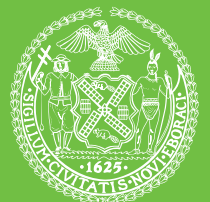




The New York City Health Literacy Campaign:
From Knowledge to Action.
Sample Lessons

**PREVENTION & DETECTION
ABE LEVELS 3 & 4**

TEACHER'S EDITION



Developed by the Mayor's Office of Adult Education

Version 2008-2009



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DEAR TEACHER,

Okay, bad news first: Many New Yorkers have no idea that they may have diabetes, high blood pressure, asthma, high cholesterol, HIV, depression or cancer. These diseases are commonly dubbed “life-threatening” because they can lead to heart attacks, strokes and early death if they continue to go undetected and untreated.

Now the good news: Thanks to teachers like you who are passionate about teaching health literacy, our students can learn about the importance of early detection and practice the skills they will need to access free or very low-cost health screenings. This knowledge of health screenings and “navigational” skills to access screenings provides our students with a sense of ownership and agency about taking care of their health!

Throughout the month of October, adult education classes across the city will be participating in the City’s annual *Take Care New York* prevention and screening campaign. The Office of the Mayor has arranged special partnerships with the public hospitals in order to welcome your students during the month of October. The following lesson is designed to prepare your class to take a field trip to a participating public hospital for free or low-cost health screenings. With some modification, this lesson can be used at other times, but is designed to be used primarily during the

October *Take Care New York* campaign. It is important that you contact your HHC “field-trip coordinator” as soon as possible in order to discuss a good time for your class to attend the health screening before implementation of this lesson.

The **three key messages** that your students need to know at the end of the lesson are:

1. Screening is affordable and confidential. Screenings will be free or low-cost and your immigration status will be kept confidential.

2. Screening is essential to managing your health.

3. There are free or low-cost health screenings at all public hospitals during the month of October and from your doctor during the rest of the year as well.

Along the way, you will help your students:

1. Read text on familiar subjects.
2. Make minimal references.
3. Write paragraphs with main idea and supporting details.

DEAR TEACHER,
continued

This lesson is broken up into 2-hour sessions that will require 3 consecutive days of class.

Day 1 of the lesson will introduce the concepts of prevention, early detection and health screenings. Activities on the first day are also designed to build your students functional literacy skills while at the same time demystifying the health screening experience so that your students will feel prepared for their field trip.

Day 2 of the lesson will consist of your field trip to the participating public hospital or clinic of your choice. Please take advantage of this opportunity to get screened as well! Also, if you have a digital camera, the Mayor's Office would appreciate it if you would be willing to share some pictures of your experience with us.

Day 3 offers a time for your students to reflect on their field trip. Activities include a computer literacy activity or an alternative writing activity. If your students have some computer literacy skills, help them share their new knowledge and perspectives using technology. In order to prepare for this activity you will need to reserve a time slot in the computer lab. Also, your students need to have some experience with using Power\Point. If your students are not computer literate, take this time to help them develop their writing skills in a poster-making activity.

With your guidance, your students will further their health literacy skills, access important public services and be able to spread their knowledge of prevention and early detection to their families and communities!

Yours,



Shannon Allen
Mayor's Office of Adult Education



“FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS” (FAQS)

What is prevention?

Activities people undertake to avoid disease development and/or ways that people can catch a disease at a very early stage.

What is high blood pressure and why is it bad?

Blood pressure is a measure of how hard the blood pushes against the walls of your arteries and veins as it moves through your body. It's normal for blood pressure to go up and down throughout the day, but if it stays up, you have high blood pressure. Another name for high blood pressure is hypertension. There are usually no symptoms; the only way to know if you have high blood pressure is to get checked. Doctors can't point to its exact cause, but several things are known to raise blood pressure. These include: being very overweight; drinking too much alcohol; having a family history of high blood pressure; eating too much salt; and just getting older. High blood pressure puts people at higher risk for heart disease, the leading cause of death among New Yorkers. This is especially true for people who have diabetes.

Can high blood pressure be cured?

No, but it can be treated and managed through diet, exercise and medication.

What is cholesterol and why is high cholesterol level unhealthy?

Cholesterol is a fatty substance found in all of your body's cells and bloodstream. There are two kinds: "good" cholesterol (called **HDL** – keep it **H**igh) keeps your blood flowing smoothly through your blood vessels and arteries; "bad" cholesterol (called **LDL** – keep it **L**ow) tends to collect in your blood stream, clogging up your arteries and increasing your chance of heart attack or stroke. About 1 in 4 New Yorkers have high cholesterol but do not know it. There are no symptoms; the only way to know if you have it is to get checked by your doctor.

Can high cholesterol be prevented and treated?

Yes! Exercise and a healthy diet can help control cholesterol. There are safe and easy medications as well.

