

IS THE NEW SHINGLES SHOT ALSO A VACCINATION AGAINST STROKE?

If you're 50 or older, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends getting the new Shingrix vaccine against shingles, even if you've already been vaccinated against this disease. Shingrix is more than 90% effective for the prevention of shingles, a disease that strikes one million Americans a year, causing a blistering skin rash that can lead to chronic nerve pain. Getting immunized also has another important benefit that may surprise you: lower risk for stroke.

Why does a shingles shot help people avoid a stroke? Here's a closer look at Shingrix and why the CDC and the BaleDoneen Method now recommend it for people ages 50 and up.

What causes shingles and who is at risk?

Also known as herpes zoster, shingles is caused by a reactivation of the varicella zoster virus (VZV) that causes chickenpox. The main risk factor is being over 50, which is why immunization is advised for this age group. More than 99% of adults over the age of 50 have VZV dormant in their nervous system. The risk that the virus will reactivate escalates with advancing age. Without immunization, one in three Americans will develop shingles over a lifetime. After age 85, the risk is one in two.

How serious is shingles?

Initial symptoms of shingles include extreme pain and sensitivity, with sensations ranging from intense itching to burning, stabbing or a deep, shooting "lightning bolt" pain, sometimes accompanied by fever, chills and headache. This is followed by an itchy, blistering rash, usually on one side of the body, lasting from two to four weeks. In some cases, shingles can affect the eyes, leading to debilitating pain, inflammation and even blindness. About 18% of shingles patients develop postherpetic neuralgia (PHN), a chronic, often severe nerve pain that lasts months or even years.

What's the link between shingles and stroke?

In two recent large studies, people who developed shingles were up to 4.5 times more likely to suffer a subsequent stroke, highlighting the value of immunization against the virus that causes this disease. That's because any viral or bacterial infection sparks inflammation, and for people with cardiovascular disease (CVD), that could cause plaque in the arteries to become inflamed and rupture, much like a volcano spewing molten lava. The body's defense to this injury is to form a clot, which can trigger a stroke if it blocks the flow of blood to the brain.

Why do people who are already immunized against shingles need the new vaccine?

A CDC expert panel reports that Shingrix, made by GlaxoSmithKline, provides much greater protection than Zostavax, made by Merck. Therefore the panel recommends that anyone previously vaccinated with the one-dose Zostavax be revaccinated with Shingrix, which is given in two doses. Shingrix's protection is maintained at a high level for at least four years, according to a recent peer-reviewed study. The new vaccine costs about \$280.

What are the risks of Shingrix?

In randomized clinical trials comparing



Shingrix to a placebo injection, the most common side effects of the vaccine were temporary pain, redness and swelling at the injection site, muscle pain, fatigue, headache,

shivering, fever and upset stomach. Rates of serious events after injection were similar in those who received a placebo and those who received the vaccine, which does NOT contain a live virus.

What's the BaleDoneen takeaway?

If you're 50 or older, talk to your medical provider about being vaccinated. Not only can the new shot help you avoid a notoriously painful, vaccine-preventable disease, it's an easy way to reduce your risk for stroke, the leading cause of serious, long-term disability. Someone in the U.S. has a stroke every 40 seconds, and every four minutes, an American dies from a stroke.

The good news, however, is that heart attacks and strokes are preventable. To find out if you have CVD, which typically develops silently over many years until it's severe enough to cause a heart attack or stroke, get a comprehensive [BaleDoneen Method](#) assessment, which uses leading-edge lab and imaging tests to check for hidden signs of arterial disease. Early detection and treatment can save lives, hearts and brains! Also check out the BaleDoneen book, [Beat the Heart Attack Gene](#), which presents a personalized prevention plan and the tools you need to partner with your healthcare provider to protect and optimize your arterial wellness.



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Heart-Healthy Holiday Gifts

If you're shopping for friends and family, or brainstorming about ideas for a holiday gift exchange at the office, here are some great, healthy gifts that will truly make the recipient's heart rejoice.

DARK CHOCOLATE

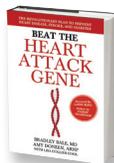
When Hippocrates wrote, "Let food be thy medicine," he may have been referring to dark chocolate, which has such a wide array of cardiovascular benefits that the BaleDoneen Method prescribes 7 grams of dark chocolate daily (one small square) for heart attack and stroke prevention. Nibbling on the sweet treat may also protect against cancer, some studies suggest.

