help make connections between them so these two important groups of people can really get to know each other better,” says Dr. McTigue.

**If you are interested in participating in the Story Booth project, or want to learn more, go to <https://goo.gl/fa2Dai>.** This study is one of 200+ research studies listed on the Pitt+Me™ website. Pitt+Me™ is a community

of patients, volunteers, and researchers working together as partners in research and clinical trials to advance healthcare. You can play an important role in the process of discovery by joining Pitt+Me.



Story Booth user Shunai Taylor (right) talks with PaTH student worker Sri Karanam.