

# Ask a Patient Health News November 13, 2022

## Health News: November 13, 2022

- Over the last two weeks, how often have you felt **nervous, anxious, or on edge**? Have you felt afraid as though something awful might happen? Are you worrying too much? These are examples of the types of questions your primary care doctor may ask **you** and your **child** (age 8 and up) at upcoming **annual wellness visits**.

Acknowledging growing concerns about the mental health of youth, the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPTF) recommended that **primary care doctors screen all children age 8 to 18 for anxiety**, even if there are no symptoms. An evidence report of 39 supporting studies was compiled and published in *JAMA*. The report concludes that evidence suggests that some screening instruments were reasonably accurate, leading to "low-to-moderate strength of evidence" and that **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)** and **pharmacotherapy** were associated with benefits for those diagnosed with anxiety.

<https://uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/uspstf/recommendation/screening-anxiety-children-adolescents>

Separately, the task force also recommended routine screening at primary care visits for **all adults under age 65**, but the announcement is still being finalized.

Adults screening draft update: <https://uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/uspstf/draft-update-summary/anxiety-adults-screening>

Check out **Ask a Patient's** feature article on the new recommendation, with an overview of **screening instruments**, including a sample with scoring instructions, potential non-drug and drug treatments for anxiety in children, and news on how **Canada's approach** to identifying anxiety in children is different.

<https://www.askapatient.com/news/anxiety-screening-and-treatments-children-usptf.asp>

## Medicare Advantage News

- More than 28 million older adults are enrolled in private Medicare plans, known as **Medicare Advantage**. **Enrollment has more than doubled** since 2007 and is **expected to surpass government-run Medicare next year**, according to an analysis by Kaiser Family Foundation. Many seniors choose Medicare Advantage plans because of lower out-of-pocket costs and for additional benefits, such as for vision or dental care that are not offered with traditional Medicare plans.

A Senate Finance Commission report found that the number of **complaints** about the marketing Medicare Advantage plans more than doubled from 2020 to 2021. Marketing schemes include: mailers that appear to be official government documents, ads that use "Medicare" in the company's name or branding, targeting seniors with dementia, switching plans without a person's consent, and unwanted robo-calls. The report says that consumers enrolled in a new plan that doesn't work for them should call **1-800-MEDICARE** for help.

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/health/2022/11/08/private-medicare-plan-enrollment/10617969002/>

- Richard Kronick, a former federal health policy researcher and a professor at the University of California-San Diego, said his analysis of newly released Medicare Advantage billing data estimates that **Medicare overpaid the private Medicare Advantage health plans by more than \$106 billion from 2010 through 2019** because of the way the private plans charge for sicker patients. In original Medicare, medical providers bill for each service they provide. By contrast, Medicare Advantage plans are paid using a coding formula called a "risk score" that pays higher rates for sicker patients and less for those in good health. The more the serious medical condition diagnosed, the more money the plan gets from the government - sometimes thousands of dollars more per patient over the course of a year with little monitoring by Center for Medicare Services (CMS).

<https://khn.org/news/article/medicare-advantage-overpayments-cost-taxpayers-billions-researcher-says/>

- Most doctors measure total cholesterol, LDL (low-density lipoprotein), HDL (high-density lipoprotein) and triglycerides as part of routine blood work, but do not routinely measure **lipoprotein levels, known as Lp(a)**. It is estimated that one out of five people inherits a high level of lipoprotein. This sticky cholesterol-protein particle contributes to blood clots that can clog arteries and can also lead to calcification of heart valves. Syndicated columnist and People's Pharmacy radio host Joe Graedon shares comments from patients and discusses why Lp(a) can be a risk factor for a **heart attack**.

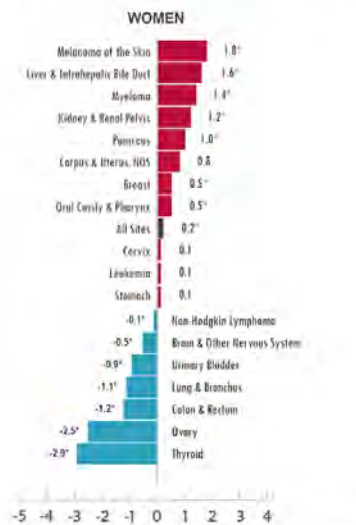
<https://www.peoplespharmacy.com/articles/is-lpa-contributing-to-unexplained-heart-attacks>

- Collagen is the most abundant protein in our bodies. It's used to make all our connective tissues—including skin, bones, blood vessels, cartilage, ligaments, muscles, and tendons. A 2017 review of several small studies of people with osteoarthritis concluded that daily collagen supplements (between 10 mg and 40 mg) decreased joint pain by about 30%. *Consumer Reports* explains the potential benefits and limitations of **collagen supplements**. <https://www.consumerreports.org/health/supplements/what-is-collagen-and-does-it-help-your-skin-a2726606623/>

- The **2022 Annual Report to the Nation on the Status of Cancer** states cancer **death rates continued to decline** in every demographic group in the United States from 2015 to 2019, with an average 2.3% death rate decrease per year among males and average 1.9% decrease per year among females. Lung cancer and melanoma death rates are decreasing the most, while uterine and pancreatic cancers showed increases in mortality for women.

