

Here are this week's health care news highlights from AskaPatient:

- Strenuous exercise does not dampen the immune system as previously thought, rather the immune cells migrate. <http://ow.ly/bTUq30jCylf> (04-23-18)
- Heart patients who walk faster are less likely to be hospitalized within 3 years, and their stays are shorter. <http://ow.ly/8Gcz30jCyr9> (04-23-18)
- Bill and Melinda Gates foundation to invest \$1 billion in the fight against malaria <http://ow.ly/CHjp30jCyyU> (04-23-18)
- Switching to zero calorie sweeteners to avoid obesity could lead to the same outcome anyway, but through a different mechanism. <http://ow.ly/1aeK30jDPZT> (04-24-18)
- People are developing dementia later in life and living with it for a shorter time compared to 30 years ago. <http://ow.ly/5AL930jDQ0i> (04-24-18)
- "Wear and tear" arthritis may actually have something to do with gut bacteria, not simply carrying too much weight. <http://ow.ly/YuVL30jDQhp> (04-24-18)
- Malaria makes humans smell more attractive to mosquitoes, helping to explain why the disease spreads so effectively. <http://ow.ly/M2g830jDQn1> (04-25-18)
- Soaking in a hot tub several times per week could improve health markers in some obese women. <http://ow.ly/hlhN30jF7cV> (04-25-18)
- It may be possible for elderly and chemo patients to regenerate the immune system simply by fasting for 3 days, new study finds. <http://ow.ly/IERc30jF7kv> (04-25-18)
- Caffeine during pregnancy is tied to childhood weight gain starting in infancy and progressing to obesity later. <http://ow.ly/tRAM30jF7vn> (04-26-18)
- Glowing contact lens worn at night could prevent blindness in diabetics by reducing the oxygen demand of eye cells. <http://ow.ly/T7SA30jGkcb> (04-26-18)
- Exercise curbs appetite by heating up the area of the brain that regulates eating. <http://ow.ly/fvrl30jGkg4> (04-26-18)
- CDC reports one in 59 children has autism, though boys are 4 times more likely to be identified with autism than girls. <http://ow.ly/3jD830jHxNe> (04-27-18)
- Physical proof that Gulf War illness is caused by brain damage has been found, which could help civilians with fibromyalgia. <http://ow.ly/2qET30jHy0x> (04-27-18)
- Heavy drinkers have more "bad" bacteria in their mouths that are associated with cancer, heart disease, and gum disease. <http://ow.ly/cVdY30jHya0> (04-27-18)
- Beltway designed to divert diesel vehicles traffic in Sao Paulo improves public health. <http://ow.ly/72hf30jIRI2> (04-28-18)
- Forty-four genetic variants identified that are associated with depression, 30 of which are newly discovered. <http://ow.ly/Z1Ps30jIRIN> (04-28-18)

From AskaPatient: Lawmakers continue to investigate pharmaceutical price increases

Our March 11 newsletter featured an article on the **generic** drug price fixing investigation under way by the Department of Justice and at least 47 state attorneys general. There are also many questions and concerns that lawmakers and patient advocates are raising about recent price spikes of **brand name** drugs. On March 26, Missouri Senator Claire McCaskill released a report from the U.S. Senate Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs Committee, Minority Office's investigation into pharmaceutical price increases: [Manufactured Crisis: How Devastating Drug Price Increases Are Harming America's Seniors](#)

The 12-page report identifies the 20 most-prescribed drugs for seniors in 2017 and compares price changes of those drugs for five years, between 2012 and 2017. Some of the key findings include:

- For these 20 brand name drugs, prices increased an average of 12% each year for five years; this is approximately **ten times** the cost of inflation during the period from 2012 to 2017.
- the **number of prescriptions written** for many of these 20 drugs have **sharply declined (48 million fewer)** since 2012, **while the sales revenue resulting from these 20 prescriptions increased by almost 8.5 billion in this period**, causing healthcare costs to stay high even though use of the drugs has been reduced.
- The percent change in price between 2012 and 2017 ranged from a low of 31% (for the shingles vaccine Zostavax) to a high of 477% (for the brand-name nitroglycerin, Nitrostat).

Drugs that have had sharp drops in number of prescriptions include Crestor (statin) and Nitrostat (nitroglycerin) while drugs that have had an increase in number of prescriptions over the five years include **Restasis** for dry eyes and **Xarelto** blood thinner.

Here is a list of 15 of the 20 brand names identified in the report, along with data on price increases and links to patient reviews.

Top 15 of the Most Commonly Prescribed Brand Name Drugs for Seniors and Recent Price Increases

[Advair Diskus \(asthma\)](#)

\$227.60 2012 price
 \$360.86 2017 price
 59% price increase

[Crestor \(cholesterol\)](#)

\$349.31 2012 price
 \$615.65 2017 price
 76% price increase

[Januvia \(diabetes\)](#)

\$306.58 2012 price
 \$517.91 2017 price
 69% price increase

[Lantus \(diabetes\)](#)

\$121.88 2012 price
 \$250.24 2017 price
 105% price increase

[Lyrica \(nerve pain\)](#)

\$264.43 2012 price
 \$600.35 2017 price
 127% price increase

[Nexium \(acid reflux\)](#)

\$256.99 2012 price
 \$368.85 2017 price
 44% price increase

[Premarin \(hysterectomy\)](#)

\$255.94 2012 price
 \$554.60 2017 price
 117% price increase

[Restasis \(dry eyes\)](#)

\$167.62 2012 price
 \$321.26 2017 price
 92% price increase

[Spiriva \(COPD; asthma\)](#)

\$244.77 2012 price

\$348.30 2017 price
42% price increase

[Symbicort \(COPD: asthma\)](#)

\$206.05 2012 price
\$293.46 2017 price
42% price increase

[Synthroid \(hypothyroidism:Hashimoto\)](#)

\$96.35 2012 price
\$153.82 2017 price
60% price increase

[Tamiflu \(flu\)](#)

\$97.94 2012 price
\$143.18 2017 price
46% price increase

[Ventolin \(asthma\)](#)

\$34.67 2012 price
\$50.68 2017 price
46% price increase

[Xarelto \(afib\)](#)

\$258.82 2012 price
\$449.51 2017 price
74% price increase

[Zetia \(cholesterol\)](#)

\$225.63 2012 price
\$483.71 2017 price
114% price increase

Pharmaceutical drug prices: recent activity by lawmakers:

- Currently, pharmaceutical companies get a huge tax break on a business expense: the billions they spend on **prescription drug advertising is fully tax-deductible**. Legislation has recently been introduced by McCaskill that would end these taxpayer subsidies.
- Currently, "gag clauses" forbid pharmacists from **proactively telling consumers if their prescription would cost less out of pocket** than through their insurance plan. Proposed bipartisan legislation, the "Patient Right to Know Drug Prices Act", would end this practice.
- Last summer, legislation from McCaskill and Republican Senator Susan Collins of Maine to **increase competition for generic drugs and help lower prescription costs** was signed into law by President Trump.

Sources and More on this Topic:

March 20, 2018: [press release on ending pharmacist gag clause](#)

March 26, 2018: [press release on price increases of brand name drugs](#)

August 9, 2017: Another McCaskill bill to become law - plan with Collins to tackle cost of Rx drugs: [press release](#)

United States Senate's Special Committee on Aging: [Committee report](#) of bipartisan drug pricing investigation

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