

# Healthy Living

Medical Advances ■ Nutrition ■ Fitness

## Balloon treats precancerous condition

A common side effect of untreated heartburn, or acid reflux disease, is *Barrett's esophagus*. This is a condition in which the cells of the lower esophagus protect themselves against constant acidic attacks by mutating. The bad news is that this common side effect of heartburn or acid reflux can lead in rare cases to cancer. But now if you develop Barrett's esophagus, doctors have a better way to treat the condition and decrease your cancer risk by 80 percent to 90 percent, says Dr. Nicholas Shaheen of University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Shaheen was the lead au-

thor of a recent New England Journal of Medicine study that proved the efficacy of radio-frequency ablation, which destroys precancerous Barrett's cells. During *radio-frequency ablation*, doctors extend an endoscope that has a balloon attached to it down into the throat. Then the balloon is expanded after it reaches the lower esophagus, Shaheen says. The balloon's surface is covered with tiny, metal coils that emit radio-frequency waves that destroy the abnormal cells. In the past, doctors treated Barrett's esophagus using lasers, which killed healthy cells, too, and left some abnormal cells intact, Shaheen adds. Because radio-frequency ablation is still so new, the cost for consumers

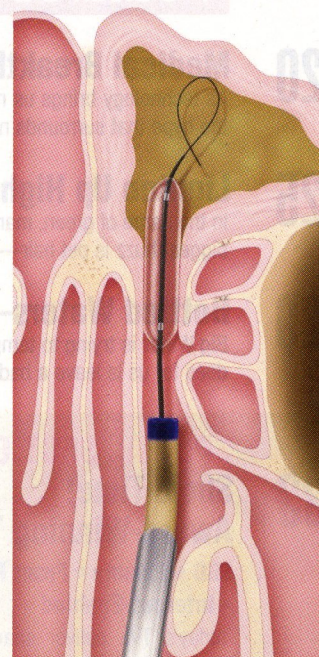
is unknown, and more research is being conducted, he says.

## New procedure helps sinusitis sufferers

Chronic sinusitis is a condition in which the sinuses become inflamed and swollen. In the past, those who had chronic sinusitis often endured invasive surgery to find relief. But now balloon sinuplasty offers a safer outpatient alternative, says Dr. Josh Makower, who is the inventor of the procedure. Makower was a sinusitis sufferer until he underwent his own procedure. During *balloon sinuplasty*, doctors thread a wire that carries a balloon into the sinus cavities via the nostrils. After the balloon is inserted into the cavity, it's inflated just enough to crack the outer eggshell-like structure of the sinuses, which then allows them to reshape into a wider area so fluids can drain more easily, Makower explains.

Balloon sinuplasty can be performed with the use of local anesthesia and is an outpatient procedure, Makower adds. Compared with traditional sinus surgery, bleeding is minimal, swelling is minor and many patients are able to return to work the day after they undergo the procedure.

Balloon sinuplasty was approved by Food and Drug Administration in 2005, but long-term data are now available for the first time, Makower says. Hospitals



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**During balloon sinuplasty, an endoscope with a balloon attached is snaked into the sinuses and then expanded, which reshapes the sinuses to allow for drainage.**

are charging an average of \$12,657 for balloon sinuplasty, compared with \$14,471 for traditional sinus surgery or functional endoscopic sinus surgery, Makower says. Most insurance companies cover most of the costs.

## New spine surgery safer, less invasive

Lumbar spinal fusion surgery is a risky, painful procedure, but a relatively new method of performing lumbar spinal-fusion surgery has taken mainstream hold in the medical world. The procedure, which is called *presacral interbody fusion*, is conducted through a 1-inch incision in the lower back, says Dr. William To-

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## Running shoes don't necessarily help your feet

If you're going on a run, you need good running shoes, right? Maybe not, according to a recent study that was conducted by Australian researchers. Scientists at University of Newcastle found no evidence that running shoes that have elevated, cushioned heels and good arch support prevent injury or improve running performance. They also found that running in bare feet isn't any worse or better than running while you wear athletic shoes.

