

HealthSenseSM

the quarterly community magazine of Cox Health Systems www.coxhealth.com

feature
Aide receives state recognition 9

healthy living
What's your stroke risk? 3

cutting edge
New varicose and spider vein treatment 12

at your service
Weight loss for good 5

calendar
Health education 6

It runs in the family

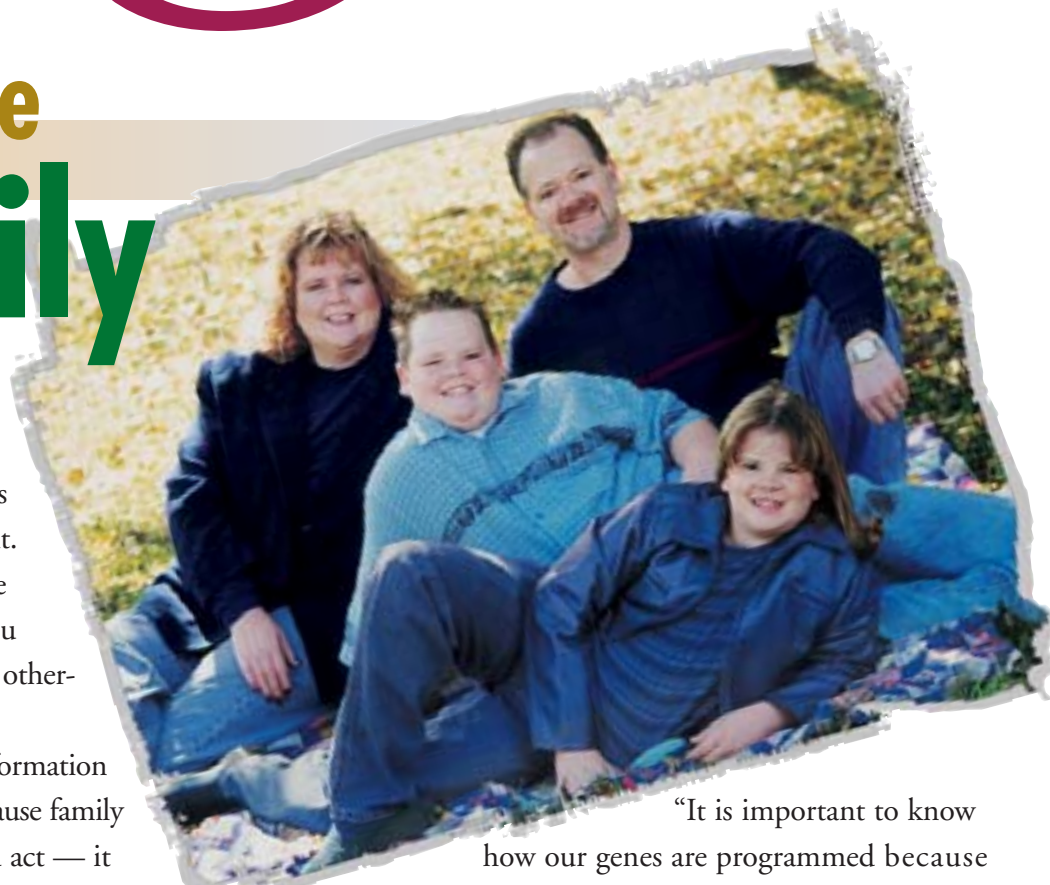
by Donna Barton

You have your mother's skin, your grandfather's easy-going temperament and your aunt's ability to eat large portions and not gain weight. Although you may be thankful for the favorable traits you have "inherited" from your family, you may not realize the role those traits, physical or otherwise, play in your life.

Your family's tendencies can be valuable information for you as well as your health care provider; because family lineage can affect more than how you look and act — it can affect how you feel. Our genes comprise the molecular blueprint that regulates the growth, development and functions of the human body. They exist in the nucleus of each cell. Between 35,000 and 45,000 genes reside in the 46 chromosomes of each cell and just one gene mutation can drastically impact the way your body works.

Medical experts estimate that 10 to 15 percent of individuals who develop [colon cancer](#) have a family history of the disease, and 25 percent of children of alcoholics are likely to become alcoholic. A woman's risk for [breast cancer](#) increases if her mother or sister had breast cancer. Other conditions such as [heart disease](#), certain forms of arthritis, high blood pressure and [diabetes](#), for example, are also found to be common among blood relatives. That's why health care professionals agree that the more you know about your family's health, the better.

Dr. Tim Jones, Steeplechase Family Physicians, contends that since most doctor visits are brief and in response to a specific complaint, a patient's family health history can often speed diagnosis. Family health histories also play a crucial role in disease screenings.



"It is important to know how our genes are programmed because that tailors how to treat certain conditions and symptoms," Jones says. "We all have health hazards as we go through life, but knowing a person's family health history puts further focus on things to look for."