A HOME BLOOD PRESSURE MONITOR

Under new medical guidelines, nearly 50% of U.S. adults now qualify as having high blood pressure (a reading of 130/90 mmHg or above). Home blood pressure monitors are an important way for people in this category to track their health, with a recent study showing that morning blood pressure is the best predictor of heart attack and stroke risk. **However, it's crucial to know the right technique. When using a wrist blood-pressure cuff, the reading will be inaccurate unless the device is positioned at heart level.** A good way to tell if the device is correctly positioned is to hold the arm with the BP cuff across your chest as you would if the national anthem were playing.

A COPY OF BEAT THE HEART ATTACK GENE

Give your loved ones inspiration and a comprehensive, personalized heart



attack and stroke prevention plan with the bestselling BaleDoneen book, [Beat the Heart Attack Gene](#), now available in hardcover, paperback and Kindle

formats on Amazon. "Not only does this book show you how to optimize your heart and brain health, but following the plan could save your life," says bestselling author Daniel Amen, MD.

FRESH FRUIT

A fruit basket or a subscription to a fruit-of-the-month club serves as a delicious reminder of the cardiovascular benefits of eating fresh produce daily. In large studies, people who eat the most fruit and veggies daily have the lowest risk for stroke. And there's even research showing that eating an apple a day helps keep the cardiologist away by lowering heart attack risk!

A SONIC TOOTHBRUSH

A [landmark peer-reviewed BaleDoneen publication](#) is the first to identify that periodontal disease (PD) due to high-risk oral bacteria can actually cause cardiovascular disease. The BaleDoneen Method recommends brushing twice a day with a sonic toothbrush, along with flossing and regular dental care, as key ways to optimize both oral and arterial health.

WATER BACKPACK

If someone on your gift list is an avid jogger, hiker or bicyclist, a water back-

pack ensures easy, hands-free hydration that helps protect heart health. In a recent study of more than 20,000 people, those who drank five or more glasses of water daily had half the risk for fatal heart disease than those who quaffed two or fewer glasses daily, even when other risk factors were taken into account.

A ZEN SAND GARDEN

Mindful meditation is a great stress-reliever with proven cardiovascular benefits. Several companies sell versions of the traditional Japanese meditative garden done in miniature sizes that are perfect for a desk or coffee table. Look for a set with a wooden frame, sand, one or more small rakes to create meditative designs, and a booklet with helpful instructions. Some sets also include polished stones to enhance the garden's tranquil design, and extra-small sets are available for travel.

RESISTANCE BANDS

An excellent option for a wide range of fitness needs, resistance bands are a great choice for people who travel frequently and may not always have access to a gym or weights for strength training. Look for a set that includes tubes, handles, ankle straps, a door anchor and a travel bag for convenient storage.





• *December Recipe* •

Gluten-Free Vegan Stuffed Acorn Squash with Kale, Quinoa and Cranberries

This hearty, delicious recipe is sure to delight your family and friends. A gluten-free grain, quinoa is high in protein, heart-healthy fiber, disease-fighting antioxidants and a bounty of essential minerals and nutrients. A recent study suggests that quinoa supports metabolic health, while also helping to lower blood sugar and triglycerides. Nutrients in cranberries help lower blood pressure, while kale is called “the queen of vegetables” because of its wide array of health benefits, including fighting the inflammation that can spark heart attacks and strokes.

INGREDIENTS

- 2 medium acorn squash, halved and seeded
- 2 teaspoons olive oil, divided
- ³/₄ cup quinoa
- 12 ounces low-sodium vegetable broth
- 1 bunch kale, chopped with stems removed
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 teaspoon dried or fresh oregano
- ¹/₂ teaspoon black pepper (plus additional for baking squash)
- 15 ounce can of low-sodium chickpeas, rinsed and drained
- Zest of one orange, plus 1 tablespoon fresh orange juice
- ¹/₃ cup unsweetened dried cranberries
- 4 tablespoons chopped parsley (for garnish)

Preheat oven to 400°. Place acorn squash halves in baking pan, cut sides up. Drizzle with 1 teaspoon olive oil and season with pepper. Bake until fork-tender, about 50 minutes. Set aside to cool and lower oven temperature to 375°. Meanwhile, bring broth to a boil in a small pot. Add quinoa and return to a boil. Cover and simmer over low heat for 12 minutes. Remove from heat and let sit, covered, for 15 minutes. Heat remaining teaspoon of olive oil in a large frying pan. Add kale and cook over medium heat until wilted, about 4 minutes. Add garlic, oregano and ¹/₂ teaspoon black pepper. Reduce heat to medium low and cook for one minute. Remove from heat and add chickpeas, orange zest and juice, cooked quinoa and cranberries. Mix well. When squash halves are cool enough to handle, stuff with the kale-quinoa mixture. Bake for 10 minutes at 375°. Garnish with parsley and enjoy! Serves four.

Adapted from Wellplated.com and Foodnetwork.com.