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Health & Wellness[®] MAGAZINE

February 2025

Lee Edition - Monthly

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**EMPOWERING
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Empowering Women to STOP Suffering in Silence

By Ivan R. Bracic, D.C.

Urinary incontinence affects over 19 million women in the United States, yet many suffer in silence. Dr. Ivan Bracic is introducing EMSELLA™, a groundbreaking technology that offers hope to those affected by this common condition. This innovative treatment stimulates the entire pelvic floor region and restores neuromuscular control, revolutionizing women's wellness through its non-invasive approach to treating urinary incontinence.

The condition primarily stems from weakened pelvic floor muscles, often resulting from childbirth, menopause, or natural aging. Despite its prevalence, research from the National Association for Continence (NAFC) shows that half of affected women never seek treatment, significantly impacting their self-esteem and quality of life.

"Given how common this is for women, it always surprises me that women keep it to themselves as many of their friends and colleagues are suffering as well," notes Dr. Bracic. "Our integrative wellness practice treats many situations, and this is one we didn't want to overlook. When our patients hear we have EMSELLA™, they're excited to learn we can treat this issue and stop suffering in silence."

Urinary incontinence affects approximately 35% of women worldwide and manifests in three forms: stress incontinence (leakage during physical activity), urge incontinence (strong & sudden), and mixed incontinence (a combination of both). The condition often forces women to abandon exercise routines and can lead to decreased self-confidence and intimacy.

EMSELLA™ employs High-Intensity Focused Electromagnetic (HIFEM) technology to comprehensively treat the pelvic floor region. A single session delivers thousands of supramaximal pelvic floor muscle contractions, equivalent to performing thousands of Kegel exercises. These contractions are crucial for muscle re-education in incontinent patients.

Clinical studies demonstrate the treatment's effectiveness. All study participants reported improved awareness of their pelvic floor muscles, with 95% expressing satisfaction and significant quality of life improvements after completing six treatments.



Moreover, 67% of treated patients either completely eliminated or reduced their use of hygienic pads in daily life.

The EMSELLA™ treatment offers several advantages over traditional therapies:

- Non-invasive procedure
- No recovery time needed
- Patients remain fully clothed during treatment
- Targets the entire pelvic floor region simultaneously
- Provides measurable results

This breakthrough technology represents a significant advance in women's health, offering a dignified solution to a condition that affects millions. By making treatment more accessible and comfortable, EMSELLA™ empowers women to address their incontinence concerns and reclaim their quality of life.

For women struggling with incontinence, this innovative treatment provides hope and an opportunity to break free from the limitations and embarrassment

References:

1 Leede Research, "Views on OAB: A Study for the National Association of Continence." December 16, 2015.

2 HIFEM Technology Can Improve Quality of Life of Incontinent Patients, Berenholz J., MD, Sims T., MD, Botros G., MD, Individual results may vary.

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THE CONNECTION BETWEEN SLEEP, TESTOSTERONE AND SEXUAL HEALTH

By Dr. Ernesto Eusebio

Sleep is a fundamental aspect of our overall health, and its impact on various bodily functions is profound. One less reported area where sleep plays a crucial role is in the regulation of libido and testosterone levels. In this month's article I will try to summarize the relationship between sleep, low libido, and testosterone levels in an effort to emphasize the importance of maintaining good sleep for optimal sexual health and hormonal balance.

Testosterone is a hormone primarily produced in the testes in men and in smaller amounts in the ovaries in women. It plays a vital role in various bodily functions, including muscle mass, bone density, mood regulation, and sexual desire. In men, testosterone levels typically peak during adolescence and early adulthood, gradually declining with age. In women, testosterone levels are significantly lower but still essential for maintaining libido and overall health.

Testosterone production follows a circadian rhythm, with levels rising during sleep and peaking during the early morning hours. This natural cycle is crucial for maintaining healthy testosterone levels. Research has shown that insufficient sleep or poor sleep quality can disrupt this cycle. For instance, studies have found that men who get less than 7 hours of sleep per night may experience a drop in testosterone levels, negatively affecting their energy levels, mood, and libido.

Libido, or sexual desire, is influenced by various factors, including hormonal balance, psychological state, and overall health. Testosterone is a key hormone in regulating libido, and its levels are closely linked to sleep quality. The disruption on testosterone production caused by poor sleep could lead to a decrease in sexual desire. Additionally, sleep deprivation can increase levels of cortisol, the body's primary stress hormone, which can further suppress libido.

The Bidirectional Relationship

The relationship between sleep and testosterone is bidirectional. While poor sleep can lead to lower testosterone levels, low testosterone can also contribute to sleep disturbances. For example, low testosterone levels have been associated with increased sleep fragmentation and reduced sleep efficiency. This creates a vicious cycle where poor sleep leads to lower testosterone, which in turn exacerbates sleep problems.



The Connection Between Sleep Apnea and Low Testosterone

Sleep Apnea is a common sleep disorder defined by frequent stopping breathing episodes during sleep. Sleep apnea can significantly impact testosterone production by affecting your circadian rhythm. It results in frequent unconscious awakenings, preventing the body from entering the deeper stages of sleep crucial for hormone production. The repeated episodes of oxygen deprivation (hypoxia) associated with sleep apnea can also reduce testosterone production through oxidative stress and inflammation, directly impacting the testes' function and the hypothalamic-pituitary-gonadal axis.

Additionally, low testosterone can exacerbate sleep apnea symptoms. Individuals with low testosterone often experience fatigue and weaker respiratory muscles, contributing to increased likelihood and severity of sleep apnea episodes. This creates a vicious cycle where one condition worsens the other, making management challenging.

The Role of Testosterone Replacement Therapy

Testosterone Replacement Therapy (TRT) is frequently prescribed to men with low testosterone levels to alleviate symptoms like decreased libido, fatigue, and muscle mass loss. However, TRT's might exacerbate or even induce sleep apnea in susceptible individuals. One study found that healthy men experienced increased hypoxemia (low blood oxygen levels) and disrupted sleep breathing patterns after receiving high-dose testosterone injections. Similarly, men with hypogonadism (low testosterone) saw a rise in disordered breathing events when on TRT.

The underlying mechanisms are not entirely clear, but it is believed that testosterone might affect the body's respiratory control centers, leading to compromised airway stability during sleep. Thus, for individuals already suffering from sleep apnea, TRT could worsen their condition.

Conclusion

The relationship between sleep, low libido, and testosterone is complex and multifaceted. Adequate sleep is essential for maintaining healthy testosterone levels, which in turn supports libido and overall sexual health.

Sleep apnea can reduce testosterone production by disrupting sleep and causing oxidative stress, while low testosterone can worsen sleep apnea symptoms by weakening respiratory muscles.

While TRT can help alleviate symptoms of low testosterone, it can also exacerbate sleep apnea in susceptible individuals. Therefore, a careful and individualized approach to TRT is necessary, particularly for those at risk or already suffering from sleep apnea. Consulting with healthcare professionals and considering both conditions together can lead to tailored treatments, improving overall health outcomes and quality of life.

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Umbilical Stem Cell Therapy: A Revolutionary Approach to Joint Pain Relief

By Derek P. Wimmer, PA-C

Millions of people worldwide suffer from chronic joint pain and degenerative conditions that significantly impact their quality of life. While traditional treatments often focus on managing symptoms, umbilical stem cell therapy has emerged as a promising regenerative medicine approach that could potentially offer long-lasting relief and healing. This innovative treatment harnesses the remarkable properties of stem cells derived from umbilical cord tissue to address joint pain and inflammation at their source.

Umbilical stem cells, also known as umbilical cord mesenchymal stem cells (UC-MSCs), are harvested from donated umbilical cords after healthy births. These cells possess unique characteristics that make them particularly valuable for therapeutic applications. Unlike embryonic stem cells, umbilical stem cells avoid ethical concerns while maintaining powerful regenerative capabilities. They are also more potent and versatile than adult stem cells, which typically decline in function as we age.

The therapeutic potential of UC-MSCs lies in their remarkable ability to perform multiple functions within the body. These cells can differentiate into various cell types, including cartilage, bone, and connective tissue cells. Additionally, they release powerful anti-inflammatory compounds and growth factors that promote healing and tissue regeneration. This dual action makes them particularly effective in treating joint conditions and chronic pain.

When administered for joint pain relief, umbilical stem cells work through several mechanisms. First, they can help repair damaged cartilage and other joint tissues by differentiating into the necessary cell types. Second, they reduce inflammation through the secretion of anti-inflammatory molecules, helping to break the cycle of chronic pain and further tissue damage. Third, they stimulate the body's natural healing processes by releasing growth factors that promote tissue repair and regeneration.

Clinical applications of umbilical stem cell therapy have shown promising results in treating various joint conditions, including osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, and sports-related injuries. Patients typically receive the treatment through targeted



injections directly into the affected joints or through intravenous administration. The procedure is minimally invasive and can be performed on an outpatient basis, with many patients reporting significant improvements in pain levels and joint function within weeks or months of treatment.

One of the key advantages of umbilical stem cell therapy is its safety profile. Since these cells are immunologically privileged, meaning they rarely trigger an immune response, the risk of rejection is minimal. Furthermore, the cells undergo rigorous screening and processing to ensure their safety and quality before use. This makes them a viable option for patients who may not be suitable candidates for more invasive surgical procedures.

Research continues to demonstrate the effectiveness of umbilical stem cell therapy for joint pain relief. Studies have shown improvements in pain scores, joint function, and quality of life measures among treated patients. For example, a recent clinical trial focusing on knee osteoarthritis reported that patients receiving umbilical stem cell injections experienced significant pain reduction and improved mobility compared to those receiving conventional treatments.

Despite the promising results, it's important to note that umbilical stem cell therapy is still an evolving field. While many patients experience significant benefits, individual results can vary. Factors such as the severity of the condition, the patient's overall health, and the specific protocol used can all influence treatment outcomes. Additionally, multiple treatments may be necessary to achieve optimal results, and the long-term durability of the effects is still being studied.

The future of umbilical stem cell therapy looks bright, with ongoing research exploring new applications and refinements to treatment protocols. Scientists are investigating ways to enhance the therapeutic potential of these cells through various processing techniques and combination therapies. As our understanding of stem cell biology continues to advance, we may discover even more effective ways to harness their healing potential for joint pain relief.

For those considering umbilical stem cell therapy, it's essential to consult with qualified healthcare providers who specialize in regenerative medicine. These professionals can evaluate individual cases and determine whether stem cell therapy is an appropriate treatment option. They can also provide guidance on what to expect during treatment and help monitor progress throughout the healing process.

As we continue to witness advances in regenerative medicine, umbilical stem cell therapy represents a promising frontier in the treatment of joint pain and related conditions. With its unique combination of safety, effectiveness, and regenerative potential, this innovative therapy offers hope to those seeking alternatives to traditional pain management approaches.

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BREAKING THE STIGMA: Empowering Your Mental Health Journey

By Jo Ortiz, PMHNP-BC

In a world where we readily seek medical attention for physical ailments, many still hesitate to address their mental health needs. The persistent stigma surrounding mental health conditions continues to create barriers, preventing countless individuals from accessing the support they deserve. However, a powerful shift is occurring as more people share their stories and champion the importance of mental wellness.

Sarah Martinez, a 34-year-old marketing executive, remembers the day she finally reached out for help. "I spent years believing I needed to 'tough it out' through my anxiety and depression," she shares. "I worried what my colleagues would think if they knew I was seeing a therapist. Looking back, seeking help was the strongest decision I've ever made." Today, Sarah advocates for mental health awareness in her workplace, helping create a more supportive environment for others facing similar challenges.

Understanding when to seek support is crucial for early intervention and better outcomes. While everyone experiences occasional emotional difficulties, certain signs warrant professional attention. These include persistent changes in sleep patterns, difficulty maintaining relationships or work responsibilities, unexplained physical symptoms, or feelings of hopelessness that last more than two weeks. Remember: seeking help isn't a sign of weakness—it's an act of self-care and personal responsibility.

The landscape of mental health support has evolved significantly. Traditional therapy now coexists with innovative approaches like teletherapy, support groups, and mental wellness apps. This diversity of options makes mental health care more accessible than ever before. James Chen, a licensed clinical psychologist, notes, "We're seeing more people embrace therapy as part of their overall wellness routine, just like exercise or healthy eating. This normalization is crucial for breaking down stigma."



Personal stories of recovery provide powerful testimony to the possibility of positive change. Michael Thompson, a high school teacher, battled social anxiety for decades before seeking treatment. "I was terrified of being judged for my mental health struggles," he recalls. "But when I finally opened up, I discovered so many others had similar experiences. Now, I'm open with my students about mental health, showing them it's okay to ask for help."

Communities play a vital role in dismantling mental health stigma. Workplaces are implementing mental health days and employee assistance programs. Schools are incorporating mental wellness education into their curricula. Religious and cultural organizations are addressing mental health within their communities, recognizing that spiritual well-being and mental health often intertwine.

Taking the first step toward mental health support can feel daunting, but several strategies can help:

Start with your primary care physician if you're unsure where to begin. They can provide initial guidance and appropriate referrals.

Research mental health professionals who understand your specific needs and cultural background. Many now offer free initial consultations to ensure a good fit.

Confide in trusted friends or family members who can provide support and accountability during your journey.

Explore online resources and support groups to connect with others who share similar experiences.

Remember that recovery isn't always linear. Progress might include setbacks, but each step forward contributes to long-term well-being.

The conversation around mental health continues to evolve, with public figures, athletes, and celebrities increasingly sharing their own mental health journeys. Their openness helps normalize these experiences and demonstrates that mental health challenges can affect anyone, regardless of success or status.

As we move forward, let's remember that everyone deserves access to mental health support without fear of judgment or discrimination. By sharing our stories, supporting others, and prioritizing our own mental well-being, we contribute to a more compassionate and understanding society—one where seeking help for mental health is as natural as treating any other medical condition.

Your mental health journey is uniquely yours, but you don't have to walk it alone. Whether you're taking your first steps toward support or continuing along your path to wellness, remember that seeking help is an act of courage that can open the door to transformation and healing.



Meet Jo Ortiz, PMHNP-BC

Bilingual in Spanish and English, Jo is one of the visionary leaders at Phoenix Behavioral Group. As a board-certified Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner, Jo brings a wealth of expertise and a compassionate touch to the forefront of patient care. With unwavering dedication, she strives to empower individuals to reclaim their mental health and lead more fulfilling lives.

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SHOW YOUR EYES SOME LOVE: Essential Tips for Maintaining Healthy Vision

In our digital age, our eyes work harder than ever before. From smartphones to computer screens, our visual system faces unprecedented challenges. Yet, many of us take our eye health for granted until problems arise. Here's how you can protect and nurture your precious vision with some practical eye care tips.

Practice the 20-20-20 Rule

Digital eye strain is a growing concern, but there's a simple solution: the 20-20-20 rule. Every 20 minutes, take a 20-second break and look at something 20 feet away. This simple habit helps reduce eye fatigue and prevents your eye muscles from becoming locked in a fixed position. Set a reminder if needed – your eyes will thank you.

Optimize Your Work Environment

Proper lighting and screen positioning make a significant difference. Position your computer screen at arm's length and slightly below eye level. Reduce glare by adjusting room lighting and consider using an anti-glare screen protector. If possible, choose natural lighting over harsh fluorescent lights, which can contribute to eye strain.

Protect Against UV Radiation

Sun damage isn't just bad for your skin – it can harm your eyes too. Invest in quality sunglasses that block both UVA and UVB rays, and wear them year-round, not just in summer. When choosing sunglasses, look for labels indicating "100% UV protection" or "UV400." Don't forget to wear them even on cloudy days, as UV rays can penetrate cloud cover.

Nourish Your Eyes Through Diet

Your diet plays a crucial role in maintaining eye health. Include foods rich in omega-3 fatty acids, lutein, zinc, and vitamins C and E. Think leafy greens, fatty fish, eggs, nuts, and colorful fruits and vegetables. These nutrients help prevent age-related vision problems and maintain overall eye health.

Stay Hydrated and Well-Rested

Proper hydration helps maintain the natural lubrication of your eyes. When you're dehydrated, your eyes can become dry and irritated. Additionally, getting adequate sleep allows your eyes to rest and repair themselves. Lack of sleep can lead to eye strain, twitching, and even temporary vision problems.



Regular Eye Examinations Matter

Don't wait for vision problems to schedule an eye exam. Regular check-ups can detect potential issues before they become serious. Adults should have comprehensive eye exams at least every two years, while those with existing conditions or over 60 should visit annually or as recommended by their eye care professional.

Exercise Your Eyes

Just like other muscles, your eyes benefit from exercise. Try focusing exercises: hold a pen at arm's length, focus on it, then slowly bring it closer to your nose while maintaining focus. Another simple exercise is to roll your eyes in circles occasionally throughout the day to help relieve tension.

