

# Health Page



## Please Avoid Plastic: BPA Health Risks

Bisphenol A (BPA) is a chemical that companies have used to make plastics and resins over the past 50 years. While the American Chemistry Council, an association that represents plastics manufacturers, says the chemical is not harmful, the National Toxicology Program at the Department of Health and Human Services disagrees.

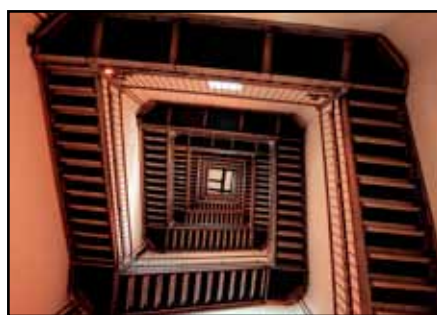
“BPA is often used to make food and beverage containers such as baby bottles,” says **Shylaja Nuguri, MD, PhD**, pediatrician at Saint Francis Medical Center. “When you are using these containers, the BPA could seep into your body and pose a risk for the brain development of fetuses, infants and children.”



Shylaja Nuguri, MD, PhD

So what can you do? Avoid liquid formula. When you can, try to purchase products that are BPA-free and discard any scratched bottles or cups. The National Toxicology Program also suggests that you avoid putting polycarbonate plastics in the microwave or dishwasher.

For more information, visit [www.sfmcc.net](http://www.sfmcc.net) or call Saint Francis at 573-331-5877.



## Feeling Dizzy? Don't Delay – See Your Doctor

Dizziness and lightheadedness rarely signal something serious. However, you should not ignore these symptoms – particularly if they recur – as they could signal the onset of a stroke. “When you are dizzy, it is possible that you have an inner ear problem,” says **Jay Avasarala, MD, PhD**, neurologist at Saint Francis Medical Center, “but dizziness is also one of the warning signs of stroke.”

You should be especially concerned if you are suddenly experiencing one or more of the other stroke symptoms: slurred speech, double vision, unsteady walking, difficulty swallowing or weakness on one side of the face or body. “Whether it has occurred suddenly or has been recurring on several occasions, dizziness is definitely a good reason to see your doctor,” says Avasarala. “In fact, it is one of the most common reasons adults see their doctor. A neurologist can order a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and other tests to determine if these symptoms are related to a stroke.”



Jay Avasarala, MD, PhD

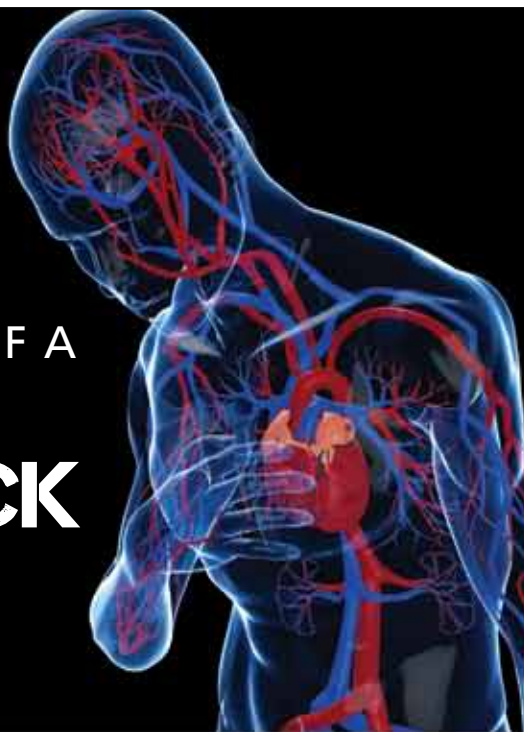
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## CHEST PAINS CAN SIGNAL THE START OF A HEART ATTACK



Heart disease is the single greatest cause of death to men and women in the United States. You have probably heard that chest pain is the most common symptom of a heart attack, but how do you know when chest pain signals something serious?

“Chest pain is often cause for concern,” says **Clifford R. Talbert Jr., MD, FACC**, cardiologist at Saint Francis Medical Center. “However, chest pain that is specifically related to a heart attack does not occur sharply. It slowly builds over several seconds and does not continuously last more than 5 to 10 minutes. The source of the pain can span over a broad area. Additionally, pain that becomes worse with movement is probably due to the muscles or bones in the chest, not the heart.”



Clifford R. Talbert Jr., MD, FACC

The main symptoms of a heart attack are:

- Chest tightness or heaviness (“People describe the pain as feeling like a band is being tightened around their chest,” says Talbert.)
- Sweating, nausea and anxiety
- Shortness of breath
- Pain in the left arm, neck or jaw

“It is important to note that some people suffering from a heart attack will only have one of the above symptoms,” says Talbert. “Some say they have not experienced any pain at all. That is why it is important to seek medical help if you have any symptoms that fit these descriptions.”

It may be easier for you to determine whether you are having a heart attack by looking at your risk factors. Heart disease risk factors include:

**Age:** Men who are older than 45 and women who are older than 55 are more likely to have a heart attack.

**Smoking:** Smoking increases the risk of blood clots blocking the flow of oxygen to your heart, which can cause a heart attack.

**High blood pressure and high cholesterol:** Excessive cholesterol deposits can narrow the arteries that supply blood to the heart. High blood pressure can damage your arteries, enabling deposits to build up in your arteries that slow blood flow.

**Family history of heart disease:** Heart disease, high blood pressure and high cholesterol can all run in families.

**Obesity:** Having a body mass index of 30 or higher increases the risk of heart disease.

**Diabetes:** People with diabetes are twice as likely as those without diabetes to have heart disease.

For more information, visit [www.sfmcc.net](http://www.sfmcc.net) or call Saint Francis at 573-331-5877.



## Teach Children to Stop the Spread of Germs

The best way to teach children about the spread of germs during this cold and flu season is to remind them to wash their hands often with soap and water. “Children pick up germs from anything they touch, and during the winter, schools are breeding grounds for all kinds of germs,” says **Heather K. Dodson, MD, FAAP**, pediatrician at Saint Francis Medical Center.

“Washing your hands is the best way to protect yourself. A good rule of thumb is to sing ‘Happy Birthday’ twice while washing your hands so you know you have washed them long enough.”



Heather K. Dodson, MD, FAAP

Additionally, kids can stop the spread of germs by covering coughs and sneezes. “The best way to do this is to cough into the crook of your arm,” says Dodson. “If a child uses a tissue after a cough or sneeze, the child should immediately wash his or her hands.”

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## Save Your Skin: No Such Thing as a Safe Tanning Bed

Think twice before you head to the tanning beds this winter. “A tan is no different from sunburn in terms of its effect on our skin,” says **Matthew B. Schumer, MD**, family medicine physician at Saint Francis Medical Center. “There is no such thing as a safe tan from a tanning bed. Both ultraviolet-A (UVA) and ultraviolet-B (UVB) beds cause cancer.”

Any kind of tan can be dangerous, but people tend to overuse tanning beds because they are so easily accessible. “Teenagers are at special risk because of their accelerated growth rate,” says Schumer. “Teens who regularly use tanning beds are putting themselves at a greater lifetime risk of developing cancer.”



Matthew B. Schumer, MD

Tanning beds also put users at greater risk of developing cataracts, corneal burns and macular degeneration. “The goggles do not completely protect your eyes,” says Schumer.

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