What is depression and how is it different from just being sad?

Everyone has feelings of sadness, inadequacy or lack of satisfaction with their lives. People have been trained across cultures to hide these feelings out of shame. However, these feelings are a normal part of life and talking about them, meditating, or remembering one's own goodness usually helps them go away. Depression is a mental illness that occurs when people cannot "pull themselves together" and "get over it". Depression often takes on a life of its own

“FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS” (FAQs): *continued*

and without treatment it can last for months or years. It interferes with people’s ability to function, especially to manage their health. Many people “treat” depression by drinking alcohol. There are much more effective treatments, like therapy and medication, and there is no shame in getting screened.

I thought health screenings and prevention were all about cancer?

Yes, cancer is a disease for which you can be screened. It can be prevented and/or treated early. Cancer screenings include mammograms for breast cancer, pap-smear for cervical cancer, colonoscopy for colon cancer, and more. But doctors and hospitals offer many other kinds of screenings as well.

What is HIV?

Human Immunodeficiency Virus is the virus that causes AIDS. People should take an HIV test to learn their HIV status (positive or negative). Many people live normal, happy lives with HIV if they get the medicine they need. Medicine can prevent HIV from becoming “full-blown AIDS.” The sooner people know they have HIV the better so that they can take care of themselves and not infect anyone else.

What is AIDS?

AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) is a disease that destroys the body’s immune system. It is a global epidemic that has killed millions of people. While there is no cure or vaccine for AIDS, medicine and regular doctor’s care allow for people to live normal lives for many years with the disease.

What is a co-payment?

A co-payment is a patient’s share of a doctor’s fee or a health-care bill. The patient’s health insurance pays the rest of the amount.

I went to the screening and found out that I have a health problem. Now what?

See your regular doctor. If you don’t have a regular doctor, the clinic where you got screened would be happy to have you as a patient. They can help you.

Teachers are not expected to be medical experts or to give clinical advice. On the contrary, this lesson is designed to help you provide your students with the health literacy and functional literacy skills necessary to manage their own health. Remember, each student’s health status is completely confidential and they should seek the professional opinions of healthcare providers. If your student has problems getting follow-up care, each participating clinic has a contact person who can help. Ask your program director.

MATERIALS

- Take Care New York Health Screening Event Schedule
- Computers with access to PowerPoint and Internet OR poster-making materials
- Digital camera (Optional)

KEY VOCABULARY

(List vocabulary words on the board before each activity)

INTRODUCTION	ACTIVITY 1	ACTIVITY 2	ACTIVITY 3
Disease, Illness, Sickness Prevent Prevention Disease, Illness, Detect Early Detection Health Screening	Nervous	High blood pressure Symptom Healthcare provider Blood Pressure Cuff Confidential Failure	Other Common Diseases: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Asthma▪ Cholesterol▪ HIV▪ Depression▪ Cancer Take Care New York (TCNY) Health and Hospitals Corporation (HHC)

NATIONAL REPORTING SYSTEM (NRS) DESCRIPTORS: ABE LEVELS 3 AND 4

These are skills that your students should master before moving to the next level:

- Read text on familiar subjects
- Determine new vocabulary by context
- Make minimal inferences
- Use context to determine meaning
- Interpret actions required in written directions
- Write paragraphs with a main idea and supporting details
- Add, subtract, multiply, divide
- Perform basic operations on fractions
- Read simple charts, graphs and labels

Look for these level-specific Descriptors in the following Lesson Outline.

DAY 1

Topic: Attending Health Screenings

Aim: Students will understand the concepts of prevention and detection and they will be prepared to attend a health screening.

Introduction

ACTIVITY 1 Attending a Health Screening: Mila's Story	Reading and discussion. <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Read simple material on familiar subjects▪ Determine new vocabulary by context▪ Make minimal inferences▪ Use context to determine meaning
ACTIVITY 2 Mila's Questions about High Blood Pressure and Diabetes Screenings	Student Role Play. <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Read text on familiar subjects▪ Determine new vocabulary by context▪ Make minimal inferences▪ Use context to determine meaning▪ Interpret actions required in written directions
ACTIVITY 3 "Get Screened. Stay Healthy."	Reading and discussion. <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Read text on familiar subjects▪ Determine new vocabulary by context
ACTIVITY 4 Mila Convinces Ricardo to Attend a Health Screening	Class-wide role play and short writing activity. <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Interpret actions required in written directions

DAY 2

Topic: Take Care New York Health Screenings.

Aim: Students will attend a TCNY screening and have a rewarding experience.

ACTIVITY 5
Health Screening

DAY 3

Topic: What did we learn from participating in the health screening?

Aim: Students will be able to communicate their knowledge and their impressions of the health screening field trip to an audience of peers.

