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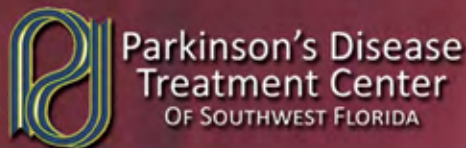
Health & Wellness[®] MAGAZINE

April 2025

Lee Edition - Monthly

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SWFL IN PARTNERSHIP
WITH CHARLOTTE COUNTY
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2025 SWFL PARKINSON'S DISEASE SPRING SYMPOSIUM

FRIDAY, APRIL 25, 2025

8:30 AM TO 3:30 PM

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Ramon A. Gil, M.D.
Diplomate American Board
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Parkinson's Disease Treatment Center of SWFL in partnership with Charlotte County Medical Society proudly presents...

2025 SWFL Parkinson's Disease Spring Symposium

"A Holistic Approach to Treatment"

Friday, April 25th, 2025
8:30 AM to 3:30 PM
The Isles Yacht Club
 1780 W. Marion Ave, Punta Gorda, FL 33950

Special Guest Speakers:

Dr. Richard B. Dewey III, M.D. Kelly Papesh, ARNP, FNP-C, CHRO Dr. Ramon Gil, M.D. Mary Spremulli, MA, CCC-SLP Debra Tarakofsky, MS, CCC-SLP PD. Vibha Kumar

Agenda

8:30 am - 9:30 am	On Site Registration, Light Breakfast and Exhibitors
9:30 am - 9:45 am	Opening Remarks..... R. Gil, M.D.
9:45 am - 10:30 am	"Being Loud"M. Spremulli, SLP and D. Tarakofsky, SLP
10:30 am - 11:15 am	"Mindfulness and Yoga for Balance" V. Kumar
11:15 am - 11:45 am	Break & Refreshments
11:45 pm - 12:30 pm	"Lifestyle in Parkinson's Disease"... K. Papesh, ARNP
12:30 pm - 1:30 pm	Lunch
1:30 pm - 2:15 pm	"Is there a Better Medical Treatment?" ... R. Gil, M.D.
2:15 pm - 3:00 pm	"Advanced Therapies for Parkinson's Disease" R. Dewey III, M.D.
3:00 pm - 3:30 pm	Q's and A's..... Faculty
3:30 pm	Recognition, Raffle and Adjourn

Thank you to our Faculty, Hosts, Participants and Sponsors!

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THE LINK BETWEEN ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE AND HEARING LOSS

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

Alzheimer's Disease and hearing loss are two prevalent health issues that affect millions of people worldwide. While they may seem unrelated at first glance, recent research has uncovered a surprising connection between the two conditions. Understanding this link is crucial for early detection, intervention, and improved quality of life for those affected.

Alzheimer's Disease, a progressive neurodegenerative disorder, primarily affects memory, thinking skills, and behavior. It is the most common cause of dementia, accounting for approximately 60-80% of cases. Symptoms typically develop slowly and worsen over time, eventually interfering with daily tasks and functioning. While the exact cause of Alzheimer's remains unknown, various factors, including genetics, lifestyle, and environmental factors, are believed to contribute to its onset and progression.

On the other hand, hearing loss is a prevalent sensory impairment, particularly among older adults. It can result from age-related changes in the inner ear, exposure to loud noise, genetic predisposition, or medical conditions such as diabetes or cardiovascular disease. Hearing loss can significantly impact communication, social interaction, and overall quality of life if left untreated.

While Alzheimer's Disease and hearing loss may appear unrelated, emerging evidence suggests a potential connection between the two. Several studies have found that individuals with untreated hearing loss may have a higher risk of developing cognitive decline and dementia, including Alzheimer's Disease. One theory is that the brain's increased cognitive effort to process degraded auditory signals may contribute to cognitive decline over time, leading to conditions like Alzheimer's.

Furthermore, researchers have identified common underlying mechanisms that could link hearing loss and Alzheimer's Disease. These include vascular factors, inflammation, and structural changes in the brain. For instance, both conditions



have been associated with reduced blood flow to certain areas of the brain, which may exacerbate neuronal damage and cognitive impairment.

Moreover, social isolation and decreased engagement in cognitively stimulating activities due to hearing loss could also contribute to the development of Alzheimer's Disease. Communication difficulties resulting from hearing loss may lead to feelings of frustration, loneliness, and withdrawal from social interactions, all of which are known risk factors for cognitive decline and dementia.

