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AMERICAN HEALTH

FITNESS OF BODY AND MIND

Special Tenth Anniversary Issue

The

10 BEST

Money-Saving Tips • Folk Remedies • Ways to Diagnose Your Child's Illness • Medical Tests • Questions to Ask About Health Insurance • 800 Numbers • Doctor Movies • Do-It-Yourself Tests • Ways to Save Your Smile • Places to Live • Emergency Procedures • American Health Recipes • Medical Breakthroughs • Fitness Videos • Ways to Burn 100 Calories • Photographs • Ethical Dilemmas • Diet Products to Avoid • Wild and Wacky Sports • Ways to Improve Your Memory • Reference Books • Questions to Ask Before Cosmetic Surgery • Silly Book Titles • Diagnoses of Mystery Diseases • Mood Boosters • Ways to Detox Your Home • Doctor Jokes • Diseases to Conquer Worldwide • Things to Keep in Your Medicine Chest • and Much More!



Playing Doctor

The **10**
BEST



BLOOD PRESSURE MONITOR

AS HEALTH CARE COSTS continue to soar, more Americans are diagnosing themselves with over-the-counter medical kits. Home medical tests are already a \$1.2 billion a year industry; by 1995 they could bring in as much as \$1.7 billion.

Because home tests are so accessible (available in most pharmacies), they allow you to gauge a medical condition promptly and determine whether you need additional medical attention. Still, helpful as they are, their accuracy varies considerably, and their instructions—which should be followed to the letter—don't always explain how to interpret the results. Also, the procedures are subject to human error. Then there's the risk that some people might rely on a home test when they really need to see a doctor, or that they may make crucial decisions based on a home test's results. Positive or negative, it's best to share the results with your physician.

"Home tests open up more flexibility in terms of working

jointly with your doctor," says Dr. Tom Ferguson, president of the Center for Self-Care Studies in Austin, Tex., and coauthor of *The People's Book of Medical Tests*. "They allow people to take more responsibility and be on the health care team instead of being passive players."

Here's a guide to the 10 most useful tests:

1 LEAD TEST KITS

Lead poisoning still afflicts thousands of Americans, even though federal law has stiffened restrictions on levels allowed in paint, cookware and other products. Consumers can use quick, reliable home tests to swab their dishes and cookware for lead. The swabs, which change color if lead is present, won't indicate how much lead the product contains, but any dishes or cookware that test positive should not be used for food or drink. Leadcheck Swabs are available from HybriVet Systems, P.O. Box 1210, Framingham, MA 01701 (800-262-



URINARY TRACT INFECTION TEST

LEAD); the Frandon Lead Alert Kit is from Frandon Enterprises, 511 North 48th St., Seattle, WA 98103 (800-359-9000).

2 BLOOD PRESSURE MONITORS

Home monitors, available in pharmacies, medical supply outlets and department stores, allow patients with hypertension to test their blood pressure as often as they like. Because some people suffer from "white-coat hypertension"—anxiety sends their blood pressure soaring during a visit to the doctor—a home monitor can provide more realistic readings. But using the equipment can be tricky, so it's smart to check your technique with a doctor or pharmacist and compare the findings of your meter periodically with your doctor's for accuracy.



PEAK FLOW METER

3 PEAK FLOW METERS

A boon to the 11 million Americans with asthma, these devices measure how forcefully a person can exhale. A decrease in airflow can warn of an impending asthma attack, which medicine can often stave off. A peak flow meter also helps a doctor monitor an asthmatic patient's condition over time and assess drug effectiveness. These devices are inexpensive and simple to use, and they require little maintenance.



PREGNANCY TEST KIT

4 URINARY TRACT INFECTION TESTS

Useful for people with recurrent urinary tract infections (women are more susceptible than men), these kits use a dipstick to detect nitrites and white blood cells in the urine, both of which indicate an infection. While the tests won't tell you what kinds of bacteria are present nor where the infection is located, they will detect the most common infectious organisms.



5 PREGNANCY TEST KITS

Though not 100% accurate, home pregnancy tests can be very reliable when used correctly. The test is designed to detect the HCG (human chorionic gonadotropin) hormone, which indicates pregnancy, in the first urine of the morning; the results are available in an hour or two.

Since factors such as excess protein in the blood and certain drugs can create a

7 OVULATION PREDICTORS

These innovations are a blessing to women trying to get pregnant, since sexual intercourse during ovulation increases the chance of conception. When they are used correctly, ovulation predictors have an 87% accuracy rate, rising to 99% if the test is done more than once a day during the week before ovulation. The test looks for the luteinizing hormone, which increases dramatically in a woman's urine just before ovulation; after a positive test result, ovulation usually occurs within 36 hours. (The test should not be used for contraception.)

The new tympanic thermometer is particularly recommended for children because it can take a temperature in just one second. A digital thermometer is the easiest to read.

10 FECAL OCCULT BLOOD TESTS

These home tests screen your stools for occult, or hidden, blood, which can indicate colorectal (colon or rectal) cancer long before symptoms are present. The American Cancer Society recommends that people aged 50 and older test for these two cancers on an annual basis. It's important, however, to understand that the kit detects just the presence of blood, not cancer itself. Certain foods, aspirin, other drugs and hemorrhoids can also trigger positive results, so the specified dietary restrictions should be followed carefully before taking the test, and it should be repeated on three consecutive bowel movements. A positive test warrants a medical consultation.



FECAL OCCULT BLOOD TEST



BLOOD GLUCOSE MONITOR

false positive reading, a doctor should confirm any positive result. A negative reading calls for a repeat check within a week. If the second test comes up negative, the woman is almost certainly not pregnant.

6 BLOOD GLUCOSE MONITORS

With accuracy rates as high as 95%, these kits have revolutionized the management of diabetes by giving the nation's 14 million diabetics a quick, easy way to measure the glucose in their blood. It's generally accepted that close monitoring of glucose levels offers the best protection against diabetes' worst effects—blindness, nerve damage and heart and kidney disease. The readings—obtained by pricking a finger and placing a drop of blood on a reagent pad that changes color to reflect the level of glucose in the sample—can be used to adjust medication or diet accordingly.

8 SULFITE TESTS

Thousands of Americans are sensitive to sulfites, additives often used in wine, beer and food to prevent spoilage. Testing certain foods and drinks before consuming them can prevent the headaches, allergies, nausea and asthma attacks that sulfite-sensitive people experience. The CHEMetrics test (available from CHEMetrics at 800-356-3072) indicates the presence and quantity of sulfites in food and wine. If there's any doubt whatever, it's best to avoid the food.

SULFITE TEST



9 THERMOMETERS

Thermometers have come a long way since we held one under our tongue and waited at least two minutes. Now consumers can choose the old standby mercury-and-glass models or from a wide range of digital, tympanic (ear) and plastic-strip thermometers; there's even a "talking" one on the market.

bonus MAIL-AWAY HOME POLLUTANT TESTS

With these you can test your home for radon and pollutants in the drinking water. To test for radon, attach a specially made charcoal canister (available from industrial supply houses) to a wall in the basement (radon comes up from the ground) for a day to a month, depending on the test. Then call the American Industrial Hygiene Association at 216-873-2442 for names of labs in your area that can test for radon. Pollutants in tap water—lead, radon, minerals, bacteria and pesticides—can be traced by sending a water sample to a lab. Call one of the following for a water test kit: National Testing Laboratories, 800-458-3330; WaterTest, 800-426-8378; or Suburban Water Testing Laboratories, 800-433-6595.

—Stacey Colino

THERMOMETER