ACTIVITY 6
Reflection

Journaling Activity

- Interpret actions required in written directions
- Write paragraphs with a main idea and supporting details

ACTIVITY 7
Share Your Knowledge

Computer Literacy: PowerPoint Presentations

- Interpret actions required in written directions
- Write paragraphs with a main idea and supporting details

ACTIVITY 7
Share Your Knowledge
(Alternative)

Poster-Making and Presentations

- Interpret actions required in written directions
- Write paragraphs with a main idea and supporting details

DAY 1

INTRODUCTION: TEACHER TALKING POINTS

Teacher Directions: Use these “Talking Points” to lead a discussion about the concepts of prevention, early detection and health screenings. Ask students to take notes on the following page during your discussion.

Note: This is only intended as a warm-up exercise. You are not responsible for correcting your students’ ideas about various means of prevention or detection.

1. What skills will you need to pass the GED?

(Students will be taking the Reading, Social Studies, Science, Writing and Math Tests. Two of the major skills we will work on today are reading comprehension and writing.)

2. This lesson is about health. Is it important to be healthy? Why?

3. What skills do you need to live a healthy life?

4. What common health problems do you know about?

5. One thing we are going to be talking about today is disease prevention.

a. What does the word *prevent* mean? (to keep from happening)

b. What do we *prevent* in our daily lives?

(We prevent gun violence by taking guns off the street; we prevent having cockroaches in our homes by taking out the trash)

c. What do we do to prevent the common cold?

(We eat ginger; we take Vitamin C)

6. What does disease *prevention* mean?

(Actions taken to avoid getting sick or to stop a disease from getting worse)

7. How can we *prevent* disease?

(You can eat healthy foods and be physically active)

8. Another topic we will talk about today is *early detection* of disease.

d. What does the word *detect* mean?

(To find or discover something that was hidden or unknown)

e. When do we hear this word in our daily lives?

(Smoke *detector*; *detective*; metal *detector*; to *detect* a lie)

9. What does early *detection* of an illness mean?

(If you can't prevent an illness, then the best thing to do is to become aware of it early and begin treatment as early as possible.)

10. The best way to *detect* a disease early is to attend a health screening.

Does anyone know what a health screening is?

(Health screenings are tests done by a healthcare provider to see if you have or may develop certain diseases.)

11. Has anyone ever attended a health screening before? Describe your experience.

12. What types of tests are offered at health screenings?

(Screenings for vision, hearing, blood pressure, cholesterol, blood glucose, depression, asthma, cancer, HIV, diabetes.)

INTRODUCTION: PREVENTION, EARLY DETECTION AND HEALTH SCREENINGS

Teacher Directions: Have students take notes during your Introduction discussion.

Directions: Take notes during this discussion.

1. What are some common health problems?

- What words mean the same thing as “health problems”?

2. Disease Prevention

- Define the word *prevent*:

- Use *prevent* in a complete sentence:

- What is disease *prevention*?

- How can we *prevent* disease?

3. Early Detection

- Define the word *detect*:

- Use *detect* in a sentence:

- What does early *detection* of an illness mean?

4. Health Screenings

- Define the term *health screenings*:

ACTIVITY 1: ATTENDING A HEALTH SCREENING: MILA'S STORY¹

Teacher Directions: Have students break into groups. Ask one person to read the story for the group and another person to record the answers to the questions below.

Directions: Read this story in your groups and answer the questions below.



Mila is thirty-five years old and an immigrant from the Dominican Republic. She has lived in New York City for five years. Mila attends an ABE class to get her GED. Recently, Mila has been thinking about her health a lot. This is because she has been learning about health in her class. She has learned that the prevention of disease means eating healthy food and being more active. She has also learned about how important the early detection of illness can be. Mila's teacher said that the best way to detect an illness early is to attend a health screening.



Mila just found out her class will be taking a trip to a free or low-cost health screening offered at a public hospital or clinic near her school. Her teacher told the class that they will be screened for diseases like high blood pressure and diabetes. Mila is nervous for several reasons. First, she has not been to see a doctor in three years and she is worried that she might have a disease. Secondly, she does not know what happens during screenings or what she will do with her results. She is also nervous because she has no papers and she is worried that the hospital will report her to the authorities. Finally, she has no insurance and cannot afford to pay for the health screening. To feel better, Mila decided to ask her teacher some questions.

Questions for discussion:

1. **What is Mila's problem?** (She is nervous)
2. **Does this problem relate to your life?**
3. **How?**
(not been to the doctor in a long time, never been to a health screening, no documentation, no insurance)
4. **What can Mila do to feel better about going to the screening?**
(If she is nervous she should ask her teacher questions!)

Teacher Directions: After the discussion, tell students that they will have the chance to become teachers in the following role-play. Model the following role-play with a student and then have students pick partners and practice role-play (try to partner stronger students with weaker students). Allow time for one or two presentations.