Dr. Jones also says family health histories are a valuable communication tool. "It helps me to know how a person or family relates and responds to illness," he says. "A patient who had a relative die young of a heart attack is going to react differently if they begin to

have chest pains or problems than someone who doesn't have that in their family. That's why family doctors have an advantage — we get to see family members across the age span, we get to know their personalities and habits and what they might be predisposed for because we have treated their father and mother, too."

Because most shared conditions come from first-degree relatives, compiling a health history should focus on traits found in parents and siblings. Biological grandparents, aunts and uncles also contribute to genetic traits, but usually the further removed the relative, the less impact they have on your

... family lineage can affect more than how you look and act — it can affect how you feel.

health. However, keep in mind the health of distant relations can be useful information to establish patterns of health in your family.

While collecting information, important facts to note include how relatives died, age at death, childhood conditions and birth defects, chronic health problems and the age they occurred, and ethnic backgrounds. Medical histories should be reviewed and updated periodically to reflect changes in health.

Now, thanks to www.coxhealth.com, getting started on your family health history is just a click away. The Cox Web site offers a personal health diary to help you document everything from your height, weight and allergy information to your children's

as family history ... so it is important to fill out those family history sheets but also talk to your doctor."

Halverson suggests viewing your family health history as a motivator, especially if you have certain known familial illnesses. Knowing you are at risk can challenge you to achieve better health. Halverson also advises you to note positive patterns in your family health history; some histories may reassure you about illnesses you're likely not to get.

"Any information should be viewed as a way to be more proactive in your health, he says. "You may not be able to change your genes, but you can maximize your good health."

As a certified diabetes educator at Cox and a person with several close relatives with diabetes, being proactive about good health was something Barbara Schoonover understood well. However, it wasn't until her brother died at age 54 from diabetes-related complications that she says she began to "practice what she preached." Now Schoonover eats better and exercises regularly, but best of all her glucose remains at a healthy level. She has maintained this lifestyle for nearly three years.

Says Schoonover: "It took a combination of grief, knowing my family history and my professional background to make me change, but at least I'm healthier now because of it." ❖

Donna Barton is a Public Relations assistant for Cox Health Systems.

"You may not be able to change your genes, but you can maximize your good health."

immunization records. In addition to interactive tools such as health risk appraisals, nutrition assessments and a fitness quiz, plans are under way for more advanced e-tools to help you find medications to match your genetic needs.

A map of your family's medical history is a useful tool that can lead to a healthier life for you and future generations of your family. Eventually the information you compile on coxhealth.com could be added, with your permission, to your permanent medical record to enhance communication with your physician.

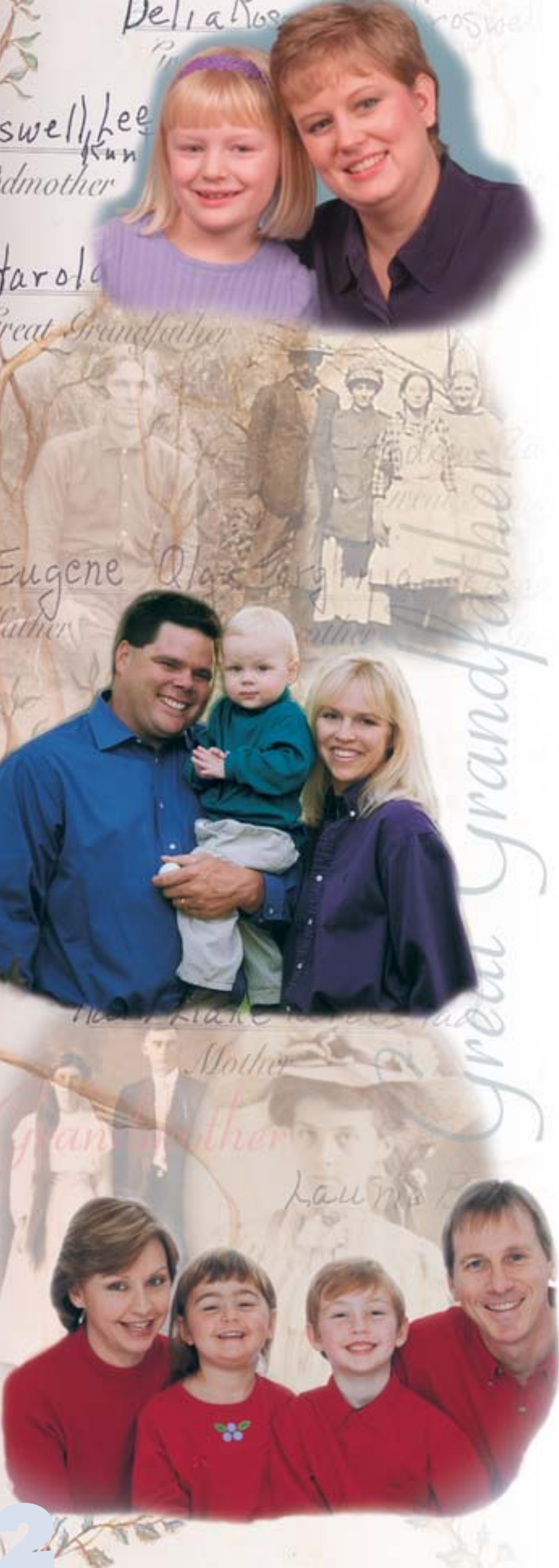
If you discover there is a condition that runs in your family don't think your fate, or the fate of your children, is sealed. Dr. Larry Halverson, director of the Cox Family Practice Residency Program, reminds us that good health is a combination of many things including age, gender, occupation and personal habits, as well as genetics. In fact, most hereditary diseases have a lifestyle component, he says.

