



Saving money by preventing illness

As family budgets continue to get squeezed by ever higher gas and food prices, one of the areas that patients can save money is by avoiding unnecessary health care costs. Now I'm certainly not advocating skipping necessary doctor's appointments or stopping important medications, but many of the illnesses that I see in my everyday practice can be effectively prevented or treated with simple home remedies. In this article, I'll list a few of the most common illnesses and how to prevent and treat these symptoms, saving most people anywhere from \$25 or more per visit.

Allergies and sinus problems: One of the most effective ways to prevent nasal congestion from sinus problems and allergies is to do a daily or twice daily nasal irrigation. There are many over-the-counter products out there that cost literally pennies a day to use, compared with the higher costs of using a prescription nasal spray or anti-histamine. While

this treatment is usually very safe, there are some precautions with doing nasal irrigation, so please contact your doctor first before starting this particular therapy.

Swimmer's ear: Swimmer's ear is probably the most common and preventable pediatric illness that I see in the summertime. It is caused by excess moisture and bacteria which remains in the ear canal after swimming. There are many effective over-the-counter ear drops (make sure you get the swimmer's ear drops as there are ear drops for other conditions) that cost just a few dollars a bottle. It's likely that the bottle will last you the whole summer. If you can prevent even one case of swimmer's ear, then you'll have made up the cost of the medication many times over. Again, there are some precautions with these ear drops, so make sure you talk with your doctor or pharmacist before starting this therapy.

Viral Infections: While we tend to think of viral infections occurring mostly in the winter, they actually occur with pretty high frequency in the summer as well. Many of the patients that I see could take care of their symptoms fairly effectively by under-

standing a few basic treatment principles: For fever and pain, use a fever and pain reducer like Tylenol or Motrin; For stuffy nose, use a decongestant like Sudafed; For runny nose, use an antihistamine like Benadryl or Claritin; For coughing, use a cough medication like plain Mucinex or plain Robitussin.

Again, because not all people can take all medicines, make sure that you first clear things with your pharmacist or doctor before starting on a treatment plan and contact your doctor if you have any concerns or worsening symptoms.

As stated earlier, one of the best ways to save on health care costs is to prevent illness rather than treat it after it sets in. Hopefully, the ideas above will help you save a few dollars here and there while staying healthy.

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