For **case rates**, overall new cases of cancer remained stable for men and children but increased for women, adolescents, and young adults. Here are some trends:

## National Trends in Rates of New Cancer Cases - Women



Average Annual Percent Change 2014 - 2018

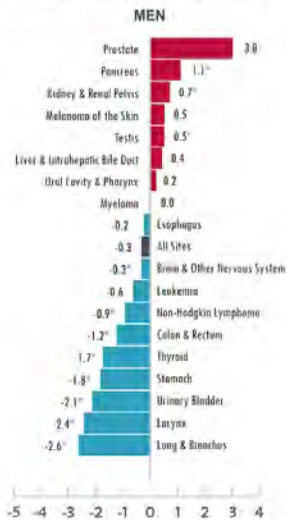
AAPC = average annual percent change  
\*AAPC is significantly different from zero (p < .05).

Source: Annual Report to the Nation  
[seer.cancer.gov](http://seer.cancer.gov)

Chart adapted by Ask a Patient.com

## National Trends in Rates of New Cancer Cases - Men

### 3 Cancer Cases - MEN



Average Annual Percent Change 2014 - 2018

AAPC = average annual percent change

\*AAPC is significantly different from zero (p < .05)

Source: Annual Report to the Nation  
seer.cancer.gov

Chart adapted by AskaPatient.com

- At least 10% of physicians will have a **substance use disorder** at some point in their lives, according to state medical boards. Confidential, state-affiliated programs called **Physician Health Programs** (PHPs) are meant to help doctors with alcohol and substance abuse problems. Their private nature is designed to encourage physicians to seek treatment without fear, but some patient advocates say not enough information is provided to the public about such programs. InvestigateTV and the Arnolt Center for Investigative Journalism at Indiana University contacted U.S. medical boards, asking how many licensed physicians each had referred to the state's Physician Health Program since January 1, 2020.

Check the map within the article to find out how many physicians in your state have been referred to the program (not every state provides this information.)

<https://www.hawaiinewsnow.com/2022/10/31/private-practice-confidential-drug-alcohol-programs-physicians-keep-patients-dark/>

- Some states make their substance use treatment programs available to all licensed health practitioners (nurses, pharmacists, and veterinarians, and others.) For example, the Virginia Health Practitioners' Monitoring Program (HPMP) 2020 annual report says that 70% of enrollees in its program were **nurses** (Board of Nursing) while 20% were **doctors** (Board of Medicine). The two most frequently abused substances by health care practitioners in 2020 under the HPMP were **opioids** at 44%, and **alcohol** at 38%.

<http://www.dhp.virginia.gov/media/dhpweb/docs/hpmp/reports/2020HPMPAnnualReport.pdf>

### Research News

- Now that **cannabis** is more readily available for both recreational and medical use, some women are taking it to manage various **menopause-related symptoms**. Researchers from McLean Hospital Imaging Center, Belmont, MA, and Department of Psychiatry, and Harvard Medical School, Boston, MA, surveyed about 200 peri- and post-menopausal women, 83% of whom were regular cannabis users. Participants reported using it most often for sleep disturbance (67.4%), mood/anxiety (46.1%), and libido (30.4%). The results were published in *Menopause: The Journal of The North America Menopause Society*.

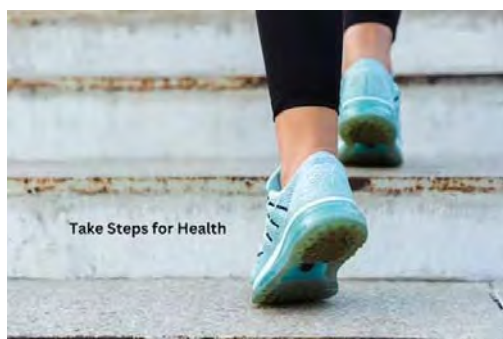
<https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/are-women-turning-to-cannabis-for-menopause-symptom-relief-202210242837>

- How can doctors help reduce the risk of **stomach bleeding** associated with **long-term aspirin use**? Researchers at University of Nottingham conducted a large clinical trial to investigate whether the eradication of **H. pylori** with a short course of antibiotics would protect against aspirin-associated ulcer bleeding. Helicobacter pylori infection is linked to peptic ulcers and long-term aspirin use increases the risk of ulcer bleeding. The researchers found that eradication of the bacterium protects against ulcer bleeding, but this protection appears to be lost after about two and a half years. Researchers say the findings demonstrate a new gastroprotective strategy for long-term aspirin users and pave the way for further research on the health benefits of aspirin. The study was published in the *Lancet*.