Recognizing the potential link between Alzheimer's Disease and hearing loss highlights the importance of early detection and intervention for both conditions. Regular hearing screenings, particularly among older adults, can help identify hearing loss early on and facilitate appropriate management, such as hearing aids or cochlear implants. By addressing hearing loss promptly, individuals may mitigate its potential impact on cognitive function and reduce the risk of developing Alzheimer's Disease.

Additionally, promoting cognitive health through activities such as social engagement, physical exercise, and lifelong learning may help mitigate the risk of Alzheimer's Disease, especially in individuals with hearing loss. Maintaining a healthy

lifestyle, managing chronic conditions, and staying mentally and socially active are essential strategies for preserving cognitive function and overall well-being.

In conclusion, while Alzheimer's Disease and hearing loss are distinct conditions, they share intriguing connections that warrant further investigation. Understanding and addressing the interplay between these two health issues could have significant implications for early detection, prevention, and management strategies. By integrating hearing health into holistic approaches to brain health, we can potentially improve outcomes and quality of life for millions of individuals affected by Alzheimer's Disease and hearing loss.

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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PARKINSON'S AWARENESS MONTH

TREATING PARKINSON'S DISEASE WITH A HOLISTIC APPROACH

By Ramon A. Gil, M.D., Medical Director, Parkinson's Disease Treatment Center of SWFL

The progress witnessed over the past 30 years in understanding, diagnosing, and treating Parkinson's Disease (PD) is simply phenomenal. Many of you may be wondering, "When is the cure coming?" Even that seems closer today than ever before. But remember that "cure" is a very strong word, and in the case of PD it will probably be arresting the progression of the illness, as it is impossible to completely reverse the damage caused by PD to the brain by the time the diagnosis is made.

It is hard to believe that as recently as in the late 1990s we were still looking at or questioning the value of physical exercise as part of the treatment for PD. Today, we are fully aware that exercise is the only way to increase the levels of GDNF (neurotrophic factor), which is the chemical compound capable of repairing the brain. As a matter of fact, we are currently participating in a gene therapy trial to enhance the production of GDNF. This is indeed a promising approach to finding the cure for PD.

New and better medications continue to become available to treat PD. In just the last 5 years, six new drugs have been approved for the treatment of PD including two subcutaneous infusions. Technological advances in Deep Brain Stimulation (DBS) seem to be a never-ending story. Each of the three companies involved in this field are competing (all to your benefit as patients) in creating additional features in their systems which make programming easier, more effective, and with less side effects. They are also focused on energy efficiency, as newly designed leads allow us to use more efficient settings with the batteries lasting longer. New rechargeable batteries have also been improved.

At the PD Treatment Center of SWFL, we continue to bring you the latest information regarding all aspects of this disease. We hold firm to the conviction that empowering you with education will make you better patients with more confidence in your journey with PD, resulting in a better quality of life.

This year our Spring Symposium will center around "A Holistic Approach to Treatment." As we treat you, we look forward to helping you emotionally, spiritually, and physically. First, Mary Spremulli, CCC-SPL and Debra Tarakofsky, CCC-SPL will open the program with a "loud" talk emphasizing ways to improve and preserve speech and swallowing functions, often affected in PD. They will address significant problems around this topic in the moderate to advanced stages of the disease.

Vibha Kumar studied and received her certification in yoga and meditation from the highly reputed Bihar School of Yoga in India. We are honored to have her reviewing "Mindfulness and Yoga for Balance." There is no real benefit in improving motor symptoms of PD if you ignore anxiety, depression, anger, and frustration in your daily life. These feelings are often the cause of significant deterioration in the home environment and are capable at times of breaking a family apart.

Next, we will have a special guest from Las Vegas, NV. Ms. Kelly Papesh, DNP, ARNP is a most experienced and dynamic nurse, who for years practiced side by side with very well-known neurologists in the Movement Disorders community. She will review "Lifestyle in Parkinson's." No matter how many times we have previously discussed the importance of dietary intervention and physical exercise, for some of you in the audience this material will be new. Furthermore, I know that a refresher course is not a bad idea for those who are still not totally sold on the idea of joining a gym and eating better.

In the afternoon session, I will give a presentation titled: "Is there a Better Medical Treatment?" I hope to convey information that will help you understand why your current treatment may not be the best, and the advantages of newer drugs versus older versions. It may have taken me a while, but I eventually switched from manual cameras to digital ones.



Finally, Dr. Richard Dewey, III M.D., will talk to us about "Advanced Therapies in PD." This will be an amazing presentation by a young, well-trained Movement Disorders Specialist, bringing us the latest advances in DBS technology, and the exciting new infusion therapies, some of them approved just a few weeks ago.

Get ready, this is going to be a *great* program. We are *winning* the battle.

Welcome to our 2025 PD Spring Symposium.