Consider Blue Light Protection

While research is ongoing about blue light's long-term effects, many find that blue light filtering glasses or screen settings help reduce eye fatigue during screen time. If you spend many hours in front of digital devices, this extra protection might be worth considering.

Remember, your eyes are irreplaceable. These simple yet effective habits can help maintain your vision health for years to come. By incorporating these practices into your daily routine, you're investing in one of your most valuable assets – your sight. Start showing your eyes some love today, and they'll serve you well throughout your lifetime.



BRIAN MARHUE, O.D.
Optometric Physician

Dr. Marhue is a board-certified optometric physician that provides a wide variety of primary eye care to patients. He completed his bachelor's degree and Doctor of Optometry degrees at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. He completed externships at Omega Eye Care Center, Piedmont Medical Center, Birmingham V.A. Medical Center and the Sparks Center for Developmental Vision Clinic.

Dr. Marhue's present and past memberships include Students of Optometry Serving Humanity, the Trinidad and Tobago Optometrists Association, Florida Surgical Eye Expeditions, the American Optometric Association, the Florida Optometric Association and the Southwest Florida Optometric Association.

He served as the president of the Southwest Florida Optometric Association for over four years and has participated in multiple eye mission trips to Trinidad, Guatemala and El Salvador.

Born in Trinidad, he completed high school and started college in Toronto and completed his last years of undergraduate and professional training at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. He served as the Director of Optometry at the Eye Centers of Florida for 14 years before joining Southwest Florida Eye Care as a partner which is now part of Center For Sight.

Dr. Marhue has lived in Fort Myers since 1991. He loves spending any time he gets with his two wonderful adult children, Aaron and Brittne. He and his wife Tricia enjoy their families, hiking, cycling, soccer and fishing.



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WHY SUPPORTIVE SNEAKERS AND PROPER STRETCHING ARE ESSENTIAL FOR RUNNERS

By Patrick Bartholomew Jr., DPM, AACFAS

As a podiatrist, I frequently see patients experiencing foot and lower limb pain from improper footwear or neglecting stretching before and after running. Whether you're new to running or a seasoned athlete, caring for your feet and muscles is crucial to prevent injury and ensure long-term performance. In this article, I'll explain why choosing the right sneakers and establishing a suitable pre- and post-workout stretching routine are essential for your running health.

The Importance of Supportive Sneakers for Runners

Supportive sneakers are fundamental for maintaining a healthy running routine. Beyond aesthetics and brand popularity, the functionality of your footwear significantly impacts your running experience. Here's why:

Foot Arch Support: Your feet vary in arch type—flat, high, or neutral—each requiring specific support. Wearing shoes that match your foot's structure prevents discomfort and injury. For instance, motion-control shoes benefit flat-footed runners by preventing overpronation, while high-arched runners need cushioned stability shoes.

Shock Absorption: Running generates substantial foot pressure. Quality running shoes absorb shock, reducing strain on joints and lowering injury risks like shin splints and plantar fasciitis. Inadequate cushioning forces your feet and legs to absorb excess shock, leading to wear and tear over time.

Proper Fit: Ill-fitting shoes cause blisters, calluses, and chronic pain. Ideal shoes offer ample toe box space, snug heel fit, and arch support. Regular foot measurements are essential, especially for frequent runners whose feet may change shape or size.

Durability and Stability: Durable, stable shoes maintain foot and ankle alignment, reducing sprain and strain risks. Investing in quality shoes designed for running longevity protects your feet and enhances performance.



Pre-Workout Stretching: Why It's Crucial for Runners

Stretching before running is crucial for preparing your body for the physical demands of exercise. It helps enhance flexibility, improves blood circulation, and activates the muscles you'll use during your run. A simple stretching routine can include the following exercises:

Dynamic Stretching: These stretches involve movement to activate muscles, tendons, and ligaments crucial for running. Examples include leg swings, lunges with twists, and high knees, improving range of motion and injury prevention.

Focus on the Lower Body: Target calves, hamstrings, quads, and hip flexors to optimize performance and prevent tightness during and after running.

Post-Workout Stretching: A Key Component to Recovery

After running, it's important to focus on flexibility and recovery to help your muscles relax and prevent tightness. This approach not only alleviates muscle tension but also enhances your stride efficiency, allowing for smoother and more effective movement in future runs.

Static Stretching: Hold stretches for 15-30 seconds to reach deep muscle tissues. Effective stretches include calf stretches, hamstring stretches, and hip flexor stretches, promoting flexibility and reducing stiffness.

Running offers fitness benefits but strains the feet and muscles. Proper sneakers and a consistent stretching routine are vital for performance and long-term health. As a podiatrist, I emphasize foot care and flexibility to prevent injuries and enjoy running for years. For personalized advice on footwear or stretching, schedule a consultation to prioritize your foot health and running enjoyment. Happy running!

Patrick Bartholomew Jr., DPM, AACFAS

Dr. Bartholomew works at Family Foot & Leg Center at the Cape Coral office. He is accepting new patients.

To make an appointment, call 239-430-3668 or visit www.NaplesPodiatrist.com.



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Fun Day Trips for Seniors Near Bonita Springs

Bonita Springs is a gem for seniors seeking delightful day trips filled with adventure, relaxation, and cultural enrichment. With a blend of scenic landscapes, historical charm, and leisurely activities, there's something for everyone to enjoy. From serene beaches to scenic parks, these outings offer a chance to immerse yourself in the area's natural surroundings.

Whether you're interested in exploring local history or simply enjoying a peaceful day in nature, Bonita Springs offers a variety of experiences that cater to your interests and mobility needs.

Here's a guide to some of the best day trips for seniors in and around Bonita Springs, perfect for making the most of your golden years.



Naples, FL

1. Explore Nature's Beauty

Lovers Key State Park

Renowned for its tranquil beauty, Lovers Key State Park is a paradise for nature enthusiasts. Seniors can enjoy peaceful walks along flat, well-kept trails, making it an ideal spot for bird-watching, relaxing by the water or having a picnic. The park also provides beach wheelchairs, ensuring accessibility for all visitors.

Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary

Immerse yourself in a preserved swamp ecosystem. The elevated boardwalk makes it easy to navigate, providing a secure and enjoyable way to explore this natural wonder. Along the trail, you might spot alligators, turtles, and an array of bird species, making it a truly unique experience.

2. Relax on the Beaches

Unwind at the beautiful beaches near Bonita Springs:



Bonita Beach, FL

Bonita Beach Park

A favorite among locals and visitors alike, Bonita Beach Park offers seniors a serene spot to unwind. With ample facilities, including accessible restrooms and picnic tables, it's a great place to enjoy the ocean breeze, have a leisurely meal or take a gentle stroll along the shore.

Barefoot Beach Preserve

Barefoot Beach Preserve provides a serene escape from the busy pace of life. Its accessible pathways, shaded picnic areas, and breathtaking sunsets make it a perfect spot for seniors to relax and see what Southwest Florida has to offer.

3. Discover Local Culture

Enjoy the vibrant cultural scene just a short drive from Bonita Springs:

Naples Botanical Garden

A short drive from Bonita Springs, the Naples Botanical Garden delights the senses. The garden is thoughtfully designed with wide, shaded paths and plenty of seating, making it easy for seniors to explore. Enjoy the beautifully themed gardens, seasonal exhibits, and educational programs that provide a deeper appreciation of the natural world.

The Baker Museum

Art enthusiasts will find plenty of inspiration at The Baker Museum in Naples. Featuring a range of exhibitions from classic to contemporary, this museum is senior-friendly with its accessible layout and welcoming atmosphere. It's an excellent spot to spend a culturally enriching afternoon.

Artis—Naples

Beyond The Baker Museum, Artis—Naples hosts a variety of live performances, including symphonies, theater, and ballet. Seniors who enjoy the arts will appreciate the rich cultural experiences offered here, making it a must-visit for those looking to enrich their lives with music and theater.

4. Visit Historic Towns

Step back in time and immerse yourself in the history and charm of nearby towns:

Everglades City

Venture to Everglades City for a glimpse into Florida's rich history. This quaint town offers a laid-back atmosphere, with opportunities to visit local museums, enjoy waterfront dining, and learn about the area's unique heritage. It's a perfect destination for a relaxed yet educational outing.

Matlacha

Step into the vibrant world of Matlacha, a colorful fishing village known for its eclectic art galleries, charming boutiques, and cozy cafes. The town's laid-back vibe and welcoming atmosphere make it a perfect destination for seniors to explore, shop, and enjoy dining experiences.

Fort Myers River District

Experience the charm of the historic Fort Myers River District. With its brick-lined streets, unique shops, and diverse dining options, this area is a lively yet accessible destination. Seniors will enjoy the array of cultural events, live music, and the opportunity to explore at their own pace.



Are you interested in learning more about Acts and The Terraces at Bonita Springs?

Schedule a community tour today by calling 239-204-3469 or take a virtual tour right now! Please join us for our next event!



5. Enjoy Leisurely Activities

Take a break from the everyday hustle and indulge in some leisurely activities around Bonita Springs:

Tin City

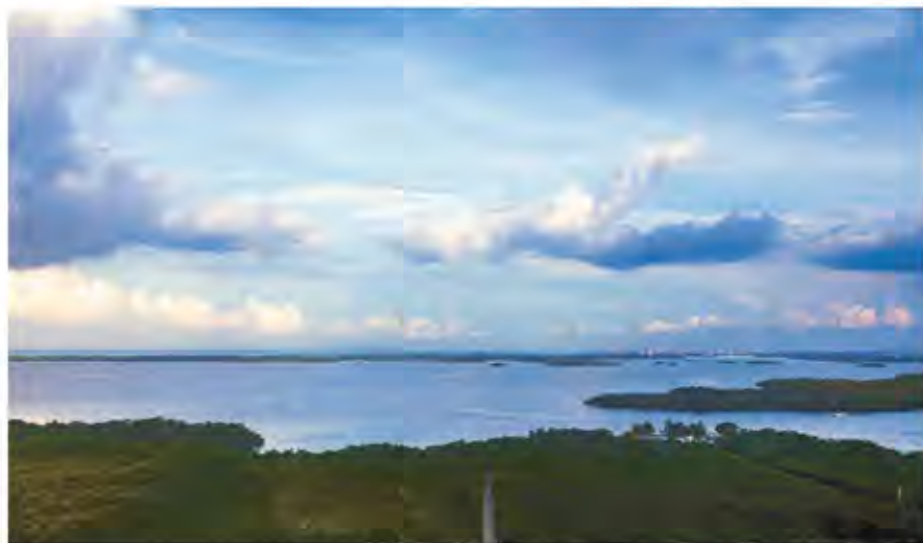
Tin City in Naples offers a nostalgic waterfront shopping experience. Stroll through unique shops, indulge in delicious food, and take in the scenic views. The relaxed atmosphere and easy-to-navigate layout make it a favorite for seniors looking for a leisurely day out.

Koreshan State Park

Discover Koreshan State Park, where you can explore easy walking trails and historic buildings. The park offers picnic spots for a relaxing outdoor meal, making it an ideal destination for a day of leisurely exploration and enjoyment.

Wonder Gardens

Wonder Gardens in Bonita Springs is a must-visit destination for nature enthusiasts. The garden features rehabilitated and non-releasable birds and reptiles, offering visitors a unique opportunity to observe and learn about these creatures up close. With its educational exhibits, Wonder Gardens provides an engaging experience for guests to explore wildlife conservation efforts and gain a deeper understanding of the natural world.



Estero Bay, FL

Make the Most of Your Day Trips With The Terraces at Bonita Springs

At The Terraces at Bonita Springs, our residents enjoy the freedom to explore these wonderful destinations, making every day an opportunity for adventure and relaxation. Our community promotes an active lifestyle, encouraging residents to engage with their surroundings and participate in exciting outings.

With organized group excursions and convenient transportation options, you can easily join friends for a day of exploration or relaxation, whether a trip to a scenic nature park, a visit to a charming local town or a cultural experience at a nearby museum.

Our supportive environment allows you to maintain independence while enriching your life with new experiences. With a calendar full of activities and outings tailored to all interests, there's always something happening at The Terraces.

Contact us today at 239-208-6963 to learn how The Terraces at Bonita Springs can enhance your lifestyle, support your independence, and open doors to exciting new adventures in and around Bonita Springs.

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ALIGNMENT MATTERS:

Pilates as a Pathway to Physical Therapy Success

By Shannon Willits, Master Pilates Educator

The healing art of movement is often overlooked in a world increasingly dominated by quick fixes and high-tech solutions. Yet, Pilates continues to emerge as a remarkably effective physical therapy and rehabilitation tool. Its focus on controlled, mindful movements and functional strength has made it a valuable resource for physical therapists and movement specialists.

The Mind-Body Connection: A Forgotten Element in Recovery

Unlike traditional rehabilitation exercises that are restricted to focus on individual muscle groups, Pilates teaches the body to move as a cohesive unit. The human body operates as an integrated system rather than separate parts. Pilates aligns seamlessly with this perspective by promoting movement patterns that reconnect the nervous system with muscular function.

For instance, someone recovering from a shoulder injury doesn't just need stronger deltoid muscles—they need their core, scapular stabilizers, and hip alignment to work in harmony. Exercises like the Arm Springs Series on the Cadillac train the entire kinetic chain while rehabilitating the shoulder.

This holistic approach proves especially effective for clients with chronic pain conditions. Pilates helps retrain the nervous system to perceive movement as safe, breaking the pain cycle. Pilates prioritizes precision and control over brute strength or high repetition, as movement quality precedes quantity.

Rebuilding Core Strength: Beyond Visible Abs

Core strength is often oversimplified as merely having visible abdominal muscles. However, in Pilates, the core encompasses a deeper network of muscles, including the diaphragm, pelvic floor, multifidus, and transverse abdominis that interconnect and work together as a unit. This interconnected system is fundamental for maintaining stability and reducing the risk of injury.

Pilates integrates specialized equipment like the Reformer and Chair to safely and effectively target these deeper core muscles. For example, the Footwork Series on the Reformer stabilizes the pelvis, activates the transverse abdominis, and promotes balanced strength throughout the lower body. Additionally, Pilates emphasizes controlled, lengthening movements, which are especially valuable for addressing muscular tightness and imbalances often resulting from injuries or poor posture. This approach provides a comprehensive method for restoring function and enhancing overall physical resilience.



The Breath Connection:

Oxygen as a Healing Tool

Joseph Pilates famously stated, "Above all, learn how to breathe correctly." This emphasis on breath is far from a philosophical add-on; it's a cornerstone of rehabilitation. Many physical therapy clients struggle with poor diaphragmatic function, which exacerbates pain and limits mobility.

Pilates integrates breath into every movement, encouraging efficient oxygen exchange and activation of the parasympathetic nervous system. Exercises like the Hundred or Spine Stretch Forward require deep, intentional breaths that engage the core and facilitate relaxation and circulation. This intentional breathwork aids lymphatic drainage, reduces inflammation, and enhances overall recovery—a powerful complement to manual therapy techniques.

Aligning the Spine, Restoring Freedom

Spinal health is central to both Pilates and physical therapy. The spine is more than a structural framework; it's a communication highway for the nervous system. Misalignments or restrictions in the spine can lead to widespread imbalances and dysfunction.

Pilates addresses spinal health through exercises that promote mobility, stability, and optimal alignment. For instance, the Spinal Articulation Series (such as the Roll Up or Spine Stretch) improves segmental movement—a key goal in post-surgical recovery or degenerative conditions like arthritis. Additionally, Pilates challenges proprioception, or body awareness, through exercises performed on unstable surfaces. These tools provide subtle feedback, encouraging the body to find more efficient movement patterns. These improved pathways are vital for recovering from coordination or balance issues.

Collaboration with Physical Therapists

Pilates doesn't replace physical therapy but rather complements it beautifully. When used as a post-rehab tool, it bridges the gap between structured physical therapy sessions and a return to everyday activities. This collaboration ensures clients progress safely while fostering long-term strength and mobility.

Physical therapists often refer clients to certified Pilates instructors to build on the gains made during therapy. Conversely, Pilates instructors can identify areas where

clients may benefit from further physical therapy intervention. This collaboration enhances client outcomes by ensuring both disciplines stay within their respective scopes of practice while delivering comprehensive care.

Empowerment Through Movement

Pilates transforms rehabilitation into an empowering journey, encouraging clients to participate actively in their recovery. Instead of a passive process where progress ends after discharge, Pilates fosters a partnership between therapists and clients, building confidence and extending growth beyond therapy sessions.

This approach is life-changing for those with chronic pain. Pilates helps clients rebuild trust in their bodies, replacing fear with control and possibility. When practiced consistently, simple movements like the Pelvic Curl or Side-Lying Leg Series develop resilience and restore a sense of ownership over physical health.

The adaptability of Pilates is also beneficial in the recovery process. Its exercises can be customized for anyone, from bedridden clients to elite athletes, allowing therapists to meet each individual at their current level. This versatility ensures meaningful progress for every client, reinforcing the therapist's role as a guide and a partner in recovery.