¹Adapted from a health lesson developed by Tilla Alexander and Diana Raissis at MMALC

ACTIVITY 1: MILA'S QUESTIONS ABOUT THE HEALTH SCREENING²

Directions: Now you will become teachers and try to make Mila feel better about attending a health screening with her class. Choose a partner and practice one of the following role plays.

Teacher: How are you Mila? You look nervous.

Mila: I can't go to the health screening. I don't have any documentation or insurance.

Teacher: Don't worry. The hospital promises to keep all of your information confidential and the health screening will be free if you do not have insurance.

Mila: I feel perfectly healthy though. Why should I go to the screening?

Teacher: Everybody needs to get screened, even people that feel healthy like you. This is because many people have life-threatening diseases like high blood pressure but never know it. This is because high blood pressure has no symptoms. The only way to know if you have high blood pressure is to get screened by a healthcare provider.

Mila: Why does checking my blood pressure matter?

Teacher: High blood pressure can hurt your whole body. It can lead to a stroke, heart attacks, heart failure or kidney failure if it goes untreated.

Mila: How will healthcare providers check my blood pressure?

Teacher: Healthcare providers will put a cuff on your arm. This will measure your blood pressure. It is fast, easy and painless. By the way, it is important to get your blood pressure checked by your doctor on a regular basis, not just at health screenings.

Continued



Blood pressure cuff

Mila: What will happen if I have high blood pressure?

Teacher: Everything will be okay. If you have high blood pressure, you will just have to make some small but important changes. First, you will have to visit your regular doctor for screenings. If you do not have a regular doctor, there are people who work at the hospital where we are going that would be happy to help you. You will also have to make changes in your diet such as eating less fatty foods and salt. If you smoke, you will have to quit smoking. Finally, you may have to take medicine. If so, taking your medication is an important part of controlling your blood pressure.



A GED student getting her blood pressure checked at a health screening

²From American Heart Association's High Blood Pressure Library found at:
http://www.americanheart.org/beatyourrisk/en_US/main.html

ACTIVITY 2: QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Teacher Directions: After one or two groups have preformed the role-play for the class, have students work in their pairs to answer the following questions. Answers to questions should be written in complete sentences. When pairs are ready, have students share their answers with the class by writing their answers on the board. Take time to discuss students' use of writing conventions as well as reading comprehension.

1. High blood pressure is often called “the silent killer”

Judging from the reading, why do you think people call it that?

(High Blood Pressure has no symptoms, so the only way to know you have it is to get screened. If undetected and untreated, high blood pressure can lead to stroke, heart attack, heart failure and kidney failure.)

2. The hospital promises to keep all information “confidential”

What does this mean?

(It means that they will keep patients' health status or immigration status secret or classified.)

3. How did Mila feel about health screenings before talking to her teacher?

Why?

(She felt nervous because she had not been to the doctor in a long time, had never been to a health screening before and she did not have papers or insurance.)

4. How do you think she feels after talking to her teacher? Why?

(She feels better because she understands what is going to happen.)

5. What is the point of going to a health screening?

(Many people have diseases like high blood pressure but don't know it. Attending health screenings will help them detect diseases and begin treatment before it is too late.)



TAKE CARE NY

Get Screened.
Stay Healthy.

A simple health check for asthma, diabetes, high blood pressure, cholesterol, HIV, depression or cancer can help keep you healthy. This October, NYC public hospitals and health centers will offer the health screenings you or your family need at little or no cost.*

Dial **311** or visit nyc.gov/hhc to find the HHC hospital or health center near you.

And Take Care, NY.



Bellevue • Belvis • Coler-Goldwater • Coney Island
Cumberland • East New York • Elmhurst • Gouverneur
Harlem • Jacobi • Kings County • Lincoln • McKinney
Metropolitan • Morrisania • North Central Bronx
Queens • Renaissance • Sea View • Woodhull

*If you have health insurance, it will be billed. You will be responsible for any co-payments. If you don't have insurance, there is no cost to you.

ACTIVITY 3: “GET SCREENED. STAY HEALTHY.”

Teacher Directions: Let your students know that, just like Mila, they will also be attending a health screening with you during the following class. Refer students to the TCNY advertisement and then read as a class. Use these questions to lead the discussion. After your discussion, make students aware of the hospital or clinic you have chosen to visit and your plan for the following day.

Directions: Read this advertisement and talk about its meaning in your group. Take notes as you talk about the questions and be ready to report back to the class.