Friday, April 25th, 2025

8:30 AM to 3:30 PM

The Isles Yacht Club

1780 W. Marion Ave, Punta Forda, FL 33950



**For more info or to register
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Parkinson's Disease Treatment Center

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Regenerative Frontier:

MSC Exosomes Show Promise for Parkinson's and Beyond

By Derek P. Wimmer, PA-C

Recent scientific breakthroughs have positioned Mesenchymal Stem Cell (MSC) exosomes as potential game-changers in the treatment of neurodegenerative conditions, with Parkinson's disease showing particularly encouraging results. While Parkinson's represents a critical but relatively limited market, emerging research suggests these powerful cellular messengers may have broader applications across neurodegenerative disorders and even general health optimization.

Parkinson's Breakthrough: What Studies Reveal

Parkinson's disease affects approximately 10 million people worldwide, characterized by progressive loss of dopamine-producing neurons. Traditional treatments primarily manage symptoms rather than addressing the underlying neurodegeneration.

Recent studies demonstrate that MSC exosomes—tiny vesicles released by stem cells that transport proteins, lipids, and genetic material—can cross the blood-brain barrier and deliver regenerative cargo directly to damaged neural tissues. In pre-clinical models, these exosomes have shown remarkable abilities to:

- Reduce neuroinflammation associated with Parkinson's progression
- Promote survival of dopaminergic neurons
- Enhance mitochondrial function in affected brain regions
- Stimulate neurogenesis and improve neural circuit connectivity

A 2023 study published in *Stem Cell Research & Therapy* reported significant motor function improvement in Parkinson's models after MSC exosome administration, with effects lasting considerably longer than conventional therapies.

Expanding Horizons: Applications Beyond Parkinson's

The therapeutic potential of MSC exosomes extends well beyond Parkinson's disease, potentially transforming treatment approaches for multiple neurodegenerative conditions:

Alzheimer's Disease: Affecting over 50 million people globally, Alzheimer's represents a substantially larger market. Preliminary research indicates

MSC exosomes may reduce amyloid-beta and tau aggregation while supporting neural regeneration and cognitive function. A Phase I clinical trial showed promising safety profiles and cognitive stabilization in early-stage patients.

Multiple Sclerosis: Studies suggest MSC exosomes can modulate the immune response that drives MS pathology, potentially reducing demyelination and promoting remyelination of damaged nerve fibers. This dual neuroprotective and regenerative approach addresses both inflammatory and degenerative aspects of MS.

Vascular Dementia: By improving cerebral blood flow, reducing oxidative stress, and enhancing neural repair mechanisms, MSC exosomes show promise for vascular cognitive impairment, the second most common form of dementia.

Holistic Health Applications

Beyond neurodegenerative conditions, MSC exosomes demonstrate potential for overall health optimization:

Cognitive Enhancement: Early research suggests these biological messengers may support healthy brain aging by improving neural plasticity, reducing age-related inflammation, and enhancing cognitive reserve even in non-pathological states.

Immune Modulation: MSC exosomes contain powerful immunomodulatory factors that may help balance immune function, potentially benefiting conditions ranging from autoimmune disorders to chronic inflammation.

Cellular Rejuvenation: The regenerative signals carried by these vesicles appear to activate tissue repair pathways throughout the body, supporting cellular health from the molecular level upward.

Market Outlook and Challenges

While the Parkinson's market alone might present limitations (estimated at \$5.7 billion globally by 2028), the combined neurodegenerative disease space represents over \$45 billion in market potential. Adding applications for healthy aging and immune optimization expands possibilities significantly.

Challenges remain in standardization, scalable production, and regulatory pathways. However, recent technological advances in exosome isolation, characterization, and loading techniques are addressing many of these hurdles.

Conclusion

The therapeutic versatility of MSC exosomes positions them as a promising platform technology rather than a single-disease treatment. Their ability to deliver multiple regenerative signals simultaneously, cross the blood-brain barrier effectively, and promote tissue repair represents a paradigm shift in how we approach neurodegenerative conditions and health optimization.

As research continues to validate their efficacy across broader applications, MSC exosomes may soon transition from experimental treatments to standard therapeutic options—offering new hope for conditions that have long challenged conventional medicine.

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ALIGNMENT MATTERS: DESTRESS WITH EVERY BREATH

By Shannon Willits, Master Pilates Educator

Awakening Movement Through Diaphragmatic Breathing

Stress is an unavoidable part of life, but how we manage it determines how our bodies function. In today's fast-paced world, chronic stress places the body in a constant state of fight-or-flight, leading to tension, restricted movement, and even pain. Diaphragmatic breathing is one of the most effective ways to downregulate the nervous system—or shift it from a heightened state of stress to a place of calm and recovery. This simple practice promotes relaxation, enhances movement, stabilizes the core, and improves overall well-being.