Movement Is Medicine

Pilates is far more than an exercise regimen—it is a healing movement. Integrating principles of alignment, breath, core activation, and mindful movement offers unparalleled benefits as a form of physical therapy. Through its holistic and empowering approach, Pilates bridges the gap between rehabilitation science and the art of movement.

For those seeking to recover from injury, manage chronic pain, or simply reconnect with their bodies, Pilates offers a pathway to health and freedom. As Joseph Pilates himself said, "Change happens through movement, and movement heals."

Shannon Willits, Master Pilates Educator

Shannon is a trained movement specialist holding prestigious certifications in STOTT Pilates, a fellowship in Applied Functional Science (FAFS), and a Functional Golf Specialist. She has been studying various movement methods with an emphasis on healing for decades to keep her own body healthy. While Shannon has always been strong and flexible, her body was still fighting aches and pains. After her first Pilates class, she felt a profound sense of well-being, and her aches and pains began to disappear. Trading her pantyhose and high heels for leggings and grip socks Shannon has had the privilege of bringing "Pilates for Everybody" to her community and creating an academy where she mentors aspiring Pilates instructors. Furthermore, Shannon is a master trainer for Club Pilates, Barre Above, and Relief Through Rolling, which focuses on self-myofascial release. She is also certified in other movement modalities including TRX, the MELT Method, BOSU, Gyrotonic, and more. Learn with Shannon at www.shannonwillits.com.

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WHAT IT TREATS

- Tingling
- Numbness
- Pins & Needles
- Burning
- Aching
- Limb Weakness
- Difficulty with Balance
- Muscle Cramps or Spasms
- Increased or Decreased Sensitivity

Peripheral neuropathy is a neurological disorder characterized by damage to the peripheral nervous system, which connects the brain and spinal cord to the rest of the body. This condition can result in a range of symptoms, including numbness, tingling, burning sensations, and weakness, typically affecting the hands and feet. Common causes include diabetes, chemotherapy, autoimmune diseases, and certain medications. The chronic pain associated with peripheral neuropathy can significantly impact a patient's quality of life, often proving challenging to treat effectively with conventional methods.

In recent years, innovative technologies have emerged to address the limitations of traditional treatments for neuropathic pain. One such advancement is the neoGEN-series system, a cutting-edge approach to managing peripheral neuropathy symptoms. This technology utilizes a form of electrical stimulation that goes beyond conventional transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS) or electrical muscle stimulation (EMS) methods.

Initial clinical studies and patient reports suggest that the neoGEN-series system may offer significant pain relief and improved sensation for many individuals suffering from peripheral neuropathy. Some users have reported reduced reliance on pain medications and enhanced overall function in daily activities. However, as with any medical treatment, results can vary among individuals, and the effectiveness of the neoGEN-series system may depend on factors such as the underlying cause and severity of the neuropathy.

While promising, it's important to note that more extensive research is needed to fully establish the long-term efficacy and safety profile of the neoGEN-series system. Patients considering this treatment option should consult with their healthcare providers to determine if it's appropriate for their specific condition and to develop a comprehensive management plan.

I have been a patient of Dr. Larry Johnson for over ten years for different low back and various joint pains. However, last year I started to suffer with pain and tingling in both of my legs and feet that would keep me from sleeping. Dr. Johnson explained to me that I was dealing with neuropathy and he could help to resolve my pain with a new technology called E-NERVESTIM. He has used this therapy on several patients with great success. After six treatments, my pain was starting to go away and was finally gone after a few more treatments. I have always relied on Dr. Johnson to help me for any problems I have encountered over the years and I have always recommended him to my family and friends. - Shirley W.

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MEMORY MATTERS

By Neuropsychiatric Research Center of SW Florida

February is American Heart month. Heart disease is the number one cause of death in the United States. The American Heart Association is a wonderful source of information and resources and is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year. Over the past fifty years, death rates from heart disease are declining, due in part to healthier habits of Americans as well as new treatments, medication and approaches to heart health.

Here in our monthly column, we focus on brain health and other brain related issues. So why are we even bringing up heart health? Did you know that heart and brain health are closely related? If you do things that are good for your heart, it will also help your brain! It is a two for one benefit. Let's dig into the heart/brain connection a bit more.

As the Alzheimer's Association points out, more evidence is supporting a close link between our hearts and our brains. The brain has a vast network of blood vessels, and with each heartbeat, approximately 20–25% of the blood is pumped to the head. The brain needs this oxygen rich blood to function normally. The average resting heart rate is between 60 and 100 beats per minute. So, the brain is taking between one fifth and one fourth of each heartbeat to stay nourished and to function effectively.

The Association goes on to report that some autopsy studies show that as many as 80 percent of individuals with Alzheimer's disease also have cardiovascular disease. In addition, the National Institute of Health (NIH) reported in a 2017 article that problems in the cardiovascular system may contribute to the development of dementia. It was also found that diabetes, hypertension, prehypertension and smoking during midlife increased the risk of developing dementia.

In a study originally published in June of 2023, researchers found that cognitive impairment, which includes difficulty remembering, learning new things, concentrating, or decision making is common in individuals with cardiovascular disease. It's estimated that one in three individuals who present at a cardiology clinic have some degree of cognitive impairment. With the data reflecting the connection between our heart and our brain, we need to focus on keeping both healthy.



The great news is that many things that you can do to keep your heart healthy, also keep your brain healthy! Here are some things that many of us may already know and hopefully practice to keep our hearts healthy. The CDC has some tips for heart health.

Choose healthy food and drink. Eliminating foods high in saturated and trans-fat, as well as limiting your salt (sodium) intake are good approaches. Eat foods that are high in fiber, low in saturated fats and trans fats and cholesterol. Processed foods are best avoided. If it comes in a package, it's likely processed. Fresh fruits, vegetables, fish, nuts and legumes are a better bet.

Stay hydrated by drinking 8 glasses or bottles of water a day. Alcohol should be used in moderation, no more than one drink a day for women and no more than two drinks a day for men. Too much alcohol can lead to high blood pressure among other health issues and high blood pressure is a risk factor for heart disease.

Don't smoke, or quit smoking. The hazards of smoking have been well researched, and if you don't smoke, don't start. Your healthcare practitioner can provide you with information and resources on how to stop smoking.

Manage any other medical conditions with your health care provider. Conditions such as high cholesterol, high blood pressure and diabetes are all risks for heart disease and are not good for your brain.

With appropriate intervention, these conditions can be managed effectively, and doing so helps your heart and your brain.

Keeping a healthy weight and getting regular exercise are also ways to love your heart and brain. The US Surgeon General recommends two hours and thirty minutes of moderate intensity exercise a week. That is the equivalent of 30 minutes of exercise, five times a week. Brisk walking, bicycling and other activities that get your heart pumping are ways to get started. Be sure to discuss any new exercise with your health care provider.

By practicing approaches that are good for your heart, you are helping your brain! Add in just a few more activities and you have both your heart and brain covered. Making sure you are getting adequate sleep, staying connected to family and friends, learning new things and protecting your head by wearing a bike helmet and using your seat belt, when added to your heart health strategy, will go a long way to having a well loved heart and brain.

Connect with the experienced team at the Neuropsychiatric Research Center at 239-939-7777, where we have a proven track record of helping individuals and families navigate memory related challenges. Remember, you're not alone on this journey. #MemoriesMatter

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UNDERSTANDING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF TINNITUS AWARENESS MONTH

By John Nobile - HAS (Hearing Aid Specialist), BC-HIS, ACA

Tinnitus Awareness Month sheds light on the persistent ringing, buzzing, or hissing sounds that millions around the world grapple with daily. Beyond the noise lies a silent struggle that often goes unnoticed, making it crucial to dedicate a month to raising awareness and fostering understanding.*

The Impact of Tinnitus

Tinnitus, characterized by the perception of noise in the absence of an external sound source, can take a toll on one's mental and emotional well-being. For those living with it, the constant ringing or buzzing can lead to stress, anxiety, and difficulty concentrating. Tinnitus Awareness Month aims to unravel the layers of this condition and underscore its impact on individuals' quality of life.

Raising Awareness

Creating awareness about tinnitus is a pivotal step toward fostering empathy and support. Initiatives during this month include educational campaigns, outreach programs, and online resources. These efforts aim not only to inform the public about the prevalence of tinnitus but also to debunk myths and misconceptions surrounding the condition.

Available Treatments

While tinnitus may not have a one-size-fits-all cure, awareness month serves as a platform to explore available treatments and management strategies. From therapeutic interventions and counseling to sound therapy and innovative technologies, individuals with tinnitus can discover options that suit their unique needs. Promoting awareness extends beyond understanding the condition itself; it involves recognizing the diverse range of solutions that can make a significant difference in the lives of those affected.

The Importance of Support

Tinnitus Awareness Month is not just about disseminating information but also about building a supportive community. Friends, family, and colleagues can play a crucial role in the well-being of



someone with tinnitus. Understanding the challenges they face and offering empathy can contribute to a more compassionate society that recognizes the importance of mental health.

Personal Stories

Highlighting personal stories of individuals living with tinnitus humanizes the experience. Sharing narratives of resilience, adaptation, and triumph over adversity brings a face to the condition. This storytelling aspect can inspire others facing similar challenges and promote a sense of solidarity within the community.

Advocacy and Research

Advocacy efforts during Tinnitus Awareness Month aim to influence policies that support individuals with tinnitus. Additionally, the month serves as a catalyst for increased research funding, fostering a deeper understanding of the condition and advancing innovative treatments. By advocating for tinnitus research, we can contribute to the collective efforts aimed at improving the lives of those affected.

Conclusion

As we navigate through Tinnitus Awareness Month, it is crucial to recognize the multifaceted nature of this condition and the importance of creating a supportive environment. By amplifying the silence that tinnitus sufferers endure, we can contribute to a world that is not only aware of the challenges posed by this condition but actively works towards alleviating its impact. Let us use this month as an opportunity to listen, learn, and lend a helping hand to those silently battling the persistent sounds that only they can hear.

John Nobile, HAS, BC-HIS, ACA is a licensed hearing aid specialist and an ACA-certified audioprosthetologist who is also board-certified in hearing instrument sciences. With over 55 years of experience, he has transformed thousands of lives in Cape Coral



and Fort Myers, FL, by providing his patients with the gift of sound. He is also a former veteran committed to providing all veterans with free services.

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SpaceOAR Hydrogel for Prostate Cancer Radiation Therapy—Reduces Side Effects of Bowel, Bladder and Sexual Dysfunction

Prostate cancer treatment can vary depending on the severity, patient's health and prior medical history. Radiation therapy is now an extremely precise procedure utilizing strategic techniques; however, some high doses of radiation can still cause damage to the rectal wall, contributing to adverse side effects. An innovative procedure can be done before radiation therapy to create a protective space between the posterior prostate and the rectal wall. SpaceOAR utilizes a hydrogel that creates about a 10 to 13 millimeter space (1/2 inch), allowing ample room for treatment and avoiding side effects like bowel, bladder and sexual dysfunction.

Radiation therapy typically takes place over several months, and SpaceOAR hydrogel stays in position for several months before it is safely absorbed by the body and removed through the urine. In a clinical study, SpaceOAR Hydrogel was shown to help minimize the impact on urinary, sexual and bowel quality of life for prostate cancer patients undergoing radiation therapy.¹

Creating more space, means fewer bowel, bladder, and sexual complications, which leads to a better quality of life. After radiotherapy was complete, control patients experienced a clinically significant (1X MID) decline in bowel, urinary and sexual quality of life 8 times more often than SpaceOAR Hydrogel patients.¹ More than 50,000 patients worldwide have been treated with SpaceOAR Hydrogel.¹

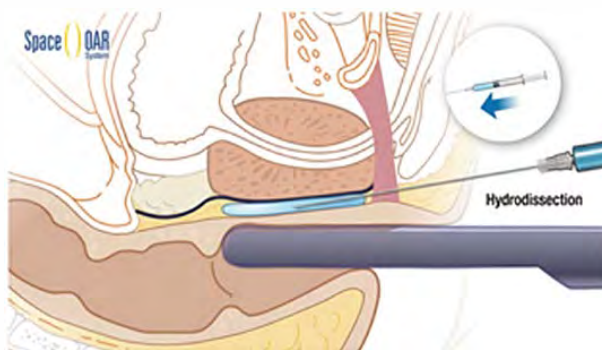
SpaceOAR FAQ:

Why Should I Have SpaceOAR Hydrogel?

By pushing the prostate farther from the rectum, the radiation dose delivered to the rectum is reduced, which may lessen damage to the rectum. With SpaceOAR Hydrogel in place, a doctor can complement the patient's radiation treatment to better target their cancer while preserving healthy tissue to help maintain quality of life.¹

Is it Safe?

SpaceOAR Hydrogel was FDA-cleared in April 2015 and is intended to temporarily position the anterior rectal wall away from the prostate during radiotherapy for prostate cancer. In creating this space, it is the intent of SpaceOAR Hydrogel to reduce the radiation dose delivered to the anterior rectum. The SpaceOAR



Hydrogel is composed of biodegradable material and maintains space for the entire course of prostate radiotherapy treatment and is completely absorbed by the patient's body over time.¹

What Is The Procedure Like And How Long Will It Stay In My Body?

SpaceOAR Hydrogel is injected as a liquid through a needle inserted between the rectum and the prostate. It can be implanted via a local anesthetic that will numb the injection area or under general anesthesia that will put a patient to sleep during the procedure. SpaceOAR Hydrogel stays in place for about three months and is naturally absorbed into the body and removed through urine in about 6 months. SpaceOAR Hydrogel can be implanted during an outpatient procedure in a hospital, surgery center, outpatient clinic or doctor's office prior to the start of radiation treatment. It is typically not a lengthy procedure – usually about 30 minutes.¹

What Are The Risks?

As with any medical treatment, there are some risks involved with the use of SpaceOAR Hydrogel. Potential complications associated with SpaceOAR Hydrogel include, but are not limited to: pain associated with SpaceOAR hydrogel injection; pain or discomfort associated with SpaceOAR Hydrogel; needle penetration of the bladder, prostate, rectal wall, rectum, or urethra; injection of SpaceOAR Hydrogel into the bladder, prostate, rectal wall, rectum, or urethra; local inflammatory reactions; infection; injection of air, fluid or SpaceOAR Hydrogel intravascularly; urinary retention; rectal mucosal damage, ulcers, necrosis; bleeding; constipation; and rectal urgency.¹

Source:
<https://www.spaceoar.com>

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**Alejandro Miranda-Sousa, MD
& Michael Binner, MD**

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Unveiling the Heart:

A Holistic Approach to Heart Health

At Root Causes Holistic Health and Medicine, our commitment to your well-being goes beyond alleviating symptoms we strive to uncover the root causes of health issues and guide you toward optimal wellness. Embracing a holistic perspective, we view every patient as an entwined complex puzzle, addressing lifestyle factors, nutrition, and natural therapies to promote balance and well-being. As we head into February, recognized as Heart Health Month, we embark on a journey to explore the profound impact of holistic practices on cardiovascular health, including a spotlight on the groundbreaking TACT-2 study and the benefits of chelation in promoting heart health.

The TACT-2 Study: Unlocking the Power of Chelation Therapy

Historical Context: The TACT-2 (Trial to Assess Chelation Therapy) study builds upon the foundation laid by the original TACT study, initiated in 2003. TACT aimed to explore the potential benefits of chelation therapy, a process designed to remove heavy metals, in individuals with coronary artery disease.

- **Motivation Behind the Study:** Recognizing that heavy metals like lead and cadmium may contribute to vascular damage and play a role in cardiovascular diseases, the TACT study delved into the potential cardiovascular benefits of chelation therapy. This treatment, already known for addressing heavy metal poisoning, became a subject of interest for its potential to benefit cardiovascular health.

- **TACT-2: Advancing Scientific Understanding:** Building on the insights gained from the TACT study, TACT-2 seeks to further our understanding of chelation therapy in the realm of cardiovascular health. Specifically, the study investigates whether chelation, combined with high-dose oral vitamins, can reduce the risk of major adverse cardiovascular events in individuals with a history of myocardial infarction.

- **Randomized Controlled Trial:** TACT-2 adheres to a robust randomized controlled trial design, recognized as the gold standard in clinical research.

This design allows for a rigorous comparison of outcomes between the group receiving chelation therapy and the group receiving a placebo.

- **Inclusion Criteria:** Participants in the TACT-2 study are individuals who have previously experienced a heart attack and are at risk for subsequent cardiovascular events. This focused selection aims to evaluate the potential benefits of chelation therapy in a specific high-risk population.

- **Holistic Integration:** Root Causes Holistic Health and Medicine integrates evidence-based practices, including chelation therapy, into its approach to cardiovascular health. The goal is to empower individuals with holistic solutions that complement traditional medical interventions, recognizing the potential of chelation therapy as part of a comprehensive strategy for heart health.

