Body Talk: Are You Listening?

Don’t ignore episodic bouts of pain and discomfort. The warning signs below could be very serious.

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Your overactive bladder may be the result of one too many watercooler breaks, but it could also be an early warning sign of type 2 diabetes. “Sometimes it’s not obvious to people what their symptoms mean and what’s going on,” says Jennifer Caudle, MD, a faculty member of the Johns Hopkins University/Sinai Hospital Program in Baltimore.

To give an example, Caudle recalls an older woman who complained of fatigue and constant urination and thirst. Later, the woman discovered she had diabetes—a condition that strikes 11.8 percent of African Americans, according to CDC data. She also discovered family members living with the same condition, another red flag patients shouldn’t ignore.

If you experience chronic chest pains, it could be your body’s way of shouting, “Hey, we might have heart disease!” Even though chest pains don’t always mean there’s something wrong with your heart, you should definitely get yourself evaluated.

When it comes to cardiovascular problems, Caudle says, early warning symptoms might appear as associated risk factors: high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes and cigarette smoking. These are signals to go see a doctor.

When you talk with your health care provider about these early warning signs, just be honest, she suggests. Although the signs may seem too trifling to discuss with your doctors, remember that physicians are there to listen to your health concerns and then assist you.

And for those who prefer to go online to research and assess early warning symptoms, take heed: “People should not make decisions about their health solely based on what they read online,” Caudle warns. “That is not appropriate.”

If you question something you’ve read on the Internet, print it out and take it to your doctor, she adds. This way, health experts can consider your concerns, run tests and give you a proper diagnosis.

And if you do dig up health info online, always consider the source—is it a pharmaceutical

company, a nonprofit, an esteemed medical journal? “Be discerning consumers,” Caudle says. Why? Because the information could be bogus or not pertinent to your situation.

The bottom line is: When you have symptoms you feel aren’t normal and they don’t disappear, allow your doctor to listen to what your body may be telling you.

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