Questions for Discussion

- 1. Explain the title in your own words.**
- 2. Name all of the diseases mentioned.**
(Diabetes, high blood pressure, asthma, cholesterol, HIV, depression, cancer.)
- 3. Why should people get screened?**
(A health screening will detect the illness early. That way you can start managing and treating the disease before it is too late.)
- 4. How much will it cost?**
(If you are uninsured it will be free. If you have Medicaid or Family Health Plus it will be free. If you have insurance, there will be a co-payment. However, if you cannot afford to pay, let financial representatives at HHC know and they will waive the charge.)
- 5. What is the point of going to a health screening?**
(It's best to know if you are at risk of having/have an illness because then you can do something about it.)
- 6. What does TCNY stand for?**
(Take Care New York)
- 7. What does HHC stand for?**
(Health and Hospitals Corporation, the City's public hospitals and clinics.)

ACTIVITY 3: “GET SCREENED. STAY HEALTHY.”

Teacher Directions: Copy this table onto the board along with all of the information in black type. Let your students know that they will be screened for diseases other than high blood pressure and diabetes. Discuss with your class and copy their thoughts and onto the board. Have students copy down information onto their table. Share provided information if necessary.

- **Do you know anything about these common diseases?**
- **Do you know how to prevent them?**
- **Do you know how you would detect them early?**

Discuss with your class and copy their thoughts and onto the board. If in doubt, please refer to the information provided in this table for you.

Common Diseases	Prevention	Early Detection
High Blood Pressure →	Eat healthy and be active →	Blood Pressure test
Diabetes	(Eat healthy and be active)	(Finger-prick test)
Asthma	(Eliminate exposure to smoke, dust, pets, pests, mold)	(Lung test)
Cholesterol	(Eat foods low in saturated fat and cholesterol, be active, manage your weight, don't smoke)	(Finger-prick test)
HIV	(Practice safe sex or abstinence and do not share needles)	(Mouth swab test)
Depression	(Eat healthy, be active, avoid drugs and alcohol)	(Patient Health Questionnaire)
Cancer:		
Breast cancer	(Eat healthy, be active)	(Breast X-ray)
Colon Cancer	(Eat healthy, be active)	(Colonoscopy)
Lung Cancer	(Stop smoking)	(Chest X-ray)

ACTIVITY 4: MILA CONVINCES RICARDO TO ATTEND A HEALTH SCREENING

Teacher Directions: Explain that you will be doing an open-ended role play. Choose one student to play Ricardo. Model the activity by playing Mila first (keep your answers short and simple). Then break class into pairs and have students take turns playing Mila and sharing what they have learned with each other in their own words.

Mila left her class feeling much better about attending the health screening. She was happy because she asked her teacher questions and she doesn't feel nervous anymore. When she got home she decided to tell her friend Ricardo about what she learned in class today.

Directions: Choose a partner to work with and take turns playing the roles of Mila and Ricardo. Answer Ricardo's questions in your own words.

Ricardo: Hey Mila, how are you? What did you learn in class today?

Mila: Hey Ricardo, I am fine. I learned about health screenings in class today.

Ricardo: What are health screenings?

Mila: (Health screenings are tests or check-ups.)

Ricardo: What kind of screenings can I get?

Mila: (You can get tests for diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, HIV, etc.)

Ricardo: Who should get health screenings?

Mila: (Everyone)

Ricardo: Why should I attend a health screening?

Mila: (You may have a disease like high blood pressure and not know it.)

Ricardo: Where can I get a health screening?

Mila: (You can go to any HHC public hospital during October for a free or low-cost screening.)

Teacher Directions: After you have gone over the role play as a class, have each student write down their favorite answers to Ricardo's questions on the lines above.

Directions: After you have done this role play as a class, write the best answers to each question on the lines provided above.

ACTIVITY 7: SHARE YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Teacher Directions: Reserve time in the computer lab for your class. Pick your strongest students to be group leaders. Divide up the rest of the class then assign each group to a leader. Assign student groups with the task of completing and presenting a PowerPoint presentation. Have students follow the slide outline below. Allow thirty minutes for presentations at the end of class for presentations.

(OPTIONAL: Invite other teachers and their classes to attend the presentations.)

Directions: Make a PowerPoint Presentation with your group. Be sure to answer every question with one paragraph and to use pictures from clip-art or the internet to make your slides interesting!

Titles of Slides:

1. Title and name of presentation.
2. What is "prevention"?
3. What is "early detection"?
4. What are "health screenings"?
5. Who should get screened?
6. Where did you go to get screened?
7. What screenings did you do?
8. Why should I get screened?
9. What was your experience like?
10. What is one thing you would tell a friend about health screenings?

ACTIVITY 7: SHARE YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Alternative: Instead of using computers, assign questions to a student/pair of students. Ask them to make a poster on 8X10 or chart paper. The poster must include a paragraph response to the question. Encourage students to decorate the poster as well using poster making materials. After students have completed their posters, ask students to present their posters in succession.

Directions: You will be assigned one question from the list below. On your poster, you will need to answer the question in one paragraph. Use markers, magazines or colored paper to make your poster interesting!