Holistic Heart Health Practices: Root Causes Holistic Health and Medicine advocates for a comprehensive approach to heart health beyond conventional treatments. Here are the critical components of our holistic strategy:

- **Lifestyle Management:** Empowering individuals to make sustainable lifestyle choices, such as regular physical activity, stress management, and adequate sleep, forms the foundation of our holistic heart health approach.

- **Nutrition:** A well-balanced and heart-healthy diet is paramount. We guide individuals in making nutritional choices that support cardiovascular health, emphasizing whole foods and nutrient-dense options.

- **Naturally Occurring Compounds and Therapies:** Root Causes explores the benefits of naturally occurring compounds and therapies to enhance heart health. Our approach includes evidence-based interventions that align with the principles of holistic medicine.

As we navigate Heart Health Month 2024, Root Causes Holistic Health and Medicine is a beacon of holistic care, addressing the root causes of cardiovascular issues. The TACT-2 study sheds light on

the potential benefits of chelation therapy, and our commitment to balance and wellness is evident in our holistic heart health practices. Let us embark on a journey toward heart health together, embracing the power of holistic approaches to achieve optimal well-being.

Root Causes Holistic Health & Medicine

Root Causes Holistic Health and Medicine is committed to helping you achieve optimal health. Our mission is to find the root cause of your symptoms and help you achieve wellness through correcting any contributing factors that can be corrected. We look at you as a whole person, and not just a collection of symptoms to be corrected. We strive for balance and wellness through lifestyle management, nutrition and naturally occurring compounds and therapies whenever possible.



Doreen DeStefano, NhD, APRN, DNP

Dr. DeStefano came to Fort Myers in the early 1980's, leaving and coming back again several times until finally settling here in 2001. She has a lifelong background in health and wellness that began in middle school when she started running.

Dr. DeStefano is also a lifelong student. She holds a bachelor's degree in nursing, and another in exercise physiology. She has a Masters (ABT) in criminology, a Master's in public business administration and a Master's in nursing. She holds a doctorate in natural health and is a licensed Advanced Practice Registered Nurse. She holds numerous licenses and certifications from advanced practice training. She continues to attend educational seminars in integrative and functional medicine twice a year to stay abreast of the most recent, cutting edge therapies available.

Her practice is centered on naturopathic principles that include healing the whole person on various levels and avoiding pharmaceutical intervention unless absolutely necessary. She believes your health is within your control. Her goal is to help you achieve maximum health.



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Florida Gulf Coast University: The Leader in Healthcare Education

FGCU's Marieb College of Health & Human Services prepares well-rounded practitioners

The healthcare industry is booming. It's projected to add more jobs than any other field in the next several years, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. A growing and aging population, technological advancements and changes in the way healthcare is delivered are among the primary reasons the industry is expanding so rapidly.

That translates into a wealth of career opportunities for well-trained professionals, and Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) is Southwest Florida's leader in educating these caregivers — your caregivers. With comprehensive academic programs, rigorous clinical training and faculty grounded in professional practice, FGCU's Marieb College of Health & Human Services prepares well-rounded practitioners to meet the mounting health and wellness needs of Southwest Florida.

Our graduates are your nurses, counselors, social workers, lab scientists and physical and occupational therapists. They are breaking new ground in research, clinical and leadership roles in public health throughout the region and beyond.

Marieb College Continues to Grow

When FGCU welcomed its first students in 1997, what was then the College of Health Professions enrolled 178 students in a nursing bachelor's degree program and bachelor's and master's degrees in health science. Today, Marieb College of Health & Human Services educates more than 2,700 students a year in 15 degree programs in its School of Nursing and Departments of Social Work, Rehabilitation Sciences, Health Science and Counseling. The college also houses FGCU's Counseling and Psychological Services for students as well as the Community Counseling & Education Center.

And Marieb College continues to grow. In the 2024 legislative session, FGCU secured final funding for the construction of a new health sciences building on campus, Academic Building 10. The facility will complement Marieb Hall, the college's home, where students learn in state-of-the-art classrooms and practice laboratory facilities. The new building will support further expansion of the college and further cement its ability to train the needed healthcare workforce.

With support from community partners in the healthcare industry and matching state funds, the college's School of Nursing has also been able to expand its programs and faculty to address the widespread shortage of professionals in the field.

Generous gifts from private foundations have also fueled growth in specialty research and outreach initiatives that have broad regional impact, leading to the establishment of the Shady Rest Institute on Positive Aging and the Golisano Intellectual and Developmental Disability Initiative.

We Create Well-Rounded Practitioners

Compassion. Skill. Discipline. Critical thinking. Professionalism. The healing professions require all in equal degree. Marieb College delivers the preparation practitioners need through hands-on learning, intensive clinical experience and personalized attention.

Our graduates consistently score higher than peers from other institutions on national licensure exams, achieving 100% first-time pass rates in six program areas. It's no wonder Marieb boasts a 100% six-month employment rate for new graduates.

Last year marked the seventh time that Marieb's bachelor of science nursing students led the state university system in first-time licensure pass rates. In fact, ours was the only such program to claim a 100% first-time pass rate.

But Marieb College's licensure success do not end there. For the 10th year, our master of science occupational therapy program maintained a 100% overall pass rate. Moreover, the doctor of physical therapy program secured a 100% first-time pass rate on the Florida Board of Physical Therapy licensing examination, with four students posting perfect scores. Our master of physician assistant studies program also secured a 100% overall pass rate on the Physician Assistant National Certifying Examination, marking five consecutive years with this success.

To build on this history of success while preparing graduates to work in fields that are quickly and constantly changing, Marieb College is committed to pursuing innovation in educational practices and experiences. We have a renewed focus on interprofessional education that has been accelerated with gracious gifts from the Marieb Foundation and the hiring of our first director of interprofessional education and emerging technology.

Interprofessional education is a strategic learning approach that brings together healthcare professionals from diverse backgrounds within a simulated setting to enhance collaboration and communication among practitioners. This fosters an environment where they can learn from one another to effectively improve health outcomes.

Marieb College is committed to advancing this initiative by establishing an Interprofessional Simulation Center in the coming years that will serve as a hub for collaborative efforts among various programs, academia and partners, thus facilitating preclinical and simulation-based training.

As always, our mission is to advance the education, health and well-being of our students through teaching excellence, impactful scholarship and service. By achieving this mission, we help improve our community and make Southwest Florida the best place for education and living.

Learn more about FGCU's Marieb College of Health & Human Services at fgu.edu/marieb.



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What is Rhinitis?

An In-Depth Look at This Common Nasal Condition

Rhinitis is an incredibly prevalent condition, impacting over 20 million adults and 7 million children in the United States annually. Despite its widespread nature, many people remain unfamiliar with this nasal nuisance. So, what exactly is rhinitis?

At its core, rhinitis refers to inflammation of the nasal passages and mucous membranes. While often mistaken for sinusitis, the majority of presumed "sinus" issues are actually cases of chronic rhinitis. Recognizing this key distinction is critical for proper diagnosis and treatment.

The Hallmark Symptoms

The telltale signs of rhinitis include nasal congestion, difficulty breathing through the nose, frequent sneezing, runny nose, post-nasal drip, itchy nose and eyes, and headaches. These bothersome symptoms arise when the sensitive nasal lining becomes inflamed and swollen.

Under normal circumstances, the nasal mucous membranes act as a filter, trapping dust, pollen, bacteria, and other airborne particles in a thin mucus layer. Tiny hair-like projections called cilia then sweep this debris down the throat to be expelled from the body. However, when irritated, these membranes react by producing excess mucus, swelling up, and obstructing airflow - giving rise to the characteristic rhinitis symptoms.

While rhinitis is typically not a serious condition, its effects can significantly disrupt daily activities like sleeping, exercising, and concentrating.

Two Main Types

Rhinitis can be classified into two overarching categories: acute and chronic. Acute cases are short-lived, resolving within just a few days for most people. In contrast, chronic rhinitis lingers for weeks or months at a time, often recurring repeatedly.

Allergic Rhinitis: The Usual Culprit

In the vast majority of cases, rhinitis stems from an allergic reaction. When the immune system mistakenly identifies a harmless substance (known as an allergen) as a threat, it kicks into overdrive. This prompts the production of antibodies called Immunoglobulin E (IgE) to neutralize the perceived danger.

However, this process also triggers the release of inflammatory chemicals like histamine, which then cause the swelling and irritation characteristic of allergic rhinitis. Common allergens include pollen, dust, dander, mold, certain foods, and more.

Allergic rhinitis can be further divided into seasonal and perennial categories. Seasonal cases are caused by allergens present during specific times of year, such as spring tree pollen. Perennial rhinitis, on the other hand, persists year-round due to ongoing exposure to triggers like dust mites or pet dander.

The Diagnostic Process

If you visit an ENT (ear, nose, and throat) specialist with suspected rhinitis, they will gather detailed information about your symptoms, their onset and progression, potential triggers, prior treatments or testing, medical history, and more.

The physician will then carefully examine the interior of your nasal passages, evaluating the condition of the mucous membranes, assessing mucus color and amount, and checking for any abnormalities like polyps or a deviated septum that could contribute to obstruction.

Depending on the exam findings, additional diagnostic tests may be recommended, such as allergy testing, pulmonary function tests, imaging studies like CT scans or X-rays, or laboratory analysis. Many of these can be conveniently performed in the ENT clinic.

Once a rhinitis diagnosis is confirmed, your doctor will develop a personalized treatment strategy tailored to your specific needs, symptoms, and triggers.

Treating the Nuisance

For cases of mild allergic rhinitis, your treatment plan may start with environmental control measures, nasal saline irrigation, antihistamines, or corticosteroid nasal sprays to reduce inflammation.

If these initial steps prove insufficient, your ENT may recommend additional interventions like decongestants (for short-term use), turbidoplasty to reduce obstructive nasal tissue, or minimally invasive procedures like balloon sinuplasty to improve sinus drainage.

For severe, persistent allergic rhinitis, immunotherapy remains the most effective long-term solution. Through a course of allergy shots or sublingual (under-the-tongue) therapy, your immune system can be gradually desensitized to your specific triggers over time.

In some cases, surgical procedures like rhinoplasty or septoplasty may be considered to correct structural nasal abnormalities that exacerbate symptoms.

No matter the rhinitis type or severity, an individualized multimodal treatment plan is key to achieving lasting relief and an improved quality of life.

By combining patient education, environmental control strategies, medical management, and specialized ENT services, the experts can tackle even the most stubborn cases of this nasal nuisance. Don't let rhinitis disrupt your daily routine - seek expert care to overcome those congested, drippy, sneezy days for good.



Dr. Price Sonkarley is a Board Certified Otolaryngologist Head and Neck Surgeon and will be continuing Dr. Montgomery's practice providing excellent care to all patients. He will be performing both medical and surgical aspects of the specialty and is accepting new patients.

Dr. Sonkarley grew up in the Midwest and received his Doctorate from the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine. He completed his Otolaryngology Residency at the University of Oklahoma. He served in the US Marine Corps for 5 years and was awarded the Joint Services Achievement Medal after his tour in Iraq.



Kathleen Rocuant, Au.D FAAA received her Doctorate from the Arizona School of Health Sciences and is Board Certified by the American Board of Audiology. She specializes in Hearing Evaluations

Hearing Aids and Hearing Solutions. She is a Fellow American Academy of Audiology and a member of the American Academy of Audiology and the Florida Academy of Audiology.



Carly Treibits, PA-C is a graduate of Florida Gulf Coast University and is a Board Certified Physician Assistant. She is a member of the Florida Academy of Physician Assistants and the American Academy of Physician Assistants.

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EDUCATE – ENGAGE – PLAN

BY AMANDA BARTON, MANAGING PARTNER

Are you proactive or reactive when planning for life's next chapters? When considering your options or a loved one's, it is essential to know the benefits of advance planning before a crisis occurs.

Aging can bring challenges, but being proactive by doing your homework in advance can make this process much smoother. Taking a proactive approach and not waiting until a crisis occurs, reduces stress for you and those that you love.

To help educate people about their many options, Seniors Blue Book is hosting its **12th Annual Preparing for Aging Symposiums** on **January 23, 2025**, from 8am-12pm at St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church (625 111th Ave N., Naples, 34108) and **February 19, 2025**, 8am-12pm at Marion Hall by Saint Cecilia (5698 Sunrise Dr., Fort Myers 33919).

At our upcoming symposiums, aging seniors, their family and caregivers will enjoy a variety of educational panels from area experts and visit over 70 exhibitor tables with valuable information to share. Topics will include: medical, senior housing, retirement, finances, legal, health & wellness, in home care, medicare, hospice, and much more!



EVENT IS FREE and will feature a **complementary breakfast, door prizes and a grand prize sunset cruise raffle – HOWEVER RSVP IS REQUIRED – 239-776-7353.**



Learn how you can make the best decisions to ensure comfort, safety and opportunities for enriched lifestyles. For example, come discover if your legal and financial affairs are set in place as you age, and if not, learn the right steps that need to be done! Or maybe you're at the point where you or a loved one may require outside assistance to help you age in your own home. Come explore the many options available in our area, and what makes each one different. And who knows, maybe you'll discover that the best choice may be moving into one of the many beautiful senior housing communities in our area. No matter where you are in the aging process, our symposium is crafted specifically for you.



The goal of our annual symposiums is so that in one day our elders, their families and caregivers can get answers they need, discover the best options available, and be set to age well!

Please register early, space is limited. RSVP is required, call 239-776-7353.



What is Seniors Blue Book?

The Seniors Blue Book is a user-friendly resource offering educational articles and information about local aging services, senior housing and health-at-home options. We believe it is our responsibility to compile accurate information in a concise format and keep it current for all seniors and their families. We've been doing just that for more than 40 years by publishing this comprehensive senior directory used by professionals, seniors, their families and caregivers - often referred to as "My Senior Bible!"

Our guides are free and can be found at more than 1,700 locations across Lee & Collier counties. You can request a free copy be direct mailed to you by calling 239-776-7353.

Visit www.SeniorsBlueBook.com to learn more.

Seniors Blue Book

For more symposium information and registration, please call 239-776-7353.



By attending, you'll join a community of like-minded individuals - committed to understanding aging and making informed choices. It's more than a mere free event; it's a commitment to self-empowerment, a pledge to navigate the complexities of aging with confidence and grace.

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To learn more:

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Join us for the upcoming 2025 Seniors Blue Book Symposium. Our annual event is designed to provide information, education and share community resources focused on the process of aging gracefully and being Pro-Active vs Re-Active.

The symposium is an interactive event that includes senior fair, panel speakers, audience Q&A, and more.

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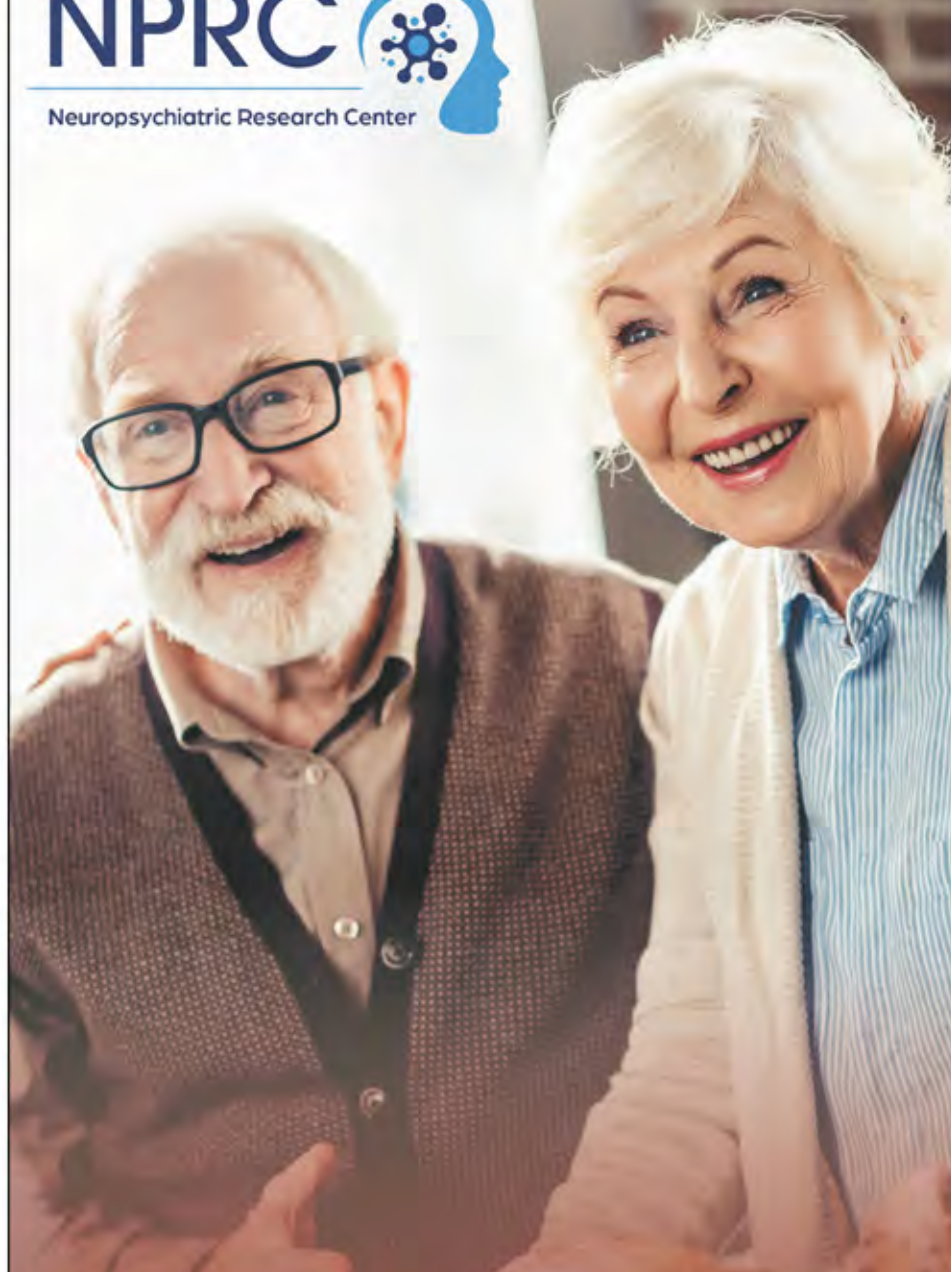
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OPTIMIZING YOUR THYROID TO SUPPORT YOUR SEX HORMONES: EXPLORING THEIR CONNECTIONS

By Dr. Melissa (Mel) Irvine, DNP - Clinical Sexologist
Specializes in Sexual Medicine and Beauty

Just like the post office workers chatting in between runs, the chemical messengers in your body—hormones—also influence each other. They're not distinct entities, and while each type of hormone may have its own list of specific tasks, its levels can affect other hormones in your body and then their ability to carry out their tasks.

