Family Circus



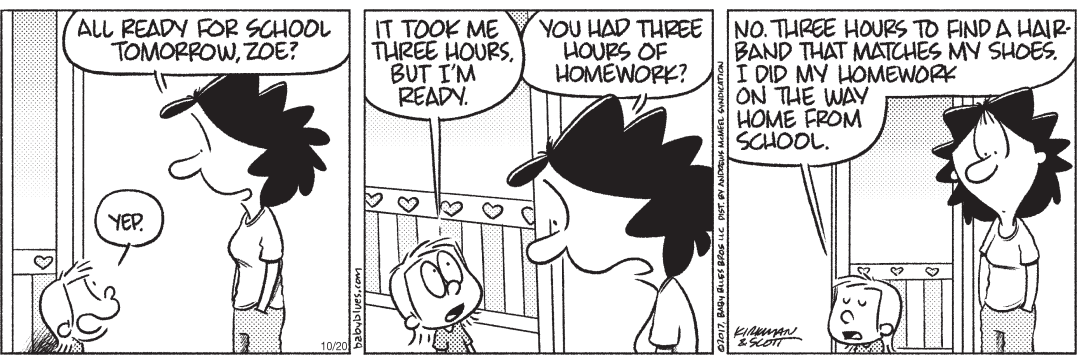
"Mommy, what did I do last Thursday?"

Lockhorns



"LEROY ASKED ME TO DANCE... WOULD YOU MIND SPOTTING ME?"

Baby Blues



Zits



Dustin



Remorseless gossip doesn't want to change

Asking Eric

Dear Eric: I can't stop gossiping. I love it. I love talking trash. I feel no remorse about it at all. But my spouse hates it when I do it and it's become an issue with us. I gossip with friends. I gossip on the phone. I gossip when I'm out. I don't need to gossip with my spouse. But he says it paints me in a negative light. He won't let it go and I think it's making things tough between us. And so, I'm trying to change. But I don't want to. Do you have strategies for changing my ways when I don't really want to change my ways? I think if I just gossiped less, my spouse wouldn't find it so objectionable. But I don't even want to do that. Can you help? – Nothing Nice to Say

Dear Say: If you don't want to change in this way, you're not going to change. You may adopt a habit for a time, but it'll either make you unhappy, and you'll drop it or you'll never fully commit to it, and it'll recede into the ether. There's a third option, I suppose – that you find the new habit actually works for you and the change happens almost despite your best efforts. But does that seem likely or efficient? Don't change for your spouse. Change, if you want, for yourself. What is gossip to you? Why are you gossiping? Are there other ways of communicating that bring you the same feeling of connection and energy? It's important to remember that what you put out frames the way you see the world. If you're speaking negatively, if you're always seeing the worst in people, then that's the world you'll live in. And that might be fine for you. It gives you plenty about which to gossip. But it's worth asking yourself if the world you know can be bigger, kinder, fuller, or more loving. Gossip happens; it isn't the gravest flaw one can have. But if you gossip so much that it's impeding your marriage, you might want to ask yourself what you're getting out of it.

Dear Eric: My husband's brother is approaching 90 and increasingly needs help physically and with memory problems. He is a sweet and charming man. His wife and her son do an admirable job of maintaining his physical health. They recently purchased an additional home near us in the small town where we now live in a retirement community. We had been inviting them to dine with us or at local restaurants, but these events have become very stressful since the brother's wife and son constantly recount various trials and tribulations. Most relate to problems experienced by the boy's father (her first husband). Some relate to problems with tenants or maintenance of their apartments or their farm. The son is not treated well by his father. He complains about maintaining their various real estate holdings as well as being forced to visit his father monthly. I come away from these get-togethers worrying about their problems so I cannot sleep. Prior to retirement I had statewide responsibility to provide protective services for former state hospital patients. Even 30 years later, when I hear about abusive or exploitative situations, I find it impossible to ignore these issues. Is there some tactful way to redirect these conversations? It is really none of my business to hear about a former husband's late life challenges and the wife's son constantly complains. – Disturbing Conversation

Dear Conversation: Being honest and direct may be your best bet here. Given your history with the subject matter, it's not unreasonable to ask that your sister-in-law and her son be a little more circumspect with what they talk about. They may not realize the impact they're having. In fact, it's quite unlikely that they do. They might just be blowing off steam, or they might not have anything else to talk about. This is fine. It's also fine to let them know that you struggle with the content. This is the give-and-take of relationships. We ask for what we need and offer what we can. Talk to them before the next dinner so it doesn't come off as a direct critique but rather can be received as an ask for future meetings. "In the past, we've talked a lot about the problems you're having with your first husband and your real estate holdings. I have a background that exposed me to many abusive situations and so I'm sensitive to these kinds of situations. Can we talk about something else the next time we get together?" If you feel so inclined, you might also let them know that if they need support with the issues they're facing, you can point them to the right government agency.

