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Baylor Health

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**REAL PATIENTS.
REAL STORIES.**

Matters of the Heart

After giving birth to her daughter Lillian, CHRISTY PFEIFER-GAMEZ had another life-changing event—heart failure

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 **BAYLOR**
Medical Center
at Irving



BACK IN ACTION
Starting a fitness regimen? Don't forget your back muscles **PAGE 3**



A PAINFUL PROBLEM
Find out how to say goodbye to gallstones **PAGE 7**

Epilepsy Explained

What do you know about this seizure disorder?

MOST PEOPLE KNOW THAT EPILEPSY is a disorder of the brain that causes seizures. But beyond that, the condition can be mysterious. We answer the most common questions about epilepsy.

WHAT EXACTLY IS EPILEPSY?

Epilepsy is a disorder in which the brain mistakenly sends out signals that can cause involuntary muscle contractions (also known as a seizure), loss of consciousness or abnormal behavior.

I'VE HAD A SEIZURE. DOES THAT MEAN I HAVE EPILEPSY?

Probably not. "Having a single seizure does not mean you have epilepsy," says Karen Bontia, MD, a neurologist on the

medical staff at Baylor Medical Center at Irving. "There are many reasons to have a seizure: illness, fever, brain damage and abnormal brain development are a few. It's only when a person has two unprovoked seizures that he or she is diagnosed with epilepsy."

ARE ALL SEIZURES THE SAME?

Each case of epilepsy is different and ranges from mild to severe. Similarly, not all seizures are the same. While

Need a Neurologist?

Do you think you may have epilepsy or another brain disorder? Visit **BaylorHealth.com/IrvingNeuro** to learn more about the neuroscience services offered at Baylor Irving.

movies portray seizures as violent shaking and loss of consciousness, some people experience seizure as a simple staring spell, abnormal behavior or jerky movements of one arm or leg.

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF SOMEONE IS HAVING A SEIZURE?

The answer to this is "not much." Unlike what you may have heard, you should not attempt to place anything in the person's mouth. Rather, "simply try to keep them safe," Dr. Bontia says. "Put them on the ground or another safe place, ideally on their side in case they vomit. And then let them be."

The seizure should pass in a couple of minutes. Afterward, the person may be groggy. If it's a first-time seizure or lasts more than five minutes, take him or her to the emergency room.

CAN EPILEPSY BE TREATED?

Although the condition itself cannot be cured, the symptoms of epilepsy can be controlled through treatment.

"Most of the time, treatments are effective," Dr. Bontia says. "At least seven out of 10 patients get better with medication. Surgery can be an option in severe cases."



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Eight out of 10 people will battle back pain at some time in their lives.

STRONG BACK, STRONG BODY

Keep your back fit with regular exercise

RESOLVING TO GET FIT IN 2013? Don't forget about your back. Keeping your back strong and healthy can help keep your entire fitness routine on track.

"You should be exercising on a regular basis—at least three to five times a week—to keep the muscles in your back toned and in good shape," says Charles Chang, MD, a neurosurgeon on the medical staff at Baylor Medical Center at Irving. "Gradually increase your truncal stability and build up your core strength."

If you do injure your back, reduce your activities, get plenty of rest and try over-the-counter

anti-inflammatory medications. If your symptoms don't improve after a week or two, see a doctor.

Dr. Chang says there is a range of treatments to help alleviate back pain.

1. Your doctor will likely suggest a higher-dose anti-inflammatory, a muscle relaxant and medication for pain. You might begin a physical therapy program to reduce the pain, with ultrasound, warm and cold compresses, or electrical stimulation. "For the vast majority of people, after several weeks of this, they improve," Dr. Chang says.

Baylor Irving offers comprehensive neuroscience services

The neurosurgeons and neurologists on the medical staff at Baylor Irving diagnose and treat neurological disorders and injuries to the head, neck and back. From brain tumors, strokes and aneurysms to head trauma and spinal cord injuries, these experienced physicians have the expertise and technology to improve a person's quality of life.

2. For those who don't respond, the next course of action is typically injections around the facet joints to numb the nerves. If a series of three injections doesn't bring relief, your doctor likely will refer you to a surgeon.