Questions:

1. Title of presentation
(You can assign this poster to one of your lower-level students.)
2. What is "prevention"?
3. What is "early detection"?
4. What are "health screenings"?
5. Who should get screened?
6. Where did you go to get screened?
7. What screenings did you do?
8. Why should people get screened?
9. What was your experience like?
10. What is one thing you would tell a friend about health screenings?

AFTER THE LESSON

You or your students may want to know more about a certain subject after you have completed the lesson. The following are additional health-related resources for program staff that may be useful in the development of further lessons on prevention, early detection and health screenings:

Look to the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's web-site for more information on key public health messages, NYC specific health statistics, and city-wide public health initiatives:

<http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/home/home.shtml>

Want to know more about HHC hospitals and clinics? Look to HHC's official web-site for more information on accessing health care and finding a healthcare facility:

<http://www.nyc.gov/html/hhc/html/home/home.shtml>

Want to know more about common diseases such as cancer, diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol? Look to these websites for more information on these specific health issues and more:

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/>

<http://www.cdc.gov/>

<http://www.cancer.org>

<http://www.diabetes.org>

<http://www.americanheart.org>

Big Town **Big Dreams**

STORIES ABOUT IMMIGRANT NEW YORKERS WHO MAKE THIS TOWN THE GREAT PLACE IT IS



After surviving breast cancer, Wendy Louie started volunteering to help other Asian women cope with what she went through. Photo by Frank Koester

'When I tell them I am a survivor and a nurse, they open up.'

By MARY BETH CASPER

Medical experts agree: Early detection and prompt medical attention are the best weapons for successfully fighting breast cancer.

They are words worth repeating.

And that's exactly what Wendy Louie, 56, a registered nurse and breast cancer survivor, does.

Louie, who lives with her two adult daughters in Richmond Hill, Queens, repeats them often. She tells her patients at the Family Health Clinic at New York Hospital Queens how important regular exams and mammograms are. She tells anyone who will listen.

Louie was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1998 after a mammogram detected a lump in one of her breasts that regular exams did not pick up.

"My first response to the diagnosis was the same as any woman's," she says. "Fear."

That was followed by denial. After all, there was no history of the disease in her family.

Then came concern for her husband and two adolescent children. "What would happen to them if something happened to me?" she recalls thinking.

Louie's story has a positive outcome. A mastectomy and a series of chemotherapy treatments saved her life. Support from Asian Initiatives — formerly called the Chinese Unit — a nonprofit organization in Flushing, Queens, also helped her.

Asian Initiatives was founded in 1992 by Lucy Young, a breast cancer survivor. Once an independent nonprofit group that served breast cancer patients of Chinese heritage, today it is affiliated with the American Cancer Society's Eastern Division. It educates and runs free support groups for all different types of cancer to New Yorkers of Asian descent.

Louie, who was born and raised in Hong Kong, came to the city at 27 to marry her childhood sweetheart, Eddie Louie, who already was living in Queens. Because she is a health care professional, she understood the medical issues surrounding her cancer diagnosis. But she still needed to "see a survivor — someone who looked like me," to help her deal with

the emotional issues she had after her mastectomy and breast reconstruction and during her chemotherapy.

The support from Young was so crucial that five years ago she started to volunteer herself for at least 20 hours a week. Sometimes, Louie visits patients in the hospital or at their homes. Other times, she calls to check on them. Once a month, she leads support groups for breast cancer patients.

"In the beginning, most of the women don't want to talk about the cancer," she says. "When I tell them I am a survivor and a nurse, they open up."

Their concerns are similar to any woman's.

"They worry their husbands won't love them anymore if they lose a breast," Louie says. "They express concerns about the side effects of chemotherapy."

"I will tell the women that they won't lose their husband's love. I invite their husbands to come to the support groups, too," she says.

Other patient concerns may be more cultural.

"There are many recent immigrants in New York who have no health insurance, no background in consistent medical care, and no understanding of the health care options available to them in America," says Ming-der Chang, vice president of Asian Initiatives.

Some are distrustful of Western medicine, or have trouble communication due to language barriers.

"In many Chinese households, cancer is a taboo subject," adds Chang. "Patients won't speak about it. Not even to their family members."

Louie, who speaks Mandarin and Cantonese Chinese, says, "Some women believe their cancer is the result of them having done something bad which they are being punished for."

For Louie, volunteering has been a comfort because her husband died of cancer of the nose three years ago. "I miss him very much," she says.

"In the early days of our marriage, there were few Asians in Queens," she recalls. "Whenever I got homesick, he would bring me to Manhattan for dinner in Chinatown."

And when she was sick, he stepped up the work at home.

"After my surgery and during my

chemotherapy, he did the cooking and cleaning," she says.

Before he died, he encouraged her to remain a volunteer.

"He asked me to continue that work even if something happened to him," she says.

