

## HOUSE CALLS

### Early years are crucial for children

House Calls runs every other Saturday. Today's column is written by Sheryl Roeloffs and members of the Community Advisory Board.

You only want the best for your baby and so do the Del Norte Family Resource Center, First 5 of Del Norte and Sutter Coast Hospital.

It is very important to talk and read to your baby for healthy brain development. From the beginning, an infant's brain is like a sponge soaking up every word.

By attending Birth and Beyond Incredible Infants class, parents learn about a baby's brain development and how to take advantage of this critical time. Parenting is the most important job there is. Parents are their children's most important teachers. Every parent or caregiver has the power to impact a child's ability to learn.

The earliest years provide such an opportunity because 90 percent of the baby's brain development occurs by the age of 3. Early relationships and experiences shape how proficient a child becomes in his or her native language. Researchers found that when parents frequently spoke to their infants, their children learned almost 300 more words by age 2 than did their peers whose parents rarely spoke to them (Huttenlocher et al., 1991; also, Hart & Risley, 1995).

Studies also show that listening to the television provides little benefit to brain development. Infants need to interact directly with other human beings for them to develop optimal language skills.

Babies don't come with instruction manuals, even though most parents wish they did. Twelve weekly 1½-hour classes are an opportunity for parents to share experiences, make new friends and support one another. Parents learn about infants' ages and stages of healthy development milestones, practical answers to day-to-day life as a parent, child safety and how to take care of themselves and their baby for a healthy start for the whole family.

Topics covered include:

- Building and strengthen your support network.
- Developing skills for helping your baby view the world as a safe place.
- Learning important developmental milestones for the first year of your baby's life.
- Learning infant CPR, taught by a certified instructor.
- Learning how to understand, accept and respect your baby's individuality, thus helping him or her grow.
- Talking with other parents about how your life has changed since the birth of your baby.
- Exploring how your role as daughter, son, friend, wife or husband has been changed by the birth of your baby.
- Discovering opportunities and responsibilities that come with creating a healthy play environment for your baby.
- Learning the importance of healthy family routines and patterns.
- Learning to create a "baby friendly" environment that meets your baby's needs for active exploration while meeting your needs for safety and order.

Parenting is the most important job! Birth and Beyond Incredible Infants gives families a healthy start to ensure that infants are born into healthy families and are raised in a supportive environment.

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Eric Nokes, who has osteoarthritis in both knees, bends down to return a low ball from a tennis ball machine at Sage Springs Club & Spa in Sunriver, Ore. Ryan Brennecke / WesCom News Service

## Are you weak in the knees?

By Anne Aurd • WesCom News Service

**E**ric Nokes has taught tennis for 15 years, and played for much longer. At 35, he's got osteoarthritis in his knees, a painful condition in which the cartilage that cushions the knee joint deteriorates, causing stiffness and pain that make it hard for Nokes to do his job.

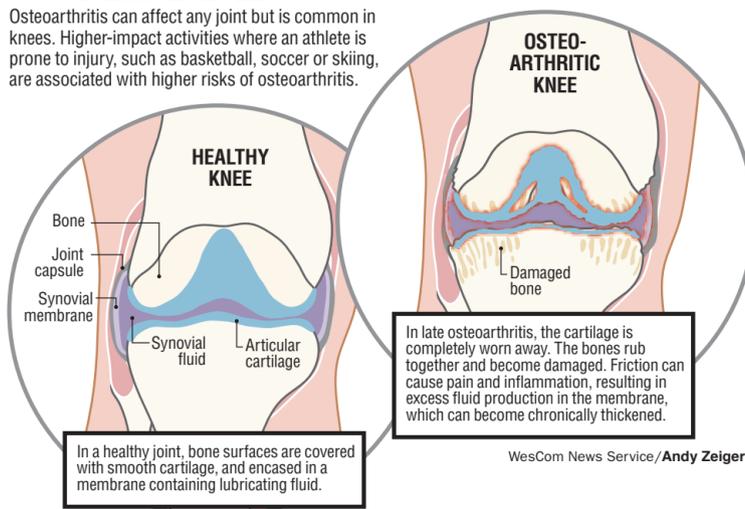
More than a year ago, the shooting pain started in one knee. Then the other. At its apex, the pain prevented him from playing with his two young kids. Climbing stairs was excruciating. He didn't work out for about six months while he was figuring it all out, and that was bad for his mental health.

A sports medicine specialist told him knee osteoarthritis was degenerative and would only get worse, "which is a hard thing to hear, especially because I'm only 35 years old and my profession involves me being on my feet and using my legs. ... I've always been fit, not overweight, always active and doing the right things. So for a few months I was crabby and upset about it," he said.