3. Surgical options depend on the cause of your back pain. Surgeons can treat a ruptured disk with minimally invasive discectomy. If bone and ligament growth has narrowed your spinal canal, decompression surgery can be done with either minimally invasive or open techniques, depending on the severity of the abnormalities. If your spine is unstable, decompression surgery can destabilize it even more. In that case, your surgeon probably will fuse your spine to help prevent further degeneration.

Put Pain in the Past

To learn more about the neuroscience services offered at Baylor Irving, visit BaylorHealth.com/IrvingSpine, or for a referral to a back pain specialist on the Baylor Irving medical staff, call **1.800.4BAYLOR**.

Close to Your Heart

The **truth** behind four common heart health **myths**

Eight weeks after Christy Pfeifer-Gamez gave birth to her fourth child, Lillian, on the Fourth of July, she started feeling ill. One morning she couldn't even get out of bed. The doctors thought it might be pneumonia. They never expected it to have anything to do with her heart. After all, she was too young for that, they said.

Fortunately, Pfeifer-Gamez's family persuaded her to transfer her care to Baylor University Medical Center at Dallas. "My husband, family, everyone just wanted me at Baylor," the 28-year-old says. Their insistence may have saved her life. The doctors at Baylor discovered she had postpartum cardiomyopathy, meaning her heart had become weak and couldn't pump blood efficiently. "I was put in a medically induced coma for three weeks," she recalls. "After coming out of the coma, I had to learn how to do everything again. It took a lot of help from my physical therapists, my family and my husband for me to recover."

Watch Christy's Story

Hear Christy talk more about her experience by visiting BaylorHealth.com/Exclusive today.

Christy Pfeifer-Gamez thought she was just getting sick eight weeks after giving birth to her daughter Lillian. But in reality, it was heart disease.



Get Heart Smart

If you think you're experiencing heart attack symptoms, call 911. For a referral to a cardiologist on the medical staff at Baylor Irving, visit **FindDrRight.com** or call **1.800.4BAYLOR**.

Today, more than a year later, Pfeifer-Gamez is leading a heart healthy lifestyle. She stays active by playing in a coed soccer league with her husband, Freddy, and has changed her diet. "I'm on a low-sodium diet," she says. "I don't buy chips or snacks for the house. We eat more fruit and more salads."

Pfeifer-Gamez also sees her doctor regularly and will have to take medication for the rest of her life. She knows that heart trouble doesn't discriminate based on age. Do you? It's time to dispel this heart myth, and a few others, for good.

MYTH: *Heart disease can't affect me. I'm too young!*

FACT: Think again. As Pfeifer-Gamez's experience shows, cardiovascular disease takes many forms, including heart failure, and can affect anyone. "Patients can be teenagers and younger, or in their 80s," says Steve Simpson, MD, a cardiologist on the medical staff at Baylor All Saints Medical Center at Fort Worth.

This is why it's important to know your family history and get your blood pressure and cholesterol levels checked early and often. "Plaque buildup can start as early as the teen years," says Neeraj Arora, MD, a cardiologist on the medical staff at Baylor Regional Medical Center at Grapevine.

MYTH: *Heart disease is a man's disease.*

FACT: "There could not be a bigger myth than this," Dr. Arora says. "Heart disease is the leading cause of death among American women." In fact, it kills more women ages 65 and older than all cancers combined—including breast cancer.

And yet most women tend to ignore or explain away the subtle symptoms that might signal heart trouble, including shortness of breath (with or without chest pain), nausea, cold sweats and pain in your chest (or arms, jaw, neck, back or stomach). If you experience any of these warning signs, speak up and seek help immediately.

MYTH: *No one in my family has had a heart attack, so I'm off the hook.*

FACT: First, make sure that's true. Many people aren't aware they have a family history of heart disease until a crisis strikes. Ask your parents and siblings if they have high blood pressure or cholesterol levels—both important risk factors to know about.

Second, if your own numbers are high, you smoke or you aren't physically active, then you're at risk, no matter what your family history is. On the other hand, even if you eat right and exercise, you can still be susceptible. Unfortunately, there's no such thing as zero risk when it comes to heart disease, which makes managing the factors within your control (weight, activity level, diet) so important.

MYTH: *I would be able to tell if I had high blood pressure.*

FACT: "There's a reason why hypertension is called the silent killer," Dr. Arora says. "You may not have any symptoms from it." The same is true for high cholesterol levels.

