

New therapies increase longevity in cystic fibrosis patients

HOUSTON—As recently as 30 years ago, making plans for college was something cystic fibrosis patients seldom did. Few reached college age.

Today, people with CF routinely reached adulthood, some living into their 50s.

"Newer therapies and antibiotics have increased

longevity of CF patients," said Dr. Julie Katkin, a CF expert at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston.

"But another big reason is

that CF centers have adopted multi-disciplinary approaches that treat the whole patient. The centers bring different kinds of health-care people together to pool their expertise for patients' benefit," she said.

One result is that CF patients are living long enough to enter the work force. If employers can accommodate some special needs, people with CF can function in many kinds of jobs.

"Some CF patients may need breathing treatments during the day," Katkin said, "and most of them have to take large numbers of medications daily to help them with intestinal absorption."

Cystic fibrosis is often thought

of only as a lung disease, but it also affects the gastrointestinal tract, the pancreas and the sinuses, and it can lead to diabetes and to arthritis and other joint problems. The disease causes mucous to thicken because water is not transported properly in various parts of the body. Principal affected sites include the lungs, pancreas, intestines and sweat glands.

"Everything else that happens to a CF patient is the result of that basic thick-mucous defect," Katkin said.

"Because the lungs become congested, bacteria have a chance to get in and grow better. The lungs can't clear it out, and

there is progressive lung damage."

A major step in CF research occurred in 1989 when the CF gene was identified," Katkin said.

"Since then, researchers have been able to study the structure of the disease-affected protein and why it does not work properly," she said.

By understanding how the protein should work, Katkin said, researchers have developed drugs that attempt to mimic, supplement or augment the protein. Several such drugs are now in clinical trials.

What all this research means for CF patients, Katkin said, is a chance to live productive lives beyond childhood.

Physical training improves vessels' function in heart failure patients

Chronic heart failure, an increasingly prevalent disease among Americans, is marked by impaired artery dilation and reduced blood flow to tissues. Arteries' loss of vital elasticity has been blamed on functional abnormalities of vessels' inner lining, the endothelium, which researchers say plays a "pivotal role" in coordinating tissue perfusion. Now, scientists report that simple exercises may prove to be an effective way to enhance endothelial function in heart failure patients.

A team of German investigators found that in a small study, physical training in the form of daily handgrip exercises improved "flow-dependent dilation" (FDD) of patients' arteries after four weeks. Using

a new high-resolution ultrasound system, the researchers measured the diameters of arteries in 12 patients with heart failure and in seven age-matched healthy "control" subjects before and after the physical training.

"FDD was impaired in heart failure patients compared with normal subjects," the research team reports in the January 15 issue of the American Heart Association journal *Circulation*. The infusion of a chemical that inhibited endothelial cells' manufacture of nitric oxide further weakened arteries' ability to dilate — an indication, the scientists say, that "endothelial release of nitric oxide is involved in FDD."

The investigators report that physical training restored FDD

in patients with heart failure. In particular, that portion of flow-dependent dilation mediated by nitric oxide was "significantly higher" after physical training, approaching normal levels. They conclude: "These results indicate that physical training restores FDD in patients with chronic heart failure, possibly by enhanced endothelial release of nitric oxide."

OVERWEIGHT TEENS

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Statistics, 44 percent of black women are overweight by the time they reach their 20's. Although socioeconomic and cultural factors are possible contributors, Foreyt says many young people are not educated about the dangers of being overweight.

"Teens should be taught that if they do not control their weight, they run a greater risk for heart disease, diabetes and other life-threatening diseases," said Foreyt, who is also director of Baylor's Nutrition Research Clinic.

In some cases, teenagers inherit their weight problem. Although obesity can run in families, Foreyt says teenagers should not give into fate.

"Parents with a family history of obesity should tell their teenagers to be extremely cautious about their weight," he said. "This may help a teenager from thinking, 'Well my parents are heavy, so I guess I'll be heavy too.'"

Teenagers can learn to be aware of what they eat while following a well-balanced diet and regular exercise program. However, parents should help teens adopt a healthy lifestyle as soon as possible.

"The older the child, the harder it is to change behavior," Foreyt said. "Teaching children good eating habits while they're still young is the best policy."

Foreyt recommends that parents practice what they preach. "Be a role model," he said. "If children see their parents eating fruits and vegetables, they will eat them, too."

Parents can also encourage "couch potato" teenagers to engage in some form of physical activity.

"Teens should consider getting involved in a team sport or exercise instead of sitting at home snacking in front of the television," Foreyt said. "Practicing good exercise habits can help them feel better about their appearance and maintain a fitness plan for life."



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