A true testament to the importance of Louie's efforts can be seen in the large number of women she counsels who go on to become volunteers for Asian Initiatives, says Chang.

Louie says she learns as much from the women she counsels as they do from her.

"One of my friends in particular has taught me the importance of being optimistic," she said.

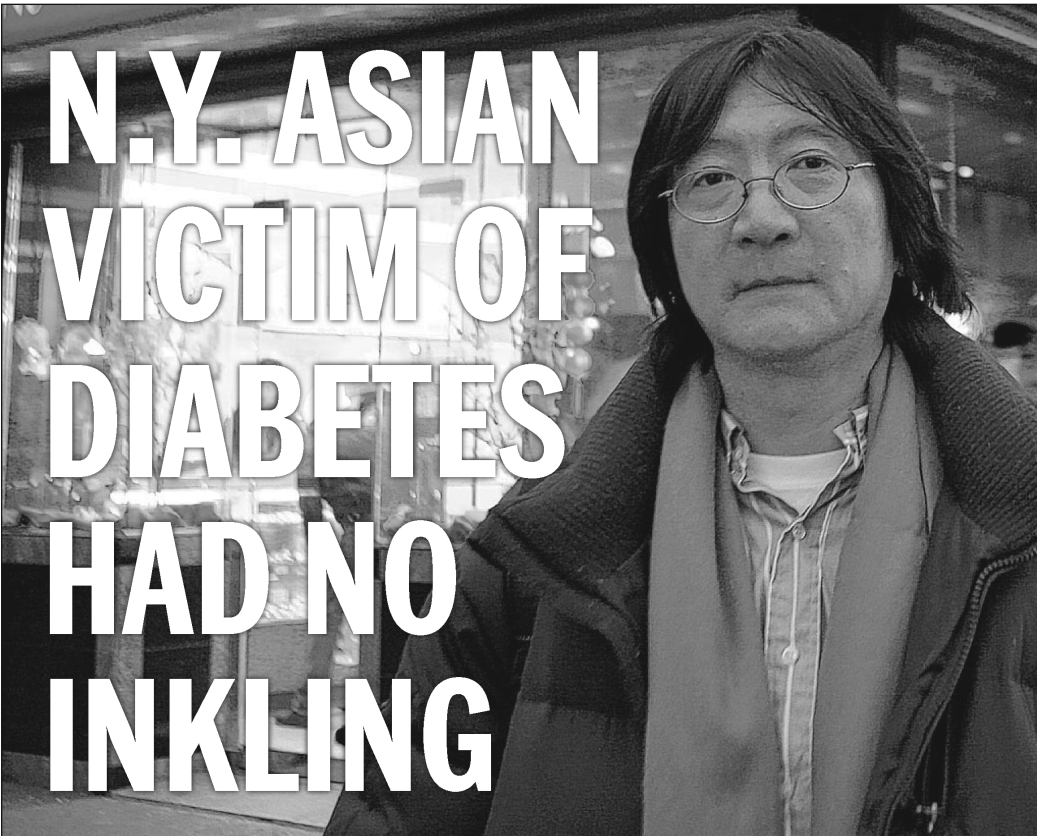
That woman's breast cancer has spread to her lungs and bones.

"Still, she leads a happy life," Louie said. "Whenever I feel sad, I think of her and I can go on."

Asian Initiatives is at 41-60 Main St., Suite 307, in Flushing, N.Y. Call (718) 886-8890.

Do you know an immigrant New Yorker who achieved his or her dream in our great city? E-mail Maite Junco at BigTown@nydailynews.com

200,000 sufferers don't even know they have it, warns Health Dept.



George Ng, who emigrated from the Philippines to the U.S. in 1979, said he is still in denial that he has diabetes at age 55. Photo by Matthew Roberts

BY JORDAN LITE
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

GEORGE NG NEVER imagined a skinny Chinese guy like him could get diabetes, but three weeks ago he found out he was dangerously wrong.

The Manhattan man discovered he was one of the more than 200,000 New Yorkers who don't know they have the disease — one of the surprising numbers released yesterday by the city Health Department in a new comprehensive look at diabetes.

"I think I had the condition for a while. I'm still in denial," said Ng, 55.

When the 5-foot-11 Ng arrived in the city from the Philippines in 1979, "I was underweight — 125 pounds — and I think the food here got me ballooned up to 160. I'd pig out, eating ice cream, chocolate and cupcakes, McDonald's fries, drinking Coke."

He's not alone. The study found that diabetes strikes almost half of Asian New Yorkers: 16% have it, and another 32% are teetering on the brink.

Less than a decade ago, studies of second- and third-generation Japanese-Americans found that 10% had the disease.

"It is a huge, significant increase," said Dr. Thomas Tsang, chief medical officer at the Charles B. Wang Community Health Center in Chinatown.

