The Women’s Specialty Health Program
For care beyond the routine...

It’s common knowledge: women have specific medical problems that don’t affect men. But when it comes to diseases shared by both sexes, women often experience different symptoms or respond differently to treatment. A disturbing fact is that a large number of women die from diseases they believe only affect men. The good news is that many lives can be saved if women catch the warning signs early and seek treatment promptly.

Cleveland Clinic Florida recognizes gender-related differences and offers a team of specialists to serve the unique medical needs of women requiring advanced care.

Listen to your Heart

Did you know that heart disease is the number one killer of women? Many women have a mammogram faithfully every year, but never consider being screened for heart disease, even when they have the warning signs. The danger is very real; nine times the number of women die from heart disease than from breast cancer. Cleveland Clinic Florida cardiac surgeon Mercedes K.C. Dullum, M.D. is passionate about women’s heart health. She emphasizes that women prevent heart disease through early diagnosis and treatment.

“When it comes to heart disease, women are very different from men. Many women don’t know they have coronary artery disease until they have a heart attack. A first heart attack often kills them. Unfortunately, the symptoms can be vague and nonspecific (see page 2). Women should learn these symptoms and seek help immediately if they experience them,” says Dr. Dullum.

continued on page 2
Care for Colorectal Problems

One of the most embarrassing medical problems is fecal incontinence. In women, particularly those who have had children, this may be the result of pelvic floor dysfunction, which can also cause rectal prolapse or constipation. Cleveland Clinic Florida colorectal surgeon Dana Sands, M.D. works hand-in-hand with gynecologist G. Willy Davila, M.D., or urologist Gamal Ghoniem, M.D., to treat these patients.

“Childbirth stretches muscles and damages nerves. As a result, a woman may develop fecal incontinence,” Dr. Sands explains. “We have a highly specialized, advanced evaluation process in our Colorectal Physiology Center to diagnose the source of the difficulty, and a variety of FDA-approved treatments as well as several clinical trials for new treatment options.”

Dr. Sands also treats women with colorectal cancer—a disease she knows can be prevented. “Too many women think colorectal cancer is a man’s disease, but it affects men and women equally. I strongly encourage women to have a screening colonoscopy at age 50 or earlier, if there is a family history of colon cancer. If a precancerous polyp is found, it can be removed to prevent cancer from developing. The test is so easy and painless that there is no excuse to delay having it,” she emphasizes.

At the other end of the spectrum from cancer are benign colorectal problems like hemorrhoids. Some women are simply too embarrassed to seek treatment. “Interestingly, some women who think they have hemorrhoids actually have other problems that require treatment,” says Dr. Sands, noting that some women may feel more comfortable discussing an embarrassing problem with a female physician.

Halting Urinary Incontinence

As a urogynecologist, Dr. Davila specializes in urinary incontinence and uterine and pelvic or genital prolapse.
“There are outpatient operations for urinary incontinence and new, highly effective medications,” he says. “Women should not have to suffer the embarrassment and inconvenience of this medical problem any longer.”

Dr. Gamal Ghoniem also specializes in advanced urinary incontinence care using sophisticated procedures—many of them outpatient—for treating stress urinary incontinence, urge incontinence and pelvic prolapse.

Both Drs. Davila and Ghoniem offer a minimally invasive technique for stress urinary incontinence that involves cradling the urethra in a sling. “Results are very good—equal to the more complicated sling approach, but less invasive. It is simple, safe and easier on the patient,” says Dr. Ghoniem.

For patients with urge incontinence, neuromodulation with a bladder pacemaker can often regulate bladder function in patients who have not responded to medications.

For pelvic prolapse, vaginal reconstruction using mesh grafts to reinforce weak tissue can provide a permanent fix. Robotic assistance enables minimally invasive procedures.

Maria Lina Diaz, M.D. specializes in caring for patients with abnormal pap smears, chronic vaginal infections and polycystic ovarian syndrome, among other problems. She also works with patients who face challenging contraceptive choices, offering them a variety of medical and surgical treatment options.

In cases when surgery is required, gynecologists Viviane Connor, M.D., and Stephen Zimberg, M.D., are frequently able to treat the problem with minimally invasive procedures. Such techniques are often appropriate for the management of abnormal bleeding. Drs. Connor and Zimberg perform advanced ultrasound evaluation of the pelvis and uterus, operative hysteroscopy to remove the source of the bleeding, and hysteroscopic non-incisional procedures for tubal ligations. They also perform laparoscopic hysterectomy when the uterus must be removed due to fibroids or abnormal bleeding.