Thyroid hormones and sex hormones are two well-known types of hormones, and they may have a greater influence on each other than you think. In fact, if you're seeing challenges associated with low or high levels of sex hormones, it may be due to your thyroid hormone levels.

How Thyroid Function Relates to Sex Hormones

Research has shown that hypothyroidism and hyperthyroidism (producing too little or too much thyroid hormones, respectively) have been associated with sex hormone concentrations and, more specifically, sexual dysfunction.

The reason for this connection has to do with the interrelationship between thyroid hormones and sex hormones. Specifically, thyroid hormones regulate the bioavailability of sex hormones, so if there is thyroid dysfunction, there may be an imbalance in the concentrations of bioavailable sex hormones, leading to ovulatory or erectile dysfunction. For women, this results in menstrual irregularities or menopause, while for men, it can lead to difficulty getting and maintaining an erection.

The connection exists in the opposite manner, as well. Estrogen therapy has been shown to increase the need for thyroid hormone, and this is because estrogen increases the production of thyroid-binding globulin in the liver, which causes more thyroid hormones to bind, reducing their availability and leading to symptoms of hypothyroidism.

Progesterone can also influence thyroid levels. Namely, it influences thyroid stimulating hormone (TSH) levels, with studies showing that it can decrease TSH levels and increase FreeT4 levels.

As for how thyroid problems may manifest in your sex life, there are a few pathways.



First, low thyroid levels can lower vaginal lubrication, making sex uncomfortable and unsatisfying. Thyroid issues can also lower testosterone levels, lowering libido in those of either gender. Hyper- and hypothyroidism can also contribute to fatigue and depression, both of which can further lower your sex drive.

Issues with the thyroid can also affect how long it takes a man to ejaculate. Hyperthyroidism can cause premature ejaculation, while hypothyroidism can result in delayed ejaculation.

Knowing these influences, thyroid hormone issues can lead to difficulty with fertility, whether because you or your partner lack a desire to be intimate or cannot ejaculate. Issues with the thyroid can also cause irregularities in a woman's menstrual cycle, which can further cause issues with fertility.

In order to maintain optimal levels of your sexual hormones, one area to monitor is your thyroid hormone levels.

How to Optimize Thyroid Function

Hormone levels require maintenance in an optimal range in order to communicate throughout the body as needed. If your thyroid is producing too much or too little hormone, it can manifest in your metabolism, but it can also affect your sex hormones, causing issues that extend beyond the thyroid's area of expertise.

In order to support your sex hormones, it's important to optimize thyroid function.

Fuel Up

Within the body is the diet-gut-thyroid axis, which makes it so that nutrition and thyroid function are closely linked. As such, the foods that you eat can

influence your gut, which then impacts your thyroid as a result of immunological regulation and nutrient absorption. If your nutritional profile is imbalanced, thyroid dysfunction can occur.

Knowing this, it's important to eat a balanced diet that is rich in thyroid-boosting nutrients, such as:

- Iodine
- Selenium
- Zinc
- Iron
- Magnesium
- Copper
- Vitamin B12
- Vitamin A

These nutrients influence thyroid hormone synthesis and regulation—if they're lacking in your diet, your body may not be able to keep up its thyroid hormone levels. However, it's also important that you don't consume too much, as this can also cause issues. If you're ever curious about what nutrition to focus on, reach out to a specialist for personalized guidance.

Besides upping your intake of these key nutrients, you can also be more mindful of the foods you avoid. Namely, a higher consumption of ultra-processed foods has been associated with a higher risk of hyperthyroidism. To promote your thyroid's health, try to avoid ultra-processed foods such as packaged snacks, cereal, candy, and soda.

Exercise Regularly

There are numerous benefits to exercising regularly, even for your thyroid. Specifically, for those whose thyroid overproduces, daily exercise may help to lower thyroid hormone levels.

Other studies have found that exercising at your maximum capacity can help raise levels of T4, fT4, and TSH. One study even found that for women with hypothyroidism, aerobic training, resistance training, and a combination of both all helped to improve T4 levels.

These studies show that your exercise type and frequency can influence how much thyroid hormone is circulating; depending on whether your thyroid is over- or under-producing, you can modify your workout schedule to support your thyroid's production, using exercise to give it a boost without overdoing it.

Beyond the direct effects of exercising, its indirect effects, such as managing weight and improving blood sugar control, can help mitigate other qualities that may negatively affect your thyroid, further optimizing its function.

While exercise can help your thyroid, it's important to ease into it, especially if you suffer from hypothyroidism, which can cause joint pain and fatigue. By starting slow, your body can adjust to the training, lowering your risk of injury.

Get Some Sleep

Research has shown that your sleep can significantly affect your thyroid function. Specifically, sleep strongly affects your thyroid-stimulating hormone (TSH), with both sleep quality and duration playing a role.

Unfortunately, problems with your thyroid can cause sleep problems, with both hyperthyroidism and hypothyroidism linked to difficulty sleeping. Knowing this, it's especially important to prioritize your sleep to break the cycle of imbalanced thyroid function and preserve its health in the days to come.

Some ways that you can improve your sleep include:

- **Find the right temperature.** Hyperthyroidism can cause night sweats, while hypothyroidism can decrease your cold tolerance, so take some time to find your ideal temperature for sleep.
- **Improve your sleep hygiene.** Set your nights up for success by following a consistent sleep/wake schedule, relaxing before bed, and avoiding electronics before bed.
- **Avoid late-night snacks.** Eating something heavy before bed can disrupt your sleep, so try to avoid snacking; if you're hungry, opt for something light.

Have Your Thyroid Checked Regularly

Sometimes, your thyroid may be sending out warning signals that something is amiss, but they remain undetected or attributed to something else. In order to detect thyroid issues early, it's best to undergo periodic check-ups to monitor its functionality. The sooner issues are detected, the sooner you can intervene to optimize its output.

Maintain a Healthy Body Weight

There are many advantages to keeping your body weight in a healthy range, especially for your thyroid. Specifically, the more you weigh, the more thyroid hormone your body requires, which creates opportunities for insufficiency and hypothyroidism. To help your thyroid meet your body's needs, focus on maintaining a healthy body weight through a balanced diet and regular exercise.

When to See a Doctor

Hormone imbalances can often go undetected, causing your body to suffer unnecessarily. As such, it's helpful to know the signs of thyroid hormone imbalance so that you know when to see a doctor.

If you have any of the following symptoms, consider having your thyroid function checked:

- A lump in your thyroid gland or a swollen neck
- Anxiety or depression
- Significant weight changes despite a regular diet and exercise regimen
- Thinning of hair or skin changes
- Tremors or palpitations
- Menstrual cycle irregularities
- Constant fatigue, no matter your sleep habits
- Changes in bowel habits
- Issues with tolerating heat or cold

Thyroid and Sex Hormones: An Unexpected Connection

While the thyroid and ovaries/testes may seem immensely different, they both produce hormones that can affect each other. Thyroid hormones can influence the bioavailability of sex hormones, creating an abundance or deficit that can then contribute to sexual dysfunction. Similarly, too much sex hormone, such as estrogen, can lower the amount of circulating thyroid hormones, while progesterone increases its availability.

Knowing the interrelationships between thyroid hormones and sex hormones, it's clear that a priority for the optimization of one should be finding balance in the other. Some ways that you can support the health of your thyroid include eating a thyroid-supporting diet, exercising regularly, getting enough sleep, and maintaining a healthy weight. It can also be helpful to have your thyroid checked periodically, especially if you display any symptoms of hypothyroidism or hyperthyroidism.

By working on balancing your thyroid hormones, the other areas of your body, including your sex hormones, will have an easier time maintaining balance, as well.



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ACHIEVING YOUR BEST SELF: Managing Loose Skin After Successful Weight Loss

Congratulations on achieving your New Year's resolution weight loss goals! While celebrating this significant accomplishment, you might notice an unexpected challenge: loose or sagging skin. This common post-weight-loss concern affects many successful dieters, but innovative solutions like the Fotona 4D Laser treatment can help you achieve the toned, firm appearance you've been working toward.

Understanding Post-Weight Loss Skin Concerns

When significant weight loss occurs, particularly at a rapid pace, skin that has been stretched over time may not fully retract to fit your new contours. This happens because weight gain stretches the skin's collagen and elastin fibers, which are responsible for maintaining skin's firmness and elasticity. While young skin might bounce back more readily, factors such as age, genetics, and the amount of weight lost can affect skin's ability to reshape itself to your new form.

Introducing Fotona 4D Laser Treatment

The Fotona 4D laser treatment represents a breakthrough in non-invasive skin tightening technology. This comprehensive treatment works through four distinct modes that target different skin layers and concerns, providing a complete approach to skin rejuvenation and tightening.

How Fotona 4D Works

The treatment's four dimensions each serve a specific purpose in addressing loose skin:

SmoothLiftin™ targets the oral cavity, strengthening collagen from the inside out. This internal approach helps tighten the skin around the lower face and neck areas, which are common problem zones after weight loss.

FRAC3® reaches deep into the skin's layers, stimulating natural healing processes and promoting collagen remodeling. This helps improve skin texture and firmness across treated areas.

PIANO® mode delivers controlled bulk heating to the deepest skin layers, encouraging long-term collagen rebuilding and skin tightening. This is particularly effective for areas with significant skin laxity.

SupErECIAL™ mode provides a light peel effect, improving the appearance of surface-level imperfections while enhancing overall skin quality.

Benefits Beyond Skin Tightening

While skin tightening is the primary goal for post-weight loss patients, Fotona 4D offers additional benefits:

- Improved skin texture and tone
- Reduced appearance of fine lines and wrinkles
- Enhanced natural collagen production
- Minimal downtime compared to surgical alternatives
- Long-lasting results with proper maintenance

Creating Your Treatment Plan

Most patients require a series of treatments spaced several weeks apart to achieve optimal results. Your treatment plan will be customized based on factors such as:

- The amount of skin laxity
- Your age and skin condition
- Specific areas requiring treatment
- Your overall aesthetic goals

Maintaining Your Results

To maximize and maintain your Fotona 4D results:

- Stay hydrated and maintain a balanced diet
- Continue your exercise routine, focusing on strength training
- Protect your skin from sun damage
- Consider periodic maintenance treatments
- Keep your weight stable to prevent further skin changes

The Journey Continues

Remember that your weight loss journey doesn't end at reaching your goal weight. Taking care of your skin is an important part of completing your transformation. Fotona 4D laser treatment offers a safe, effective solution for addressing loose skin without the risks and recovery time associated with surgical procedures.

By combining your healthy lifestyle habits with advanced treatments like Fotona 4D, you can achieve the complete transformation you envisioned when you set your New Year's resolution. Your commitment to health and wellness deserves to be complemented by skin that reflects your hard work and dedication.



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We prioritize safety, natural results and client relationships, so your journey begins with a consultation and mutual decisions based on individual needs. Your providers will then create a customized anti-aging/skin health plan for you. At Hideout, education and safety is our top priority. Our medical cosmetic treatments are performed by our highly trained and experienced medical providers, nurses and aestheticians.



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The \$600 Billion Lifeline: America's Unsung Family Caregivers

By Carl Zacharia

In 2025, caregiving continues to present an essential public health issue in the U.S. as our population ages and chronic disease prevalence increases. Family caregivers are providing indispensable support that allows individuals to remain in their homes and communities, however their contributions often go unrecognized — and unpaid.

With family caregiving on the rise, there is growing recognition among voters, policymakers, and employers about the significant challenges posed by caregiving and the need for solutions.

Two recently introduced bills and a proposed tax credit for caregivers would make it easier for family caregivers to save for retirement.

The \$600 Billion Caregiver Crisis

Terms like “complex,” “inefficient,” “unfair,” and “broken” are often used to describe the United States health care system. The U.S. spends more per capita on health care than other developed nations; but despite this, higher spending often does not achieve better outcomes.

The long-term care gap in this country's health care system is one of its most glaring shortcomings. The U.S. doesn't have a national program to help cover long-term care costs, leaving many families to shoulder the burden and expenses associated with caring for family and loved ones who need assistance with activities of daily living.

These “free” caregiver services come at a high cost. According to an AARP report, family caregivers contributed 36 billion hours of unpaid care per year in 2021 valued at \$600 billion. This figure is a \$130 billion increase since a similar report in 2019.

One in five Americans — more than 53 million adult Americans — are now unpaid family caregivers. That number increased by 9.5 million adults from 2015 to 2020 and AARP projects that by 2034, adults aged 65 and older, will outnumber children younger than 18 for the first time.

Caregivers, on average, spend more than \$7,200 per year out-of-pocket and 26 hours per week to care for loved ones. Many also face the dual demands of employment and caregiving, which often includes caring for growing children and aging parents, leading to the term “sandwich generation.”



Women are still disproportionately likely to provide unpaid care while working full or part time, although more working men are becoming caregivers. Others are forced to step away from work temporarily or altogether to keep up with caregiving, limiting their career growth, job opportunities, and retirement savings.

Voters, Politicians, and Organizations Back More Caregiver Resources

Demographic and economic trends are creating a situation for family caregivers that is unsustainable. Working-age Americans are increasingly forced to choose between their own well-being and the well-being of loved ones. However, more support could be on the way.

Two bipartisan bills — the Improving Retirement Security for Family Caregivers Act and the Catching Up Family Caregivers Act — were introduced in September.

The former would eliminate the income cap on Roth IRA contributions and allow family caregivers to contribute up to \$7,000 annually toward their retirement savings, while the latter would allow family caregivers to make catch-up contributions to employer-sponsored retirement plans, an option typically reserved for those older than 50.

The National Strategy to Support Family Caregivers plan, launched in 2022, outlines hundreds of specific actions to address the physical, emotional, and financial needs of family caregivers. This past September, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) released a report stating that nearly all these actions have been completed or are in development.

Additionally, a June 2024 poll found that 86 percent of voters (92 percent of Democrats and 82 percent of Republicans) want policymakers to support caregiving and make it more affordable. More than 80 percent of respondents said that they supported paid family leave, caregiver tax credits, and employer incentives for caregivers.

To learn more about available financial benefits and support for family caregivers, please join Zacharia Brown Estate Planning and Elder Law at our upcoming complimentary events in Southwest Florida!

FEBRUARY 2025 EVENTS!