Normal blood pressure is 120/80 or lower; your total cholesterol should be less than 200. Do you know what your numbers are? "Today there's not much of an excuse not to know," Dr. Simpson says.

Gender Disparity

While heart disease strikes both men and women, the symptoms of heart attack often vary by gender. Men are more likely to experience the more commonly recognized symptoms of a heart attack—shortness of breath, excessive sweating, nausea, or chest pain or pressure that radiates to the left arm, neck or back.

"Women can have these typical symptoms, or atypical ones such as anxiety, abdominal pain or fatigue," explains Nauman Siddiqi, MD, a cardiologist on the medical staff at Baylor Medical Center at Irving. "We sometimes see these symptoms in men, but they occur less commonly than in women."

Heart disease is the top killer of both men and women, so it's important to know these symptoms and your risk factors.

Dr. Siddiqi says you should know your blood pressure, fasting blood sugar and cholesterol levels and take steps to improve any abnormalities. "Smoking is the other risk factor that's modifiable. Knowing and treating these risk factors appropriately can help prevent heart disease in the first place."





Optimism in Cancer Research

Baylor studies of cell-based cancer vaccines show promise

FOR MORE THAN A DECADE, the researchers at Baylor Institute for Immunology Research (BIIR), a component of Baylor Research Institute (BRI), have been studying cell-based cancer vaccines—a treatment option that shows promise.

The research at BIIR focuses on using dendritic cells, which are the body's first line of defense against immune system challenges. Because certain types of cancer can get past the immune system, BIIR researchers activate a patient's own dendritic cells to fight against these forms of cancer.

The work is being carried out with melanoma, an aggressive form of skin cancer, as well as breast and pancreatic cancers.

"We have made substantial progress in the laboratory, especially in pancreatic

and breast cancer," says Karolina Palucka, MD, PhD, director of the Ralph Steinman Center for Cancer Vaccines at BIIR. "We are now requesting FDA approval for two larger clinical trials."

One of the studies will look at a pancreatic cancer vaccine that has been in development at BIIR for more than four years. The other will study

scientific officer of BRI—Dr. Palucka hopes testing these vaccines in a larger patient population will validate their findings to date.

"We are very encouraged based on our clinical trials data in patients with melanoma from the past 10 or 12 years," she says. "We have good data in terms of patients' survival, so we're optimistic."

Dr. Palucka credits the dedication and hard work of the team over many years with the progress they've made so far.

"We don't think these vaccines will solve everything, but they could be a very important component," she explains. "Immunotherapy as cancer therapy is coming of age and is becoming more mainstream in oncology."

Get Involved

To learn about these and other research trials at Baylor open to participants, visit [BaylorHealth.com/AdvancingMedicine](https://www.baylorhealth.com/advancingmedicine).



A PAIN IN THE GUT

What you need to know about gallstones

EVER WONDER HOW GALLSTONES DEVELOP? When your liver produces bile, the bile is transferred via the bile duct to your gallbladder. Your gallbladder stores it until you eat. To help digest fats, the gallbladder empties the bile into your small intestine. Usually, this process flows seamlessly. But sometimes substances in the bile can crystallize into gallstones.

Some gallstones don't show symptoms. But if you notice pain in the right upper quadrant of your abdomen, generally an hour or so after eating, they could be the cause. "It's usually a dull ache after a meal, sometimes mistaken for heartburn," says Rikin Patel, MD, a gastroenterologist on the medical staff at Baylor Medical Center at Irving. "But sometimes the pain can

Say Goodbye to Tummy Troubles

Are you dealing with persistent bellyaches? For a referral to a gastroenterologist on the medical staff at Baylor Irving, visit FindDrRight.com or call **1.800.4BAYLOR**.