"There is always some luck of the draw with health," Halverson says. "The personality of a person can influence health just as much

What's your

by Stacy Fender

Stroke, or "brain attack," is the third leading cause of death in the United States. During a stroke, the blood supply to the victim's brain is interrupted and brain tissue becomes starved for oxygen and nutrients. Within minutes, cells in the affected area of the brain begin to die, inflicting damage that may be mild or severe, temporary or permanent. The part of the body controlled by the impacted area ceases to function properly. A stroke can impact vision, speech,



Warning signs of a bad diet

by Dodi Thomas

We have all heard the old adage “you are what you eat,” but is it really true? Can the foods we eat, or more importantly, the foods we don’t eat, really impact our daily functions and appearance?

Absolutely.

Although we are blessed in this country to have access to a variety of foods, sometimes we still fail to get the nutrients needed to look and feel healthy. Do you have problem skin, lackluster hair or brittle nails? These signs could point to potential deficiencies in what you eat. So instead of reaching for skin care products, shampoos and conditioners, or heading to a nail salon, consider [your diet](#).

Take vitamin A for example. Extremely dry skin, dry hair, sloughing of the skin, broken fingernails, as well as night blindness are common signs of vitamin A deficiency. This is usually coupled with decreased resistance to infections. Vitamin A deficiency is rare in the United States, but it is still a major public health problem in the developing world. Adults usually have a one-year reserve of vitamin A stored in their livers and should not be at risk of deficiency during periods of short-term fat malabsorption. Children may only have enough stores of vitamin A to last several weeks, so children with fat malabsorption may require immediate vitamin A supplementation. Some good sources of vitamin A are beef liver, cheese pizza, cheddar cheese, eggs, carrots, mangos, spinach, cantaloupe and peaches. (National Institutes of Health, Oct. 2001.)

The most common nutritional anemias in the United States are iron and folic acid deficiency. When severe, these can also have physical manifestations. Fingernails of an iron-deficient adult can become thin and flat, and eventually

koilonychia (spoon-shaped nails) may develop. The bioavailability of the iron in our diets is of greater importance than the total dietary iron in correcting or preventing iron deficiency. Some recommendations that might help are avoiding large amounts of tea or coffee and including a source of vitamin C at every meal. (Krause’s Food, Nutrition, and Diet Therapy, Mahan & Arlin.)

A low intake of calcium is another example of how the foods we don’t eat greatly affect our health and appearance. Calcium is responsible for, among other things, the health of our teeth and gums. When we don’t consume enough, the bone and tissue in our mouths can break down causing periodontal disease, characterized by bleeding gums, chronic bad breath and a foul taste in the mouth. Registered dietitians recommend consuming the calcium equivalent of three glasses of skim milk a day to avoid periodontal disease and other health problems caused by calcium deficiency.

Bottom line: to look good you have to feel good. And well-balanced, nutritious meals provide us with plenty of vitamins, energy fuels, water and trace elements to help achieve both. ❖



Dodi Thomas is a registered dietitian at Cox Health Systems.

stroke risk?

behavior, thought processes and the ability to move.

[Cox Stroke Center](#), the first stroke center of its kind in the Ozarks, was established in 1998 to provide comprehensive, state-of-the-art treatment for stroke patients. The center’s team approach combines health care professionals specially trained in stroke prevention, diagnosis and timely intervention with rehabilitation services, community education and support. The center is a member of

the National Stroke Association’s Stroke Network.

The professionals at Cox recognize and treat stroke as a medical emergency. Seconds count. But real success in stroke treatment depends on the patient. By understanding your stroke risk, recognizing the symptoms of a stroke and calling 911 as soon as they appear, you dramatically increase your chance of survival. ❖

Stacy Fender is a Public Relations assistant for Cox Health Systems.

STROKE SYMPTOMS INCLUDE:

- sudden weakness or numbness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body
- sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding
- sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- sudden dizziness, trouble walking, loss of balance or coordination
- sudden severe headache with no known cause.

Memorize these symptoms or post them in your home, and learn your stroke risk at the Cox Stroke Center’s free Stroke Screening, 7:30 a.m. – 1 p.m. Wednesday, May 22. Call 269-INFO for location and registration information.