<https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/aspirin-induced-bleeding-can-getting-rid-of-a-bacterium-reduce-risk>

- Researchers from Medical University of Lodz conducted a meta-analysis of previous research to determine the relationship between **step count** and **mortality risk**. They found that each 500-step increment was linked to a 7% drop in cardiovascular-related deaths. While many fitness apps recommend 10,000 total steps per day as a goal, this study shows that even adding 1,000 or even 500 steps to your daily routine could lead to a longer life. The results were presented at American Heart Association's Scientific Sessions and will be published in *Circulation*.

<https://www.heart.org/en/news/2022/11/03/upping-your-step-count-even-in-small-amounts-may-increase-life-span>



-Researchers from a team led by University of Virginia scientists published a five-year follow-up to their study on a non-invasive form of brain surgery to treat **essential tremor**. **Five years** after treatment, 40 clinical trial participants continued to see their treated tremors **reduced by more than 70%**.

The ultrasound procedure focuses sound waves inside the brain to disrupt faulty brain circuits that cause unwanted movement. The procedure is guided by magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), so doctors can pinpoint the exact right spot in the brain before delivering the treatment. In 2016, the [FDA approved](#) the first **focused ultrasound for essential tremor** and has since approved the technology for the treatment of medication-resistant Parkinson's disease tremor and dyskinesia (involuntary movements). Some study authors are affiliated with InSightec, the manufacturer of the focused ultrasound device. The research was published in the *Journal of Neurosurgery*.

<https://newsroom.uvahealth.com/2022/11/10/focused-ultrasound-treatment-essential-tremor-highly-effective-after-5-years/>



*MR-guided Focused Ultrasound (Image Source: INSIGHTEC Website)*

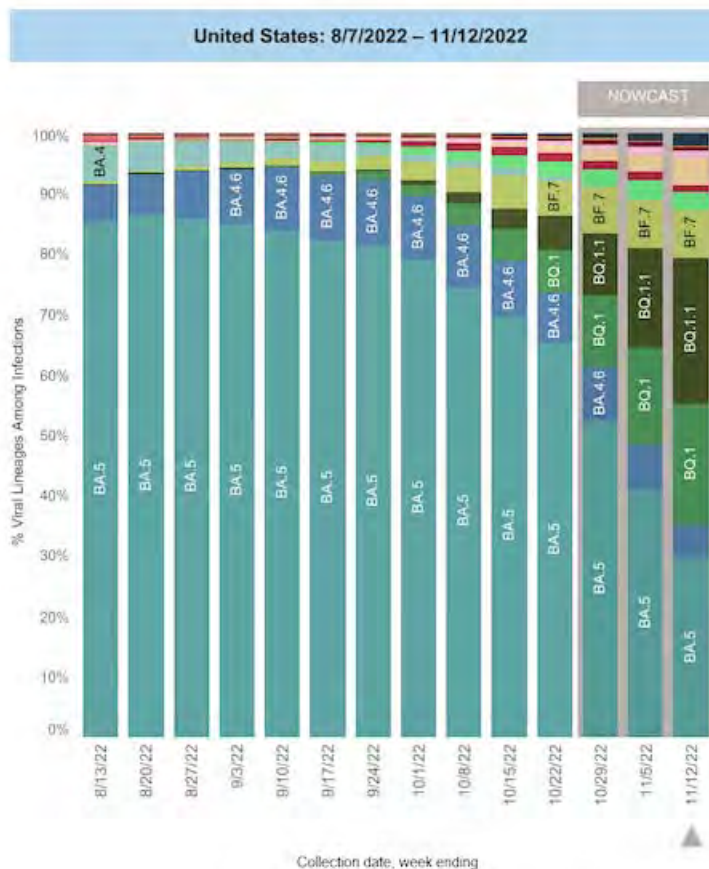
**Essential tremor** is a common movement disorder affecting 10 million Americans. Read more on how focused ultrasound works and how it is also being studied for **uterine fibroid treatments** and **cancer**:

<https://uvahealth.com/services/focused-ultrasound>

**Covid-19 News & Statistics**

The variants for Omicron are rapidly changing, with the BQ variants (BQ.1 and BQ.1.1) now dominant in the U.S. Omicron **BQ variants** now account for **44% of circulating variants in the U.S.** They appear to be adept at evading immunity from vaccination and previous infection, raising concern of a surge in Covid cases this winter. The image below shows variant proportions in the U.S.

<https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#variant-proportions>



Have you taken either of the **"bivalent" booster shots for Covid-19** that are formulated to provide protection from Omicron variant? These have been offered by Pfizer and Moderna since September. If so, please share how those boosters compared with previous vaccines (and please note in the comments field that you are rating for the booster):

[Pfizer bivalent booster rating form](#)

OR

[Moderna bivalent rating form](#)

*Thank you!*