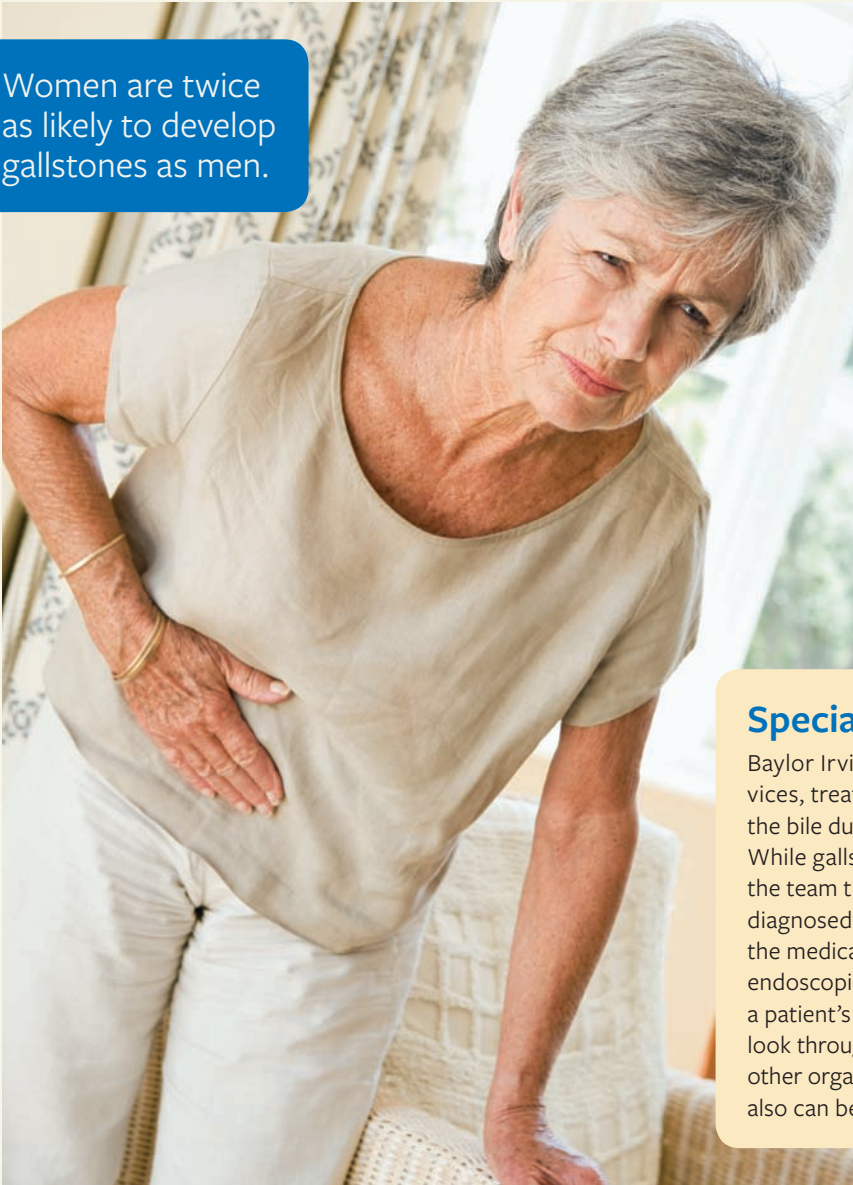
be so severe that you have to move around to get comfortable."

If you have recurring pain you should see your doctor, and if you have fever, chills, nausea or vomiting you should see your doctor right away or seek emergency care. The stones can cause trouble in several spots—the gallbladder, the bile duct, the pancreas or the small intestine. "Some stones can be really serious," warns Dr. Patel.

When you see a doctor, if symptoms point to gallstones you probably will have an ultrasound, an endoscopic ultrasound or a CT scan to confirm their presence. Lab tests also can show if blood levels of liver enzymes and other substances are abnormal because the passage of bile is being blocked.

Treatment usually involves removal of the gallbladder. "There are medications that can help dissolve gallstones but the stones have a high recurrence rate, so we typically only use them temporarily, in very special cases," Dr. Patel says.

Women are twice as likely to develop gallstones as men.



Specialized Services

Baylor Irving now offers specialized biliary services, treating conditions that affect the liver, the bile ducts, the pancreas and the gallbladder. While gallstones are the most common condition the team there sees, polyps and cancer are also diagnosed and treated. The biliary specialists on the medical staff at Baylor Irving use tools like the endoscopic ultrasound, which is threaded through a patient's mouth and esophagus. "With it, we can look through the walls of the stomach to see the other organs," explains Dr. Patel. Endoscopic tools also can be used for certain treatment procedures.



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