Heloise

Dear Heloise: Instead of putting my flatware in a jumble in the drawer, I nest them. When I empty the dishwasher, I put the freshly cleaned silverware at the back of the stack, and when I need a piece, I just take it from the front. This way, all the silverware gets periodically washed, as opposed to some that sit at the bottom of the drawer and don't get washed for a long time. They also receive the same amount of wear and tear, so I don't have a few that are bright and shiny and some that aren't. — Emily M., in Kingwood, Texas

Emily, what a brilliant idea! Nesting your flatware is a wonderful way to ensure that every piece gets used and stays in great shape. It's such a simple, practical tip. Thanks for sharing this hint! — Heloise

Dear Heloise: Like most of us, my computer keyboards and screens get dirty due to fingerprints, crumbs, coffee, life, etc. In a recent column, you recommended getting a commercial cleaner. I went to a supply store to buy such a product. The salesperson told me to just use an alcohol pad. Apparently, isopropyl alcohol is the main ingredient in commercial cleaners for computers. He saved me lots of money.

Now I just rub an alcohol pad over the screen and keyboard whenever it's needed. Works great! — Katie G., in Oregon

Katie, be very careful with the alcohol pads because you could wipe off the letters and numbers over time. As for the screen, you're better off wiping it with a damp (not wet) microfiber cloth, then drying it off with a clean cloth. Don't press hard on your computer screen. — Heloise

Dear Heloise: Recent hints regarding clean laptop keyboards didn't mention the use of a keyboard cover. These are inexpensive silicone "skins" that are designed to keep dirty, greasy fingerprints away. They work well for me. — Anne, in Camarillo, California

Dear Heloise: In a recent column, there was a letter from Frank A., in Ventura, California. He suggested leaving a fan on for your dog and stated that he leaves a floor fan on for his dog when he goes out. This is something that could be very dangerous. A nearby home burned down because they left a floor fan on for their dog, and the dog knocked the fan over. The fan motor overheated and started a fire in the house. I strongly urge you to put this news out so that others don't have this same problem. — Ernie M., in Belvidere, New Jersey

Dear Heloise: Each fall and spring, I buy a large cluster of ripe bananas. After I get home, I cut the bananas, skin and fruit into thirds. Then I take the pieces out to my garden and bury them next to my plants. With the fruit and skins acting as a fertilizer, my yard blooms beautifully for a long time.

Bananas are cheap, and if an animal digs them up (my three terriers never have), it won't hurt them. My mother taught me this trick, and she was known for her beautiful flowers. — Bonnie D., in Windsor, Connecticut

Bonnie, thank you for this hint. I've used this myself and produced some beautiful flowers. — Heloise

Patient with BPH needs biopsy to be performed on prostate

DEAR DR. ROACH: I am 68 years old and have an enlarged prostate and benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH). I've been taking tamsulosin for about seven years. My PSA level has slowly creeped up and was recently measured at 4.5 ng/mL. My doctor did a 4Kscore test, and it was rather high at 49%, indicating a higher potential for aggressive prostate cancer. The digital rectacl exam (DRE) was normal. An MRI came out low, at PI-RADS score of 2.

My doctor indicated that there has been limited research on correlations between a relatively low PSA level and a high 4Kscore. A biopsy isn't ideal (I'm on warfarin), and it's of course invasive. My options appear to be continuing to monitor the PSA periodically or doing the biopsy. We're both leaning toward the former.

However, I think there are a number of other tests that could be done, such as a Prostate Health Index (phi) test or perhaps others. Would I benefit from taking a different test, or should we stick with the quarterly PSA test? — G.V.