“These state-of-the-art procedures enable women to return to normal activities much faster and have greater cosmetic

---

### Symptoms of Heart Attack in Women

- Feeling of pressure or tightness in the chest; “chest pain” is unusual
- Shortness of breath
- Upper back, neck or jaw pain
- Nausea or vomiting
- Indigestion
- Weakness
- Fatigue
- Dizziness
- Lightheadedness

---

### Beyond the Ordinary

When a routine gynecologic examination produces abnormal test results, subspecialty gynecologic expertise is needed. Cleveland Clinic Florida gynecologists—all subspecialists with an impressive depth of expertise and experience—provide the most advanced care in the region.
appeal than traditional operations,” says Dr. Davila, who is chairman of the Department of Gynecology.

Just ask Jodi Ziskin, patient of Dr. Connor. An active 39-year-old, Jodi enjoyed Pilates yoga three to four times per week, bike riding and other activities until she started experiencing pain and abnormal bleeding. “It was a life-altering experience for me. The abnormal bleeding slowed me down drastically and prohibited most of my daily activities,” says Jodi.

After researching her options, she came to see Dr. Connor at Cleveland Clinic Florida and was diagnosed with uterine fibroids. Dr. Connor proposed a few treatment alternatives for Jodi, who opted for a “belly-button hysterectomy.” This minimally invasive procedure involves inserting a scope with a tiny fiberoptic camera through the patient’s naval. “It permits us to remove the uterus with tiny instruments inserted through small incisions. When performed as an outpatient procedure, patients go home the same day and recover in 7 to 10 days,” Dr. Connor explains.

“I’m so pleased with the results of my procedure,” says Jodi. “It gave me back my life.”

**SCREENING FOR DIGESTIVE DISEASES**

Heartburn is painful, but chronic reflux can cause even more serious problems. In some patients, ongoing exposure to toxic stomach acids causes cells in the esophagus to mutate. The condition is called Barrett’s esophagus, and it is a precursor to esophageal cancer.

“The incidence of esophageal cancer is increasing sharply, and has reached nearly epidemic proportions in white, middle-aged men. Barrett’s esophagus is a precancerous condition, and 99 percent of Barrett’s starts with reflux. For this reason, anyone with chronic reflux should have a screening upper endoscopy,” says Raymond Sandler, M.D., chairman of the Department of Gastroenterology at Cleveland Clinic Florida.

Fortunately, upper endoscopies are quick and painless. No preparation is needed for the 10-minute test, which is performed under sedation. If premalignant cells are found, the condition can be treated with a proton pump inhibitor medication and watched closely to ensure that cancer does not develop.

**Chronic Reflux: The Silent Attacker**

How do you know if you have chronic reflux? According to Dr. Sandler, you may experience heartburn often enough to require a medication that slows the production of stomach acid. If you stop taking the

*continued on page 5*
Medical Minutes

TREATMENT OF SWALLOWING DISORDERS

Zenker’s diverticulum, an outpouching of the esophagus that traps food, is a common swallowing problem associated with aging. Cleveland Clinic Florida otolaryngologist Gilberto Alemar, M.D., repairs the pouch with a minimally invasive procedure that produces the same results as standard surgery but with less discomfort and fewer complications. The procedure takes about 30 minutes and is performed through the mouth, avoiding an incision in the neck. No lengthy hospitalization is required. Patients heal rapidly, can drink liquids in a few hours and eat a regular diet in a few days.

While muscle weakness associated with aging can produce a variety of swallowing disorders, so can head injuries, stroke, and many neurologic, pulmonary and digestive diseases. Whenever necessary, Dr. Alemar works with other members of the Cleveland Clinic Florida medical team to identify the underlying cause and determine the most appropriate treatment. Physical therapy and speech pathology are two of the services that can help patients recover quickly.

Surgical treatment is not always necessary. Many nonsurgical treatments are now available. For example, the combination of electrical stimulation and swallowing therapy can be highly effective in renewing weakened swallowing muscles.

“The ability to swallow greatly impacts quality of life. We offer a multitude of sophisticated techniques to evaluate swallowing problems and to identify the right strategy for treatment,” says Dr. Alemar.