Nokes asked his orthopedic surgeon to give him total knee replacement surgery. But replacements are not generally recommended for people Nokes' age. For now, he's learning how to manage the pain so he can keep teaching tennis in Sunriver, Ore. and he's delaying knee surgery as long as possible.

### Osteoarthritis in the knee

Osteoarthritis can affect any joint but is common in knees. Higher-impact activities where an athlete is prone to injury, such as basketball, soccer or skiing, are associated with higher risks of osteoarthritis.



Source: Woodward Medical Center, "The Complete Human Body" by Alice Roberts

### Trending younger

Osteoarthritis is a common malady in middle-aged and older people, but it can also be a young person's problem, and that demographic is growing.

Americans are expected to be diagnosed with knee osteoarthritis at much younger ages this decade

than in previous decades, according to a recent study from the Orthopedics and Arthritis Center for Outcomes Research at the Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston. The average age of patients diagnosed with knee osteoarthritis is projected to fall from age 72 in the 1990s to 56 in the

2010s — a 16-year difference. The study also says about 5 percent of all Americans ages 45 to 54 would be diagnosed with knee osteoarthritis over the next decade, compared with only 1.5 percent during the 1990s. This younger diagnosis might reflect a higher participation in sports within a

segment of the population, said Dr. Sharon Kolasinski, a professor of medicine at the Cooper Medical School at Rowan University and the head of the rheumatology division at Cooper University Hospital in New Jersey. These active athletes demand more from their joints and are more likely to injure their knees than sedentary people. Certain knee injuries predispose people to accelerated osteoarthritis, she said.

"The flip side is that the remarkable increase in obesity of another segment of the U.S. population is clearly leading to an increase in knee osteoarthritis due to the biomechanical stress of obesity as well as possible metabolic effects of increased body fat," she said.

Dr. Kathryn Schabel, a knee and hip expert at Oregon Health & Science University in Portland, said knee osteoarthritis can stem from poor genetic luck; some people are just born with cartilage that just wasn't made to last.

But most of the cases of younger patients — people Nokes' age — result from a more discernible activity-related cause, Schabel said. Injuries to the knee ligaments, meniscus (cartilaginous tissue), articular cartilage or bones increase the risk of accelerated osteoarthritis. Even "subclinical

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## health happens here



This message is brought to you by Building Healthy Communities

## VITAL SIGNS: Too Many Aren't Kindergarten Ready

**S**eventy-seven percent of Del Norte kindergarteners began the school year without the skills to be academically successful by the third grade, a study funded by First 5 Del Norte says.

Only 23 percent of kindergarteners started the school year with the combination of self-regulation and kindergarten academic skills the study's authors say is the strongest predictor of academic success 3.5 years later.

"We tend to look at school success as mostly academic, but we need to focus on the whole child concept rather than the academics," said Patricia Vernelson, executive director of First 5 Del Norte. "Little people need social and emotional skills and confidence; and they need to be able to control impulses, follow directions, negotiate solutions, play cooperatively and

handle frustrations without falling apart. Those self-regulation skills are not understood enough and are critical."

Two factors related to higher levels of school readiness were children not appearing tired in class and parents receiving readiness information and engaging in transition activities for their child.

"The greater the percentage of students we have truly ready to enter our school system, the better the opportunity that they are going to have to be successful," said Don Olson, superintendent of Del Norte County Unified School District. "Early intervention is the key if we are to solve these individual needs."

Vernelson and Olson, part of the Building Healthy Communities collaborative, suggest the following:

- Provide opportunities for pretend play at home and in the classroom. Imaginative play gives children a chance to safely explore feelings while practicing and learning about social norms and rules.
- Structure the home and classroom so that children have daily opportunities to make choices, think ahead, plan activities and consider and use strategies to solve social problems. Self-regulation activities such as paying attention, following directions and controlling frustration and anger must be practiced early and often.
- Read with children. Use their books, or create stories, to talk about emotions and different ways people respond when they feel frustrated or angry.
- Establish regular bedtime. Make sure your child gets eight to 10 hours of

sleep a night. Students who appear to be tired on some, most or all days are less prepared in all school readiness areas — especially self-regulation.

• Higher family income is associated with higher readiness. Call First 5 Del Norte and the Del Norte Family Resource Center at 464-5500 or go to [www.delnortekids.org/](http://www.delnortekids.org/) to find out about local resources that include help with basic needs, parenting classes, and assistance for a special needs child.

• Contact the Del Norte County Unified School District at 464-6141 or go to its website at [www.delnorte.k12.ca.us/](http://www.delnorte.k12.ca.us/). Scroll under Parent Information on the left and click on Kindergarten Information. Links to kindergarten preparedness websites and transitional kindergarten at Bess Maxwell School are there.