ANSWER: The concern is that you might have prostate cancer. A PSA of 4.5 ng/mL is moderately elevated, which increases your risk. Although the news from the MRI is good, approximately 9% of men with a PI-RADS score of 2 have significant cancer.

However, it's the 4Kscore test results that are the most concerning. A 4Kscore result of 49% means that 49% of men with this result have clinically significant cancer. Combining lab results to come up with a single score isn't always easy. I couldn't find a single validated instrument to combine these data.

There are additional tests that could help give you more information. A phi test uses free PSA and proPSA, both of which provide additional information than a total PSA, to give another risk estimate. A PSA density test adjusts the PSA level for the size of the prostate. Your urologist should already have enough information to calculate these results.

With the information you have, the very high 4Kscore test has a greater effect on your prostate risk than the MRI. So, in my opinion, your risk of having clinically significant prostate cancer is closer to the 49% of the 4Kscore test than the 9% of the MRI. The safest thing to do here is to perform the biopsy, unless further information dramatically changes this risk.

In my opinion, the benefit from gaining information about your prostate health outweighs the risk of performing a prostate biopsy in a person on warfarin (most of whom can have it stopped temporarily).

DEAR DR. ROACH: What's the difference between being allergic and being intolerant to something? — B.I.A.

ANSWER: An allergy is a specific immune reaction that is usually mediated by a specific immunoglobulin, IgE, whereas intolerance can happen for many different reasons. For example, a milk allergy in an adult might cause a rash, which could be hives but may also include swelling of the lips and tongue. A person with a milk allergy might develop chest tightness and difficulty breathing. These symptoms can be life-threatening, and a person with a true milk allergy should carry an epinephrine injector.

In contrast, milk intolerance is usually from a lack of the enzyme lactase, which causes the person to develop diarrhea after consuming milk and milk products. In some cases, this can be quite severe, but because there's no skin, respiratory or cardiac involvement, it isn't life-threatening. There are many other examples of nonallergic intolerance.

CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Doles (out)
6 Croc's cousin
11 Banish
12 Barcelona buddy
13 Prairie State capital
15 Weed whacker
16 Dict. entry
17 Spot
18 Beaver State capital
20 Kiss
23 Crunch's cousin
27 Skating group
28 Leia's brother
29 Make sense
31 Door sign
32 Gem State capital
34 Reggae kin
37 Recipe amt.
38 Descriptive wd.
41 Sunshine State capital
44 Poet T.S.
45 Manicure targets
46 "I agree!"
47 Be patient for

DOWN

1 Netlike fabric
2 Trade show
3 Bike part
4 Yale rooter
5 "In the Night Kitchen" author
6 Blunders
7 French friend
8 Binds
9 Look lewdly
10 Took the bus
14 Salon stuff
18 Wash vigorously
19 "Winnie-the-Pooh" author
20 Mud bath site
21 Fuming
22 Help out
24 Chiding sound
25 Luau instrument
26 For each
30 Fries source
31 Sevilla's nation
33 Kinda: Suffix
34 Rose part
35 Healthy green
36 Stepped down
38 China setting
39 Sub spot
40 Witty remark
42 Brit's bathroom
43 Carpentry tool

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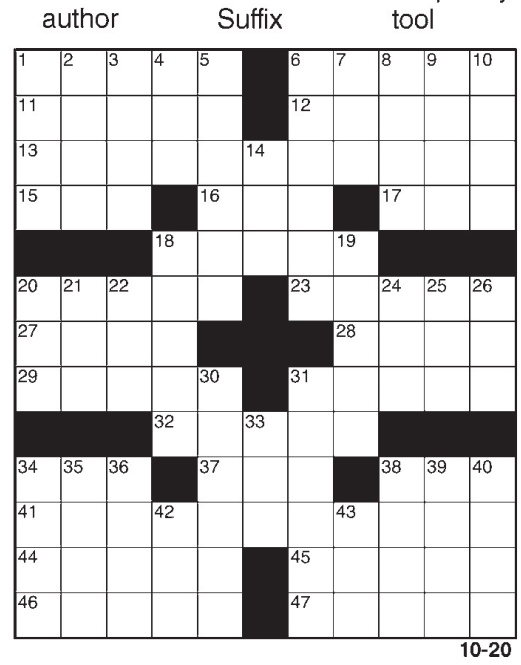
Friday's answer



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