Thousands of New Yorkers may have diabetes and not know it. You should be checked by a doctor if you have these symptoms:

- Frequent urination
- Excessive thirst and hunger
- Unusual weight loss

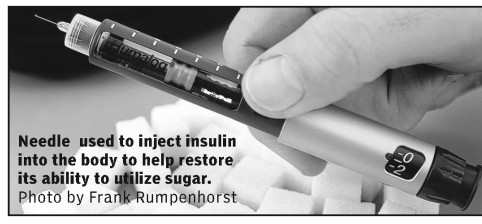
You should also get checked for diabetes if you:

- Are older than 45 and obese
- Have high blood pressure or high cholesterol
- Your blood-sugar levels are above normal

Diabetes in New York City

- **686,000** adult New Yorkers — **12.5%** of the adult population — have diabetes, **207,000** don't know it
- Half of Asian New Yorkers are affected: **16%** have diabetes and **32%** have prediabetes
- **14%** of blacks have diabetes; **21%** have prediabetes
- **12%** of Hispanics have diabetes; **25%** have prediabetes
- **11%** of whites have diabetes; **21%** have prediabetes

SOURCE: NEW YORK CITY HEALTH DEPARTMENT



Needle used to inject insulin into the body to help restore its ability to utilize sugar.
Photo by Frank Rumpenhorst

The study helps confirm that the city's diabetes problem is more serious than the national one. More than 12% of all adults here, 686,000 people, have diabetes, compared with 10% across the country.

Yet 207,000 New Yorkers don't know they have the disease, and

for 105,000, the condition is out of control enough to raise their risk of heart attack, blindness and amputation, said officials, who based their results on interviews and blood tests of 2,000 residents.

For reasons that are unclear, diabetes seems to be more com-

mon among Indians, Bangladeshis and Pakistanis than other Asian New Yorkers, though exact numbers aren't known, said Deputy Health Commissioner Lorna Thorpe.

But new calorie-rich diets, couch-potato lifestyles and weight gain among Asian immigrants are likely to be driving the community's dramatically rising diabetes problem, said Dr. George Liu, an attending physician at New York Downtown Hospital. At the same time, they are migrating from countries where diabetes is becoming more prevalent, he said.

Still, the figures defy conventional wisdom about Asians, who are assumed to be at lower risk of diabetes because of their stereotypically smaller frames.

"We don't typically think of high levels of obesity in the Asian population, but that's changing, and there's some indication that if you have weight around your ... [waist] you're at greater risk for diabetes. This tends to be more common among Asians, in particular South Asians," Thorpe said.

The problem remains serious for other New Yorkers. More than 14% of blacks, 12% of Hispanics and nearly 11% of whites have diabetes, and still more are prediabetic, according to the survey.

jilite@nydailynews.com

NYMinute

Trash run tied to slay?

CLAD ONLY IN boxer shorts, a man resembling Catherine Woods' accused killer was spotted making a pre-dawn trash run on the weekend the stripper was killed.

Taking the stand in Manhattan Criminal Court yesterday, Jacques Swarcbart said he was startled when he saw someone he thinks was suspect Paul Cortez tossing out a large garbage bag in front of his East Harlem building in November 2005.

"He was barefoot and bare-chested," said Swarcbart, a saxophone player who had been performing all night. "And that struck my imagination because it was very cold."

No murder weapon or bloody clothes were ever recovered from the 21-year-old beauty's fatal stabbing, leaving prosecutors to build their case against Cortez around circumstantial evidence and a bloody fingerprint found in her E. 86th St. pad.

Jose Martinez

Porn KOD, flags still OK

THE FDNY yesterday announced regulations that strengthen its ban on pornography at city firehouses — but apparently allow American flags and Mass cards.

The rank-and-file union trumpeted the rule as a "victory for free speech."

"We were going to sue over those items and now we don't have to, so that's a step in the right direction," said Steve Cassidy, president of the Uniformed Firefighters Association. "They have a right to ban offensive material. They don't have the right to take everything off your locker."

Jonathan Lemire

Plunge kills day laborer

A DAY LABORER died at a Brooklyn construction site yesterday after plunging four stories down an unguarded elevator shaft, police said.

The unidentified victim was doing tile work on the fourth floor of a building on Troutman St. in Bushwick when he stumbled and fell about 10:20 a.m. Emergency workers raced him to Woodhull Hospital, where he died. A source familiar with the investigation said there were no guard rails blocking the opening to the elevator shaft.

Robert F. Moore

Hunting dead girl's kin

ANONYMOUS TIPS sent cops searching addresses in upper Manhattan and the Bronx for the parents of a baby girl found dead Monday in a trash compactor at the Mitchell Houses in Mott Haven.

The medical examiner's office was still trying yesterday to determine the identity of the baby, who was thought to be between 2 and 3 months old.

Robert F. Moore

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