Wednesday, February 5th at 6:00pm
Navigating Estate Planning with
a Cancer Diagnosis - *Webinar*

Monday, February 10th at 12:00pm
Empowering Women: Securing Wealth and
Safeguarding Your Legacy
Hyatt Regency, Sarasota, FL

Wednesday, February 12th at 11:30am
Domiciling in Florida: A Step-by-Step Guide to
Becoming a Resident and Unlocking
Benefits of Homestead - *Webinar*

Tuesday, February 25th at 10:00am
Protect Your Wealth: Wills,
Trusts & Long-Term Care
Area Agency on Aging for SWFL,
Fort Myers, FL

Wednesday, February 26th at 3:00pm
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THE PROMISING ROLE OF PRP IN UROGYNECOLOGY

By Joseph Gauta, MD, FACOG

Urogynecology and Reconstructive Pelvic Surgery

Urogynecology is a rapidly evolving specialty focused on addressing complex conditions of the pelvic floor. At the Florida Bladder Institute, we strive to provide advanced, evidence-based care that prioritizes patient outcomes and quality of life. Among the innovative treatments we offer is **Platelet-Rich Plasma (PRP) therapy**—a novel approach that holds significant promise for a variety of urogynecologic conditions.

What Is PRP?

PRP is derived from your own blood, which is processed to concentrate platelets and growth factors. These components play a critical role in healing and tissue regeneration. Originally utilized in orthopedics to enhance recovery, PRP has now found applications in urogynecology, demonstrating its potential in managing conditions like **stress urinary incontinence (SUI)**, **interstitial cystitis (IC)**, **fistulas**, and **lichen sclerosus**.

How PRP Works

The process begins with a simple blood draw performed in our office. Blood is processed using proprietary technology to extract a concentrated solution of platelets. This PRP solution is then injected or instilled into the targeted tissue to promote healing, reduce inflammation, and encourage regeneration. Because PRP is autologous—derived from your own body—the risk of adverse reactions is minimal.

Current and Emerging Applications

PRP therapy has shown promise in addressing various urogynecologic conditions, including:

- **Stress Urinary Incontinence (SUI):** Particularly in cases caused by intrinsic sphincter deficiency (ISD), PRP injections can strengthen and regenerate periurethral tissues, potentially reducing the need for surgical intervention.
- **Interstitial Cystitis (IC):** PRP may alleviate pain and inflammation when instilled into the bladder or injected into the bladder wall, often in conjunction with other treatments.

- **Lichen Sclerosus:** Emerging studies suggest PRP can improve symptoms and promote healing in affected areas.
- **Fistulas:** PRP can be used preoperatively to enhance healing or injected directly into the fistula site to promote closure, potentially avoiding surgery for smaller fistulas.

Evidence Supporting PRP in Urogynecology

While more research is needed to establish long-term efficacy, the current literature highlights the benefits of PRP therapy:

- **Stress Urinary Incontinence (SUI):** Studies show that PRP injections significantly improve symptoms, especially when combined with pelvic floor muscle therapy. Results often extend up to 12 months.
- **Interstitial Cystitis (IC):** Meta-analyses reveal reduced pain scores in patients receiving intravesical PRP instillations. Improvement is typically noted after a series of monthly treatments.
- **Fistulas:** Research suggests PRP enhances healing and reduces recurrence rates, particularly when used in combination with surgical repair.

The Procedure: What to Expect

PRP therapy is a straightforward process that can be completed in our office. Here's what you can expect:

1. **Preparation:** The treatment area, such as the periurethral or vaginal tissues, is prepped for injection.
2. **Injection:** PRP is injected into targeted areas using precise techniques tailored to the condition being treated. For example:
 - In SUI, PRP is injected circumferentially into periurethral tissues.
 - For IC, PRP may be instilled into the bladder or injected into the bladder wall.
 - In fistulas, PRP can be administered preoperatively or directly into the site of the fistula.
3. **Post-Treatment Care:** Patients can return to normal activities immediately. Most individuals notice improvement within 4–6 weeks, though multiple sessions may be required for optimal results.

Costs and Insurance

As PRP is still considered experimental by insurance providers, including Medicare, patients are responsible for the cost of treatment. Pricing for Arthrex PRP treatment at the Florida Bladder Institute ranges from \$800–\$1200.

While insurance coverage is not yet available, we anticipate this may change as demand grows and additional research substantiates PRP's efficacy.

A Vision for the Future

At the Florida Bladder Institute, we are committed to staying at the forefront of urogynecologic innovation. PRP represents a significant step forward in the management of conditions that can profoundly impact a patient's quality of life. Though ongoing research is needed, early results are encouraging, and we are proud to offer this cutting-edge therapy to our patients today.

If you're interested in learning more about PRP therapy and how it could benefit you, schedule a consultation with our team. Together, we can explore personalized treatment options to address your needs.

References and Further Reading

For patients interested in the research behind PRP therapy, we can provide a detailed list of studies supporting its use in urogynecology. Ask our team for the "PRP References for FBI" handout.



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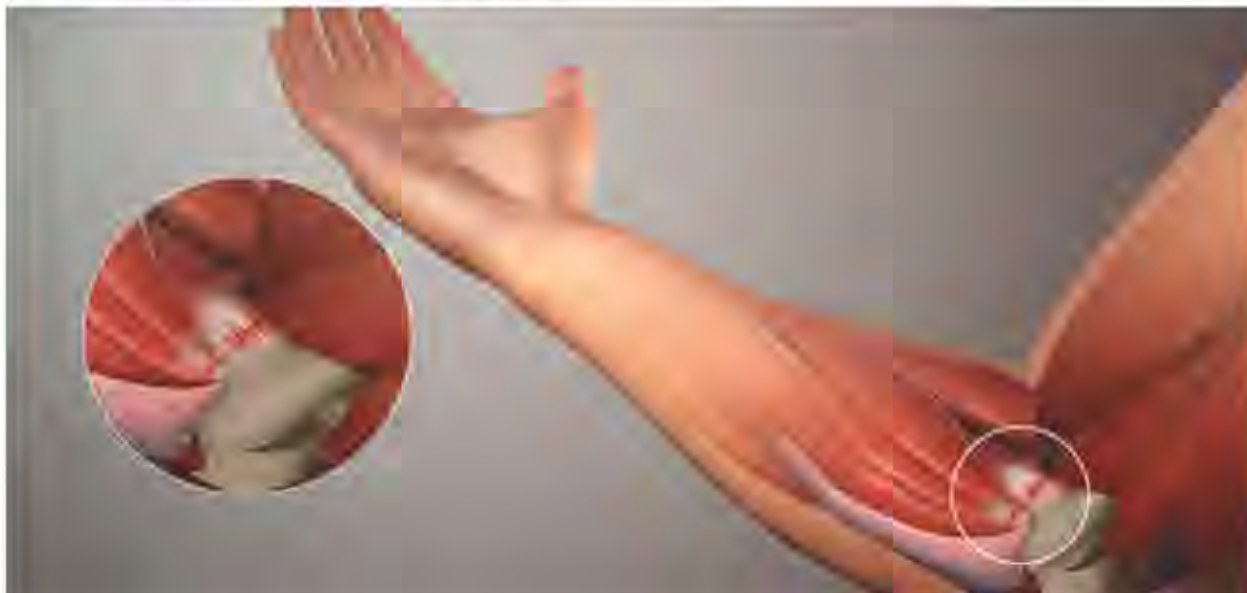


Duke Pfitzinger, DO



WHAT IS GOLFER'S ELBOW AND HOW TO TREAT?

By Dr. Scott Bradley PT, DPT, ECS



If you have pain on the inside of your elbow with certain movements then you might have Golfer's elbow or what we call in the business Medial Epicondylitis. Golfer's elbow can happen to almost anyone and can cause pain and weakness with normal activities like doing a biceps curl, opening a jar, carrying objects or putting things on a shelf. Golfer's elbow is also common in a wide variety of sports including swimming, baseball, golf, softball and even tennis.

Golfer's elbow is typically located at the common flexor tendon origin at the inside of the elbow closest to the body, which is where most of the forearm muscles that flex the wrist are located. The two muscles most commonly affected with this injury are the Pronator Teres and Flexor Carpi Radialis.

Golfer's elbow is caused by repetitive microtrauma to the common flexor tendon at the medial epicondyle of the elbow, hence why it is called medial epicondylitis in the medical community. Golfer's elbow can be an acute or chronic issue. Acutely, an average person will play 9 holes or do some housework with power tools and have some nagging pain on the inside of the elbow, which usually resolves within an hour after activity. The nagging pain is caused because the load applied on the muscles exceeds the body's ability to handle, resulting in microtrauma to the area which in turn results in pain. This is the most common case and if not properly addressed it can become a chronic issue which will require more intensive therapy.

My Doctor Recommended an Injection, Is it a Good Idea?

Instant relief of pain will always sound good, but will it accelerate the healing process? The answer is probably not. The cortisone injection will assist in relieving the nagging pain but little else, it will not fix the underlying issue associated with Golfer's elbow. Once the pain is gone many people will continue doing the activity that caused the pain. Without the proper exercises and stretches, which will help accelerate the healing process you will have pain again once the injection wears off. The best advice I give my patients is that if the pain is unbearable a cortisone injection may assist in relieving the initial pain but physical therapy will help fix the underlying problem. This also supported by the research.

This research article found that those who had a corticosteroid injection had reduced pain at 6 weeks following the injection but had no difference in symptoms compared to the control group at 3 and 12 months.¹

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/231215824_Evaluation_and_Management_of_Elbow_Tendinopathy

How Do I Fix It?

Exercise - Duh! Below are some simple beginner exercises you can do to help accelerate the healing process and reduce pain.

Wrist Flexion Isometrics

- Bend the wrist of your injured hand slightly.
- Place the opposite hand on the palm of your hand.
- Press into hand for 6 seconds and repeat 20 times.

Forearm Pronation Isometrics

- Place arm on table with thumb up and then angled with the palm side slightly down.
- Place opposite hand on the top aspect of the inside of the forearm.
- Then press forearm into hand for 6 seconds and repeat 20 times.

Elbow Flexion Isometrics

- Place your affected elbow bent to about 90 degrees with your palm facing upward on a table.
- Place your opposite hand on your affected wrist.
- Press wrist into hand for 6 seconds and repeat 20 times.

Wrist flexion Stretch Arm Straight

- Hold the arm to be stretched straight out in front of you with your palm facing toward the ceiling. Grasp your hand with the other hand, and slowly bend the wrist downward so that the fingers point toward the floor.
- Hold this stretch for 30 seconds, repeat 3 times.

Wrist flexion Stretch Arm Bent

- Bend the affected elbow so that it is at a 90 degree angle.
- Place the other hand on the affected arm's fingers.
- Gently pull back on your fingers until a stretch is felt.
- Hold this stretch for 30 seconds, repeat 3 times.

There is no one size fits all recovery program for Golfer's elbow. The earlier you address the symptoms the faster your recovery and the less restriction in your daily activity. A combination of conservative treatments to start with consisting of: isometrics, eccentrics and gentle stretches are great starting points. If you are still having trouble tackling the nagging pain on the inside of your elbow seek out a qualified physical therapist to help you in your recovery process. Most Golfer's elbows resolve within a year with no surgery. So stay consistent with your exercises and hopefully you will be back to playing 18 holes in no time.

Reference:

1. Taylor SA, Hannafin JA (2012) Evaluation and management of elbow tendinopathy. *Sports Health* 4: 384-393.



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MAKE YOUR SMILE YOUR NEW YEARS RESOLUTION!

By KELLY M. DAINIAK, DMD, GENERAL DENTIST

By now, we've made a good start to the New Year 2025. If you are like many out there you forget how important your teeth are in your life. Make 2025 the year you take care of your dental health!

Every day we rely on our teeth to communicate, to nourish and to express ourselves. We take for granted our teeth that have been with us since we were 6+ years old. Your mouth is the beginning portion of your digestive tract. Foods are mechanically broken down with your teeth and chemically broken down with saliva and enzymes, we abuse our teeth with harsh liquids, hard foods, bad chemicals (cigarettes) and sometimes paroxysmal habits (clenching or grinding). Our teeth are significant when speaking (phonetics) and expressing our emotions. A smile goes a long way!

If you are like many out there, this new year, make 2025 the year we start to take care of our teeth! The consequences of no teeth are significant. A little TLC goes a long way to preserve your quality of life.

- 1. Start by getting a thorough dental exam and healthy dental cleaning.**
- 2. Take care of any gum disease or dental caries.**
- 3. Repair any fractured or broken teeth.**
- 4. Brush and floss at least twice a day.**
- 5. Limit sugary and carbonated drinks.**
- 6. Stop smoking and using all nicotine products.**
- 7. Brighten your smile with dental office whitening.**

What to look for in a competent dental provider: a doctor who takes the time and listens to your concerns, a doctor who is thorough and not rushed, a doctor who cares about your medical and dental needs and a doctor who does what is right for you (after explaining the diagnosis and treatment options).



Dr. Kelly M. Dainiak is a Hospital Residency trained General Dentist who takes pride in caring for her patients' well-being.



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2025 Open Enrollment is Here!

By Ulla-Undine Merritt (Dee) National Producer Number (NPN) 8853366

Medicare Open Enrollment is January - March. What can be changed at this time of the year is Medicare Part D Drug Plans and Medicare Advantage Plans. You can make one change from one Part C Advantage Plan to another Advantage Plan from the same company or another. You can change from one Advantage Plan to a stand-alone Part D Drug Plan, this is not advised unless you have a secondary to Original Medicare, which is a Medigap and also called a Medicare Supplement. I always do the Medicare Supplement Applications 1st to make sure that the person is approved. Medicare Supplement have medical underwriting and you may not qualify. There are certain Special Election Periods that may qualify you as a guaranteed issue. You can NOT change from one Part D drug Plan to another this time of year.

Substantial changes to Medicare Part D, stand-alone drug plans as well as Advantage Plans, you won't have to pay more than \$2,000 in out-of-pocket costs, which include deductibles, co-pays, and coinsurance. It is especially important to check your plans formulary as medication must be in formulary to be capped. 2025 RX deductibles will be capped at \$590.00. As a reminder the cost of the plan is not as important as the cost plus your medications, that is what you look at, the total cost. It is important to know what the medication is used for to determine if it is covered by the plan. Example Wycovy may be covered but in order to be covered it must be used for certain heart conditions or diabetes, Medicare does not cover weight loose medications at this time.

Medicare Part C / Advantage Plans annually Medicare Advantage Plans make changes. They must all include the same features as Original Medicare but not at the same cost share. They can have a premium, Medical and or Prescription deductible, copays and coinsurance can change. Extra Value such as Vision, Dental, Over the Counter, Part B Give Back, transportation, etc. can all change or be eliminated. Medicare sets the annual in-network out of pocket maximum; in 2025 it is \$9,350 and \$14,000 for in-network and out-of-network services combined. However, individual insurance plans may set lower limits. These limits apply to Part A and B services only, and do not apply to Part D cost share.



The old saying if it is not broken do not fix it DOES NOT apply to Medicare Advantage Plans. Every year I see many people that have not checked/compared their current plan to what is new. I have saved so many people hundreds and in many cases thousands of dollars. You should be working with a broker that represents many insurance companies. Make sure you check them out, especially if you are going to allow someone in your house. I recommend meeting in their office. For myself we represent most insurance companies in our area and to carry all their literature with me is almost impossible. We use three large screens so that our clients can clearly see and compare the differences between the plans. The minimum information we needed is all your doctors, medications: names, milligrams, and dosage. We load your current plan and then compare it to all the other companies in your area. What companies have all your doctors, the price for your medication normally makes a significant difference. Then the Extra Value, what is most important to you. We do NOT CHARGE for our review and if warranted we will change your insurance plan for you. Ethics is most important and if you are on the best plan we will tell you, plus you can see for yourself.

As a reminder it is illegal for an insurance agent to contact you unless you give them permission. There are specific forms that you should sign, such as a Scope of Appointment which outlines what you want to talk about. This form should be signed at least 48 hours prior to your meeting or if you walk into their office, prior to speaking about Medicare.

Medicare Seminar's they are good for general information. A one-to-one appointment where you can dive into your doctors and medication is best, plus you can then compare other companies in one place.

When you turn 65 you are eligible for Medicare, once you have worked 40 quarters roughly 10 years there is no cost for Medicare Part "A". Part A covers Hospitals, Skilled Nursing, Home Health & Hospice. Medicare Part B you can choose to take at 65 or you can hold off if you are still working and have credible coverage. If you do not have group health insurance that is considered qualified, and then you want it you would have a late enrollment penalty for each month you did not have Part B & Part D, and that penalty will last for the rest of your life. Part B covers doctors, imaging, blood work, ambulance, durable medical equipment, etc. Part D is a Medicare Drug Plan and covers medications. During your initial enrollment period it is especially important to understand your options! Medicare Supplements/Medigap Plans are NOT guaranteed issue, you may need to medically qualify. You can purchase a Medigap Plan during your 1st 6 months on Medicare Part B without medical underwriting. There are a lot of things you need to know. Again, work with an agent you can trust! **Especially important:** when you *move* you need to know your options. Can you keep the same plan? Do you need to make a change and what does that look like?