For an appointment with Dr. Alemar, please call 1-800-691-6555.

GETTING A GOOD NIGHT’S SLEEP

Cleveland Clinic’s Sleep Disorders Center recently received accreditation by the American Academy of Sleep Medicine. By successfully completing accreditation, the national standards of excellence have been met for clinical and technological care of patients with sleep disorders. “The staff at our Sleep Disorders Center demonstrates a commitment to the advancement of sleep medicine and awareness of sleep as an important element of health, public safety and quality of life,” according to sleep center medical director Laurence Smolley, M.D. “We are proud to provide diagnosis and care for the full array of sleep disorders in adults.”

If you feel you may suffer from a sleep disorder, visit our website for a sleep disorder screening test or call 1-800-691-6555 for a consultation.

Screening for Digestive Diseases

from page 4

medication and your heartburn returns in a day or two, you have chronic reflux and should consider an upper endoscopy. Also, reflux can be silent. For example, obesity is a condition that predisposes to chronic reflux, but the patient may not have symptoms.

While many people have never heard of screening for Barrett’s esophagus, most people are aware of the need for a screening colonoscopy. Colon cancer is the second most common cause of cancer deaths. However, the disease can be prevented. That’s because most cases start with polyps, which can be identified and removed during a colonoscopy. For this reason, the American Cancer Society recommends a screening colonoscopy at age 50 or earlier if you have a personal or family history of colon cancer, breast cancer or ulcerative colitis.

Fear of the procedure is the greatest deterrent to following these recommendations. However, today’s colonoscopies are simple. Thanks to anesthesia or sedation, patients are unaware the procedure is being done, and they experience no soreness or discomfort afterward.

To schedule a screening test for any digestive disease, please call 1-800-691-6555
Get a Second Opinion

Patients from across the country and around the world come to Cleveland Clinic Florida for a second opinion. Why? Because the experience and expertise found at major research and education centers like Cleveland Clinic Florida can open up a broad array of exciting new treatment possibilities. A second opinion from a health expert can also confirm that your first opinion is your best choice, allowing you to proceed with confidence.

In no disease is a second opinion more critical than in cancer, where your treatment choice can affect length and quality of your life. Urologic oncologist C. Lee Jackson, M.D., and colorectal surgeon Juan J. Nogueras, M.D. are among Cleveland Clinic Florida’s specialists who gladly provide second opinions for patients exploring the depth of treatment possibilities. Both Drs. Jackson and Nogueras are among the Cleveland Clinic Florida physicians listed in Castle Connolly’s America’s Top Doctors.

“Patients seeking a second opinion are hoping to find the least burdensome treatment and reduce the risk of complications. They often seek assurance that the treatment approach already recommended to them is the best choice, and I am able to confirm that it is most of the time,” says Dr. Jackson.

Cancer treatment is not always straightforward. A variety of treatments are available for many forms of cancer, including prostate cancer. “Sometimes there is an absence of clear data to provide a concrete line where one treatment option should stop and another one should begin. We can help patients come to terms with what is most likely to benefit their individual situation,” says Dr. Jackson.

“We gladly provide our second opinion in the form of a letter, which the patient can take back and discuss with his or her doctor,” adds Dr. Nogueras.

Get a Third Opinion, Fourth and More—Thanks To Our Team Approach

Dr. Nogueras and his colleagues in the Department of Colorectal Surgery are world-renowned for their expertise in complex reconstructive techniques for cancers of the digestive system. This reputation attracts patients as well as referring physicians seeking state-of-the-art care. However, reputation is not solely responsible for Cleveland Clinic Florida’s success.

In addition to the expertise of individual doctors, Cleveland Clinic Florida offers something most medical centers cannot: a multidisciplinary team of specialists who work together.

“Whenever necessary, we sit down and discuss the specifics of an individual case with each other. For example, I can seek the opinion of colleagues as to whether radiation or chemotherapy is advised prior to surgery for rectal cancer. When immediate reconstruction is needed, our urologists and plastic surgeons are on hand to do the job and do it well. This team approach is absolutely necessary in treating complex pelvic cancers,” Dr. Nogueras explains.

“You never know if a case is going to be complex or not, so we treat every case like it is,” he adds. “And with our team approach, you’re getting the best opinions of several medical minds.”