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Stress Management

By Neetu Malhotra, MD

Have you ever felt overwhelmed? Are you feeling stressed out? The holidays can sometimes be quite stressful, whether it be making the house ready, making sure you have gotten all the presents for your loved ones/friends, but you might want to take some time for yourself too. In fact, the holidays are known to bring out all sorts of ailments and health problems, more than any time of year. The stress of the holidays is real and not something to be ignored and brushed under the rug. Stress Management is truly something we all have to deal with at one point or another. Not all stress is bad, but when you start to feel overwhelmed and feel a loss of control, that's when stress can wreak havoc in your life.

The first part in managing your stress is to identify the stressor, for example-whether it be certain negative people, going through a divorce, being told of a new diagnosis or fear of losing your job. Whatever that stressor is, it's important to identify it, talk it over with a close friend/relative or perhaps write it in a stress journal. It is crucial to not keep the feelings/emotions bottled up because that in itself is truly, I believe the heart of many health problems. Stress has been linked to heart disease, depression/mental illnesses, inflammatory conditions (ie arthritis, autoimmune illnesses, etc) and even some forms of cancer.

The second part of stress management is coming up with a plan or solution to dealing with the problem that is creating the stress/turmoil in your life. This is where taking a step back for a moment can often help. Sometimes, taking a deep breath and talking out loud is all that may be needed. I also believe it is extremely important to have outlets or hobbies in your life. Some people find getting up early and meditating is a way to relax and recharge your mind. Others may find playing an instrument, listening to a Ted talk, gardening or reading a book keeps them relaxed and content. The point is, you have to find some activity that makes you happy and feel relaxed. This in itself, helps you think of the solution as a third party and coming up with a new perspective on the problem/situation creating the stress in your life.



I think it is important to have general lifestyle principles and routines embedded in your life such as the 5 steps below:

1. It is important to stay positive and surround yourself with people that will bring positivity in your life as well.
2. Exercising regularly and maintaining a healthy diet also helps with keeping the stress levels manageable.
3. Staying well hydrated and avoiding excessive consumption of caffeinated and alcoholic beverages also help you manage your stress.
4. Learn also how to say "no" to unnecessary requests. You need to know your limits and stick to them. It is important to know the difference between the "shoulds" and the "musts" and when needed to say "no" to taking on too much, whether

it be in your personal or professional life. Taking on too much is indeed a recipe for disaster and the root of stress for most people.

5. Lastly, getting enough sleep is also vital to stress management. Most of us are not getting the recommended 7 to 8 hours of sleep every night.

In the end, it is always important to ask oneself, "Is this going to make a difference in the grand scheme of things?" "Is it really worth getting upset over?"

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ACUPUNCTURE POINT INJECTION THERAPY: Unlocking Regenerative Healing

By Dr. Mary Lambert, AP, DOM

Acupuncture Point Injection Therapy (APIT) combines traditional acupuncture with modern medicine to stimulate the body's natural healing processes. By injecting biocompatible substances like vitamins, minerals, and ultra-high dilution medicines into acupuncture points, APIT supports tissue repair, pain relief, and regeneration. Its unique approach is gaining recognition as a non-invasive alternative to conventional treatments for various musculoskeletal and systemic conditions.

The Science Behind Regeneration with APIT

APIT stimulates the body at specific acupuncture points, where blood flow, nerve pathways, and connective tissue intersect. The injection not only activates these acupuncture points but also delivers regenerative compounds directly to areas that need healing. This dual action can:

- **Boost Collagen Production** Substances like amino acids promote collagen synthesis, essential for repairing soft tissue and maintaining skin elasticity.
- **Reduce Inflammation:** Anti-inflammatory agents like saline or vitamin B12 help modulate the body's inflammatory response, accelerating recovery.
- **Enhance Cellular Regeneration:** Ingredients such as ultra-high dilution medicines and growth factors stimulate cell renewal, aiding in tissue repair and revitalization.

Clinical Evidence Supporting Regenerative Benefits

Several studies highlight the regenerative potential of APIT:

1. Pain and Tissue Repair

Research published in the *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine* demonstrated that injecting procaine (a mild anesthetic) into acupuncture points improved pain relief and reduced stiffness in patients with myofascial pain syndrome. The injections also showed evidence of enhancing blood flow and tissue repair in affected areas.

2. Joint and Cartilage Health

A study on knee osteoarthritis found that injecting hyaluronic acid into acupuncture points decreased pain and improved joint function. The localized

stimulation of acupuncture points, combined with hyaluronic acid's lubricating properties, supported cartilage regeneration and reduced degeneration.

3. Wound Healing and Skin Rejuvenation

Cosmetic acupuncture combined with APIT using ultra-high dilution medicines or hyaluronic acid has been shown to enhance skin regeneration. PRP, rich in growth factors, promotes cellular repair and collagen production, reducing wrinkles and improving skin elasticity.

4. Tendon and Ligament Injuries

APIT with regenerative compounds like vitamin B12 and amino acids has been used to treat chronic tendonitis and ligament injuries. Studies suggest that these injections improve tensile strength and promote healing by increasing local circulation and cellular repair.

Advantages of APIT for Regenerative Healing

- **Non-Invasive:** Compared to surgical options, APIT offers a safer, less invasive way to promote regeneration.
- **Natural Healing:** By leveraging the body's innate repair mechanisms, it encourages long-term recovery rather than masking symptoms.
- **Targeted Delivery:** The precise placement of injections ensures the therapeutic substances are delivered exactly where they're needed.
- **Versatile Applications:** APIT can be used for musculoskeletal injuries, chronic pain, skin rejuvenation, and even systemic conditions like fatigue or immune dysfunction.

Popular Substances Used in APIT for Regeneration

1. **Vitamin B12:** Supports nerve health, reduces inflammation, and enhances cellular energy.
2. **Hyaluronic Acid:** Improves joint lubrication and hydration, particularly in osteoarthritis.
3. **Ultra-high Dilution Medicines:** Aid in balancing the body's energy and promoting healing as well as regeneration of cells.

What to Expect

During your first visit to Lambert Wellness Center, Dr. Mary will have an in-depth consultation to curate an individual treatment plan for your needs. Regenerative APIT treatments work best in a series, but the number of treatments necessary for optimal healing will depend on the individual's health concerns and healing goals. You will, however, have some relief after the very first treatment.

Conclusion

Acupuncture Point Injection Therapy is at the forefront of regenerative medicine, blending the ancient wisdom of acupuncture with cutting-edge medical innovations. Whether addressing chronic pain, skin rejuvenation, or musculoskeletal injuries, APIT offers a powerful, non-invasive solution for those seeking natural healing and long-term wellness.

As more research emerges, APIT's role in regenerative therapies continues to expand, offering hope for those seeking to heal, repair, and rejuvenate without surgery or synthetic drugs.

Would you like to explore how APIT can benefit your specific needs? Reach out to us today by calling or texting us at 239-776-4055.

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The Synergistic Relationship Between Weight Management and Heart Health

Managing weight isn't just about fitting into smaller clothes or achieving aesthetic goals – it's fundamentally intertwined with cardiovascular health, affecting everything from blood pressure to heart function. Understanding this connection can help motivate and guide effective lifestyle changes that benefit both weight management and heart health simultaneously.

The impact of excess weight on cardiovascular health is significant and well-documented. When we carry extra pounds, our hearts must work harder to pump blood throughout our bodies, leading to increased blood pressure and greater strain on the cardiovascular system. Additionally, excess body fat, particularly around the midsection, is metabolically active and can promote inflammation throughout the body, potentially damaging blood vessels and increasing the risk of heart disease.

However, even modest weight loss can yield remarkable cardiovascular benefits. Research shows that losing just 5-10% of body weight can significantly reduce blood pressure, improve cholesterol levels, and decrease the risk of heart disease. This improvement occurs because weight loss helps reduce the workload on the heart while simultaneously addressing many of the underlying metabolic issues that contribute to cardiovascular problems.

The key to achieving and maintaining a healthy weight while supporting heart health lies in adopting a comprehensive approach that includes both dietary modifications and regular physical activity. Rather than focusing on quick fixes or extreme measures, successful long-term weight management requires sustainable lifestyle changes that can be maintained indefinitely.

From a dietary perspective, emphasizing whole, nutrient-dense foods while limiting processed foods and added sugars provides dual benefits for weight management and heart health. A diet rich in fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, whole grains, and healthy fats naturally supports weight loss by providing satisfying nutrition with fewer calories. These same foods also deliver essential nutrients that support cardiovascular health, such as potassium, fiber, and omega-3 fatty acids.

The Mediterranean diet serves as an excellent example of an eating pattern that promotes both weight management and heart health. This approach emphasizes olive oil, fish, nuts, legumes, and abundant fresh produce while limiting red meat and processed foods. Studies consistently show that following a Mediterranean-style diet can lead to sustainable weight loss while significantly reducing the risk of cardiovascular disease.

Physical activity plays an equally crucial role in this relationship. Regular exercise not only burns calories and supports weight loss but also strengthens the heart muscle, improves circulation, and helps regulate blood pressure. The American Heart Association recommends at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity or 75 minutes of vigorous activity per week, combined with muscle-strengthening activities at least twice weekly.

The beauty of exercise is that its benefits are cumulative and begin immediately. Even before significant weight loss occurs, regular physical activity starts improving cardiovascular function. As fitness improves and weight decreases, many people find they can engage in more challenging activities, creating a positive feedback loop that supports both continued weight loss and enhanced heart health.

Sleep and stress management also play vital roles in this relationship. Poor sleep and chronic stress can interfere with weight loss efforts by disrupting hormones that regulate appetite and metabolism. These factors can also directly impact heart health through increased inflammation and blood pressure. Prioritizing adequate sleep (7-9 hours per night) and implementing stress-reduction techniques such as meditation or yoga can support both weight management and cardiovascular health goals.

It's important to recognize that sustainable weight loss for heart health isn't about achieving a specific number on the scale but rather about making consistent, healthy choices that support overall well-being. Small, progressive changes often lead to more sustainable results than dramatic overhauls. This might mean starting with a 10-minute daily walk and gradually increasing duration and intensity, or slowly incorporating more vegetables into meals rather than attempting a complete dietary transformation overnight.



Regular medical check-ups and monitoring of cardiovascular health markers can provide valuable feedback and motivation throughout the weight loss journey. Improvements in blood pressure, cholesterol levels, and other health indicators often occur before significant weight loss is visible, offering encouraging evidence that positive changes are taking place.

The relationship between weight management and cardiovascular health is clear and compelling. By adopting a comprehensive approach that includes thoughtful dietary choices, regular physical activity, adequate sleep, and stress management, individuals can work toward achieving and maintaining a healthy weight while simultaneously supporting their heart health. This integrated approach not only leads to better health outcomes but also creates a foundation for lasting lifestyle changes that can support well-being for years to come.

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ENHANCING INTIMATE SEXUAL HEALTH: The Role of Labiaplasty in Women's Wellness

Labiaplasty, a surgical procedure focused on modifying the labia minora or majora, has emerged as an important topic in women's health care. This medical intervention addresses both functional and aesthetic concerns that can significantly impact a woman's quality of life, physical comfort, and emotional wellbeing.

Understanding Labiaplasty

The procedure primarily involves surgical modification of the labia minora (inner vaginal lips) or, less commonly, the labia majora (outer vaginal lips). While often categorized as a cosmetic procedure, labiaplasty serves important functional purposes for many patients who experience physical discomfort or limitations in their daily activities.

Medical Indications

Many women seek labiaplasty for medical reasons beyond aesthetic concerns. Common functional issues include:

- Physical discomfort during exercise or athletic activities
- Irritation or chafing when wearing certain clothing
- Discomfort during intimate relations
- Hygiene challenges
- Recurring infections due to excess tissue

The decision to undergo labiaplasty often stems from a combination of these functional concerns alongside personal aesthetic preferences. Medical professionals emphasize the importance of thorough consultation to understand each patient's specific needs and expectations.

The Surgical Process

The procedure is typically performed on an outpatient basis under local anesthesia with sedation or general anesthesia, depending on patient preference and surgical requirements. Modern surgical techniques focus on preserving sensation and natural contours while addressing the patient's concerns. The surgery usually takes between one to two hours, with most patients returning home the same day.

Recovery and Results

Recovery from labiaplasty generally requires two to four weeks, during which patients gradually return to normal activities. Initial swelling and discomfort are

managed with appropriate pain medication and cold compresses. Most patients can return to work within a week, though strenuous activities and intimate relations typically resume after four to six weeks.

Patient Satisfaction and Outcomes

Research indicates high satisfaction rates among labiaplasty patients, with improvements reported in:

- Physical comfort during daily activities
- Confidence in intimate relationships
- Overall body image and self-esteem
- Ability to participate in athletic activities
- Comfort in wearing various clothing styles

Medical Considerations

Potential candidates for labiaplasty should undergo comprehensive medical evaluation to ensure they are suitable for the procedure. Important considerations include:

- Overall health status
- Realistic expectations about surgical outcomes
- Understanding of recovery requirements
- Psychological readiness for the procedure
- Completion of family planning, as future childbirth can affect results

The Role of Medical Professionals

Healthcare providers play a crucial role in guiding patients through the decision-making process. This includes:

- Conducting thorough physical examinations
- Discussing medical history and concerns
- Explaining surgical options and techniques
- Setting realistic expectations
- Providing comprehensive post-operative care instructions

Future Developments

Advancing surgical techniques and technology continue to improve labiaplasty outcomes. These developments focus on minimizing scarring, reducing recovery time, and optimizing results while maintaining natural tissue sensation and function.

Labiaplasty represents an important surgical option for women experiencing functional or aesthetic concerns related to labial tissue. When performed by

qualified medical professionals with appropriate patient selection and counseling, the procedure can significantly improve quality of life and intimate wellness. As with any surgical intervention, success depends on careful consideration of individual needs, thorough medical evaluation, and realistic expectations about outcomes. The growing acceptance of open discussions about intimate health issues has helped reduce stigma and improved access to information about this beneficial procedure.

What will my recovery be like?

With Dr. Kiran Gill and her team, you can be assured of personalized care at every step to ensure that you have a comfortable treatment experience and recovery. Following labiaplasty, you will have some discomfort, swelling, and bruising for a few days.

Dr. Gill, a Board Certified Plastic and Reconstructive Plastic Surgeon, will prescribe pain meds for a few days. She will recommend ice packs, loose clothes, and absorbent pads for the initial recovery period. You can expect to resume your regular routine in a week, but should avoid strenuous exercises and sexual activity for about one month.



Your Labiaplasty Consultation

The decision to undergo labiaplasty is a personal one, and Dr. Gill will ensure that you are fully informed before moving forward through a private, one-on-one consultation in Naples, FL.

She will use this session to answer all your questions in detail and create a customized plan of action for addressing your aesthetic concerns, tailored to your wishes and goals. Call us now at 239-596-8000 to schedule a convenient appointment with Dr. Gill.



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UNDERSTANDING CBD: NATURE'S WELLNESS COMPOUND

CBD, short for cannabidiol, has emerged as a prominent natural compound that's revolutionizing the wellness industry. This non-psychoactive substance, derived from the cannabis plant, has garnered significant attention for its potential therapeutic properties while offering users the benefits of cannabis without the intoxicating effects associated with THC.

At its core, CBD is one of over 100 cannabinoids found in the cannabis plant. Unlike its well-known cousin THC (tetrahydrocannabinol), CBD doesn't produce a "high" or alter consciousness. Instead, it interacts with the body's endocannabinoid system (ECS), a complex network of receptors that helps regulate various physiological processes including mood, sleep, appetite, and pain sensation.

The extraction of CBD typically comes from hemp, a variety of cannabis containing high levels of CBD and minimal THC (legally less than 0.3% in most countries). This extraction process can be accomplished through various methods, including CO2 extraction, ethanol extraction, or oil infusion, with CO2 extraction being considered the gold standard for purity and safety.

Research into CBD's potential benefits has expanded dramatically in recent years. Studies suggest that CBD may help manage anxiety, reduce inflammation, alleviate chronic pain, and improve sleep quality. Some research indicates it might have neuroprotective



properties and could potentially aid in treating certain forms of epilepsy. In fact, the FDA has approved a CBD-based medication called Epidiolex for treating specific types of seizures.

CBD products come in various forms to suit different preferences and needs. These include oils and tinctures, capsules, edibles, topical creams, and vaping products. Each delivery method offers unique advantages – oils provide precise dosing and quick absorption, while topicals target specific areas for localized relief. Edibles offer a convenient and tasty option, though they typically take longer to take effect.

Despite its growing popularity, consumers should approach CBD with informed caution. The market remains largely unregulated in many regions, making it crucial to purchase from reputable manufacturers who provide third-party lab testing results. These tests verify the product's CBD content and ensure it's free from contaminants like pesticides and heavy metals.

When considering CBD use, it's important to start with low doses and gradually increase them while monitoring your body's response. While CBD is generally considered safe, it can interact with certain medications, particularly those metabolized by the

liver. Consulting with a healthcare provider before starting CBD is advisable, especially for individuals taking other medications.

Looking ahead, the CBD industry continues to evolve with ongoing research revealing new potential applications and benefits. As regulations develop and scientific understanding deepens, CBD's role in wellness and healthcare may expand further. For now, it remains a promising natural compound that has captured the attention of both the scientific community and health-conscious consumers seeking alternative approaches to wellness.

About Hemp Joi

It all started back in 2019, we set out to change the way the world deals with chronic aches and pains. Having a background in functional medicine and a passion for entrepreneurship, we set out to bring quality products to the greater SW Florida area and beyond.

We were inspired by family members, in the massage therapy industry, that kept getting requests from clients to use CBD oils because of their natural healing properties.

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Geniculate Artery Embolization:

A Promising Minimally Invasive Treatment for Knee Osteoarthritis

By Russell Becker, DO

Knee osteoarthritis (OA) affects millions of people worldwide, causing chronic pain and significantly impacting quality of life.

While traditional treatments range from conservative management to total knee replacement, a novel interventional procedure called geniculate artery embolization (GAE) is emerging as a promising minimally invasive option for patients with knee OA. This innovative treatment targets the underlying vascular pathology associated with knee osteoarthritis, offering new hope for those seeking alternatives to surgery.

Understanding the Connection Between Inflammation and Blood Supply

The development and progression of knee osteoarthritis involve complex inflammatory processes. Research has shown that increased blood vessel formation (angiogenesis) and inflammation in the synovial membrane of affected joints play crucial roles in the pathogenesis of OA. These new blood vessels not only supply inflammatory cells and mediators but also contribute to pain through the growth of sensory nerve fibers alongside them. This understanding has led to the development of GAE as a targeted treatment approach.

The GAE Procedure: How It Works

Geniculate artery embolization is performed by interventional radiologists under local anesthesia. During the procedure, a tiny catheter is inserted through a small puncture in the femoral artery, typically in the groin area. Using advanced imaging guidance, the catheter is navigated to the arteries surrounding the knee joint, specifically the geniculate arteries that supply the synovial membrane.

Once the target vessels are identified, small particles are injected through the catheter to block abnormal blood vessels that contribute to inflammation and pain. This embolization reduces blood flow to the inflamed synovium while maintaining adequate circulation to healthy tissues. The procedure typically takes 1-2 hours, and patients can usually return home the same day.

Clinical Evidence and Treatment Outcomes

Several clinical studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of GAE for knee osteoarthritis. Research has shown significant improvements in

pain scores and functional outcomes following the procedure. A notable study published in the *Journal of Vascular and Interventional Radiology* reported that 70-80% of patients experienced meaningful pain reduction within the first month after treatment, with benefits lasting up to two years in many cases.

The procedure has shown particularly promising results for patients with moderate to severe knee OA who have not responded adequately to conservative treatments but may not be ready or suitable for knee replacement surgery. Importantly, GAE does not "burn any bridges" – patients can still undergo other treatments or surgery if needed in the future.

Advantages and Patient Selection

GAE offers several advantages over traditional surgical interventions:

- Minimally invasive nature with only a small puncture site
- Performed under local anesthesia
- Short recovery time with most patients returning to normal activities within days
- Preservation of native joint anatomy
- No bridges burned for future treatment options

However, not all patients with knee OA are ideal candidates for GAE. The best results are typically seen in patients who:

- Have moderate to severe knee OA with documented synovitis
- Experience pain despite conservative management
- Show evidence of inflammatory changes on imaging studies
- Have no severe mechanical deformity of the knee

Safety Profile and Considerations

The safety profile of GAE has been encouraging, with relatively few reported complications. Most side effects are minor and temporary, such as mild bruising at the puncture site or short-term post-procedure pain. However, as with any medical procedure, proper patient selection and careful technique are essential for optimal outcomes.

Future Perspectives and Research

While GAE shows promise, ongoing research continues to refine the technique and better understand its long-term effectiveness. Current studies are investigating optimal particle sizes for embolization, identifying the most reliable predictors of treatment success, and exploring potential applications for other joint conditions.

The development of more sophisticated imaging techniques and embolization materials may further improve the precision and effectiveness of the procedure. Additionally, researchers are studying whether combining GAE with other treatments might provide enhanced benefits for certain patient populations.

Conclusion

Geniculate artery embolization represents an important advancement in the treatment of knee osteoarthritis, offering a minimally invasive option that targets the underlying vascular pathology of the condition. While not a cure-all for every patient with knee OA, it provides a valuable alternative in the treatment arsenal, particularly for those seeking options between conservative management and joint replacement surgery. As research continues and techniques are refined, GAE may become an increasingly important tool in managing this common and debilitating condition.

It's no stretch to say that Russell Becker, DO, a fellow-trained vascular surgeon practicing at Vascular Center of Naples in Naples, Florida, gets into things for the long run. Dr. Becker, who runs marathons in his free time, has experience and interest in all areas of vascular and endovascular surgery, including treatment of conditions like carotid artery disease, hemodialysis access creation and maintenance, and diseases of the veins.



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CBD AWARENESS MONTH: Your Pharmacist as a Trusted Guide in Your CBD Journey

By Justin Ceravolo, PharmD

As CBD continues to gain popularity for its potential therapeutic benefits, many people have questions about its safe and effective use. CBD Awareness Month serves as an important reminder that your local pharmacist can be an invaluable resource in navigating the complex world of CBD products and their integration with your current medications and health conditions.

Pharmacists are uniquely positioned to provide evidence-based guidance on CBD use, thanks to their extensive knowledge of drug interactions, dosing, and therapeutic effects. Their expertise becomes particularly crucial as the CBD market expands with various products, from oils and tinctures to topicals and edibles.

One of the primary concerns when considering CBD use is its potential interaction with prescription medications. Your pharmacist can conduct a thorough review of your current medication regimen to identify any possible interactions with CBD. This is especially important because CBD can affect how your body metabolizes certain medications, potentially increasing or decreasing their effectiveness.

Beyond drug interactions, pharmacists can help you understand the quality markers of CBD products. They can explain the difference between full-spectrum, broad-spectrum, and CBD isolate products, and help you identify reputable manufacturers who provide third-party testing certificates. This guidance is crucial in an industry where product quality and labeling accuracy can vary significantly.

Dosing is another area where pharmacist expertise proves valuable. While CBD is generally well-tolerated, finding the right dosage can be challenging. Your pharmacist can provide personalized recommendations based on factors such as your body weight, the condition you're treating, and your individual response to CBD.

Many pharmacies now offer CBD consultations where you can discuss your specific health goals and concerns. During these sessions, pharmacists can help you develop a plan for incorporating CBD into your wellness routine safely and effectively. They can also monitor your progress and help you make adjustments as needed.

For those managing chronic conditions, pharmacists can work alongside your healthcare providers to ensure CBD use aligns with your overall treatment plan. They can help you track potential benefits and side effects, and provide guidance on when to adjust your approach.

As we celebrate CBD Awareness Month, remember that your pharmacist is more than just a medication dispenser – they're a knowledgeable healthcare professional who can help you make informed decisions about CBD use. Whether you're new to CBD or looking to optimize your current regimen, scheduling a consultation with your pharmacist can help ensure you're using CBD safely and effectively as part of your health journey.



Justin Ceravolo, PharmD - Owner & Pharmacist
Justin Ceravolo, also known as J.T., earned his Doctor of Pharmacy degree from Florida A&M University's College of Pharmacy in 2012. That same year, Justin began working in Florida's Panhandle before becoming a new member of the Cypress Wellness Pharmacy family in October of 2012. Cypress Wellness Pharmacy believes that each patient, whether he or she is a human or pet, should be given their own special attention and service. In 2024 Justin became the owner of Cypress Wellness Pharmacy and is committed to advancing the pharmacy's phenomenal reputation for personalized service with a focus on education and well-being for all patients and customers. Whether you need your medication in another compounded form or you simply need advice, Justin and his team will ensure fast and efficient service that goes above and beyond your average pharmacy.

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February: A Month of Love and Prevention – Encourage Those You Love to Get Screened for Cancer

By Mandi Reid, MSN, APRN, ACNP-BC, Nurse Practitioner at Naples Cancer Advisors

February is often associated with love, from heartfelt Valentine's cards to meaningful gestures that show care and appreciation. But what if this year, you showed your love in a different way—by encouraging the people you care about most to prioritize their health? Cancer prevention and early detection can make a life-saving difference. While it's not always easy to bring up health topics, reminding your loved ones to get their cancer screenings is an act of love that could save their lives.

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force provides clear recommendations for cancer screenings, offering guidance on when and how often individuals should be checked. By staying informed and proactive, you can help ensure the people you care about catch potential issues early—when treatment is most effective. Here's a detailed guide to key cancer screenings for men and women. Consider printing this and keeping it on your refrigerator to make it easy for everyone in your household to stay on track.

Recommended Cancer Screenings for Women

1. Breast Cancer:

- Women aged 50 to 74: Mammograms every 2 years are recommended.
- Women aged 40 to 49: Mammogram timing should be based on personal risk factors and discussed with a healthcare provider.

2. Cervical Cancer:

- Women aged 21 to 29: Pap smear every 3 years.
- Women aged 30 to 65: Pap smear every 3 years or combined Pap smear and HPV testing every 5 years.

3. Colorectal Cancer:

- Begin screening at age 45. Options include colonoscopy every 10 years or annual stool-based tests.

4. Lung Cancer (for smokers and former smokers):

- Women aged 50 to 80 with a 20-pack-year smoking history should have an annual low-dose CT scan if they smoke or have quit within the past 15 years.

5. Skin Cancer:

- Perform monthly self-checks for unusual moles or lesions, and schedule full-body exams with a dermatologist if you're at higher risk.

Recommended Cancer Screenings for Men

1. Prostate Cancer:

- Men aged 50 to 69 should discuss PSA testing with their healthcare provider to weigh the benefits and risks.
- African-American men and those with a family history may need to start screening earlier.

2. Colorectal Cancer:

- Screening should begin at age 45. Options include colonoscopy every 10 years or annual stool-based tests.

3. Lung Cancer (for smokers and former smokers):

- Same guidelines as for women: Annual low-dose CT scans are recommended for adults aged 50 to 80 with a 20-pack-year smoking history.

4. Skin Cancer:

- Men should perform monthly self-checks for new or changing moles and schedule regular skin exams if they have risk factors such as fair skin or excessive sun exposure.

5. Testicular Cancer:

- While routine screenings are not generally recommended, younger men are encouraged to perform monthly self-exams to check for lumps or changes.

Making Screenings a Priority

Discussing cancer screenings may not seem romantic, but it's one of the most loving things you can do. Far too many cancers are diagnosed late, often because people put off screenings or don't realize their risk factors. By starting the conversation with your loved ones, you might be giving them the nudge they need to schedule that overdue mammogram or colonoscopy.

Better yet, turn it into a family affair. You can encourage your spouse, parents, siblings, or friends to schedule their screenings together. It's also a great opportunity to reflect on your own health—are you up to date on your screenings?

A Lifesaving Gift of Love

Cancer screenings are about more than prevention—they're about early detection, which increases the likelihood of successful treatment. According to the American Cancer Society, regular screenings have significantly reduced death rates for cancers like cervical, breast, and colorectal. For lung cancer, early detection through low-dose CT scans can improve survival rates dramatically, especially for high-risk individuals.

Think of screenings as a gift you give not only to yourself but to your loved ones. The earlier cancer is caught, the more treatment options are available, and the better the chances of a positive outcome.

At Naples Cancer Advisors, we believe everyone deserves access to life-saving cancer care and prevention resources. We're here to help guide you and your loved ones through the process, from providing second opinions to connecting you with specialists.

About Amanda (Mandi) Reid, MSN, APRN, ACNP-BC
Mandi is a nurse practitioner at Naples Cancer Advisors, where she is dedicated to empowering patients with the knowledge and resources they need to prevent and detect cancer early. As a healthcare professional since 1997, Mandi's varied roles and experience have given her a unique perspective on providing for the care needs of her patients. Her prior experience includes roles such as phlebotomist, lab assistant, nursing assistant, critical care technician, registered nurse, and nurse practitioner; each lending itself to her broad knowledge base and clinical acumen.

Mandi earned a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) from Lander University in Greenwood, South Carolina in 2000. While working as an intensive care RN in South Carolina and then Central Florida, her love of patient care and pursuit of higher education led her to earn a Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) from the University of South Alabama in 2008, achieving board certification as an Acute Care Nurse Practitioner shortly after graduation.

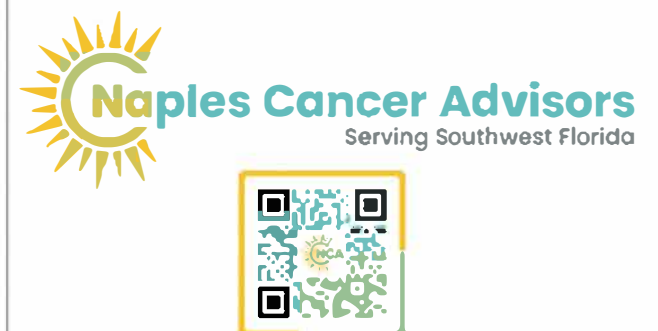
Mandi's desire to make a difference in the lives of cancer patients comes from personal experience. One of the most influential women in her life, Mandi's grandmother, was a breast cancer survivor. After living many years as a survivor, she was diagnosed with and passed due to glioblastoma multiforme, a fast growing and aggressive brain tumor. From this experience, Mandi found her purpose and passion, beginning her journey in the specialty practice of oncology when she moved to Naples, Florida in 2011.

Mandi has continued to make oncology her life's work with the goal of giving every patient the kind of care she would want her own family to receive (including hugs!). With experience in both acute care (hospital) and office practice settings, she brings a multifaceted, compassionate and holistic approach to care while providing education and options to ensure patients meet their individual goals and honoring their journey.

Take Action Today

This February, show your love by encouraging someone you care about to schedule a cancer screening. If you're unsure where to start, Naples Cancer Advisors is here to help. Our team provides personalized support and guidance, including referrals, second opinions, and navigation through screening options—all at no cost to patients.

Call us at 239-846-2273 (CARE) to take the first step toward a healthier future for yourself and your loved ones. Love isn't just about words—it's about taking action to ensure a long, healthy life for those who matter most.



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What's Your Diet?

By Pastor Roger P. Felipe

Weight-watchers. Nutrisystem. Mediterranean diet. Paleo. Living healthy has become a craze, although obesity in our country, rather legitimizes it. For many people it is about looking and feeling better, living longer, stronger and disease-free. These are all important reasons for eating clean, exercising, and learning to rest our bodies sufficiently.

For Christians, however, trying to maintain healthy habits finds its motivation in more than adopting diet fads to longevity and better quality of life. Taking care of our bodies is stewardship. That is, it is a reflection of our recognition of having been created by God, and how our lives can be instruments in his hands to serve and honor him on earth. Of course, God can use both the healthy and the unfit for his purposes, including the sick, feeble, and dying. Human worth and value is not in question.

The reality is that our earthly lives are only a speck in the sands of eternity. However, Christ followers understand that life doesn't belong to them. It is a gift from a Good Father who entrusted them with a brief span of years that should be invested in loving others and making our world a better place. For those who have believed in Christ and experienced God's forgiveness of sin, the reason for taking care of their bodies goes beyond living

longer and healthier. It's about honoring Jesus Christ with all of life, including the way they take care of their bodies.

In his book, *"The Unknown God: Searching for spiritual fulfillment,"* Oxford University professor, Alister McGrath, describes the parable of Plato's Cave, a story about people enslaved inside the cave oblivious to the reality that existed on the outside beyond the flickering shadows which they knew. That is, until the day someone was able to find their way out and discover a world beyond description, a world of beauty and splendor. McGrath writes, "Our desires have become attached to things that are little more than shadows, when they are meant to be attached to something which cannot decay or disappoint" (32).


How does this relate to healthy living? Focusing on living healthier and longer, like any other pursuit we might obsess about, really reveals a spiritual longing in our souls for something more: *eternity*. Whether is it longing for a "perfect" relationship that often disenchant, earthly riches that can quickly vanish, or a healthy and strong body that is suddenly brought to a standstill due to an unexpected medical report, our hearts are longing for something beyond what this world can provide.



McGrath probes us to consider this question: "Suppose our longing for fulfillment points to something we have yet to discover? What if our yearning is a clue to the meaning of the universe?" (10). Taking care of your body and staying healthy is a good thing, but it isn't everything. The truth of the matter is, whatever we pursue in life has a way to deceive us to think that by attaining "it" our lives will be complete. They're not. Deep inside a voice continues to remind us that our longings for fulfillment are like signposts in the sky pointing us to something beyond ourselves. Could that something (Someone) be our Creator?

May you achieve physical well-being and wholeness. But may you also discover the gift of eternal life which Jesus promises to all who believe and trust in him alone. "...I have come that they may have life, and have it in abundance" (John 10:10). I would enjoy exploring with you the meaning of life and God.

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