The Diaphragm: A Key to Downregulation

The diaphragm isn't just a muscle for breathing—it plays a pivotal role in stress management and movement efficiency. When adequately engaged, it works harmoniously with the transverse abdominis, pelvic floor, and spinal stabilizers to create a strong yet adaptable core. However, when stress takes over, breathing becomes shallow, shifting to the upper chest and over-relying on accessory muscles like the neck and shoulders. This inefficient pattern only increases muscular tension and decreases movement efficiency.

Imagine the diaphragm as an orchestra conductor, setting the tempo for the entire body. The body follows suit if it's out of sync due to stress. By focusing on diaphragmatic breathing, individuals can improve oxygen exchange, regulate intra-abdominal pressure, and bring the nervous system back to balance. This downregulation effect allows for smoother movement and greater efficiency in everyday life.

The Vagus Nerve: The Body's Stress Regulator

The vagus nerve serves as the body's main pathway for downregulation, sending signals from the brainstem down through the heart, lungs, and digestive system. As the key player in the parasympathetic nervous system—the body's rest and recovery mode—it plays a massive role in regulating heart rate, digestion, and inflammation. Stress keeps this system dormant, but diaphragmatic breathing reactivates it, shifting the body from a heightened fight-or-flight state to a place of restoration.

For individuals dealing with chronic stress, pain, or movement dysfunction, this is a game-changer. Research has shown that controlled, intentional breathwork can reduce cortisol levels, release muscle tension, and improve neuromuscular control. When the vagus nerve is activated, the body becomes more adaptable, resilient, and primed for pain-free movement.

Breath as a Tool for Core Stability and Stress Reduction

Breath is the foundation of core stability and downregulation. The diaphragm, pelvic floor, and deep abdominal muscles form an interconnected system that creates a stable base for movement. When breathing mechanics are optimal, intra-abdominal pressure is regulated, allowing the spine to remain supported and decreasing muscular tension.

Movement experts like Diane Lee and Madeline Black have extensively explored the relationship between breath mechanics and stress-induced compensatory movement patterns. Their findings highlight that movement patterns become more fluid and less restricted when individuals engage in three-dimensional breathing—expanding through the chest, lateral ribs, abdomen, and back. Conversely, when breath is neglected, tension increases, reducing mobility and efficiency.

Breath and Fascia: Releasing Stress at the Connective Tissue Level

Fascia, the body's connective tissue network, is highly responsive to stress. At high-stress levels, the fascia tightens, limiting movement and contributing to stiffness and discomfort. Breath plays a direct role in fascial health. The rhythmic motion of diaphragmatic breathing enhances fascial hydration, elasticity, and adaptability—all essential qualities for reducing tension and preventing injury.

Sue Hitzmann, creator of The MELT Method, emphasizes how conscious breathwork releases deep-seated restrictions in the fascia, helping individuals move more freely. By combining slow, controlled breathing with targeted fascial release techniques, people experience an increased range of motion, decreased tension, and improved neuromuscular coordination.

In rehabilitation and performance settings, breathwork is emerging as a powerful tool for stress relief and movement optimization.



Interested in experiencing the benefits of diaphragmatic breathing for yourself? Join us at Club Pilates for a Center + Balance class and discover the power of breath in motion.

The Practical Benefits of Breath Training for Stress and Performance

Incorporating diaphragmatic breathing into movement-based therapies isn't just theoretical—it has real-world benefits for stress management and movement efficiency. Research suggests that targeted breath training can lead to:

- Increased flexibility through improved fascial elasticity
- More effective nervous system regulation via vagus nerve activation
- More substantial core stability through deeper abdominal and pelvic floor engagement
- Lower stress levels and better sleep by shifting the body into parasympathetic dominance

Pain science research further highlights that breath training enhances body awareness—a crucial element in reducing movement-related stress. When individuals regain control over their breathing, they move with greater efficiency, less effort, and lower energy expenditure, resulting in improved daily function and athletic performance.

Breath as the Missing Link in Stress Reduction and Movement Science

For too long, breath has been overlooked as a stress management tool in movement education, rehabilitation, and performance training. Extensive research confirms its effectiveness. Diaphragmatic breathing is a fundamental strategy for downregulating the nervous system, improving core function, reducing pain, and optimizing overall well-being.

By integrating intentional breathwork into daily movement practices, individuals can tap into their body's full potential, moving with greater ease, efficiency, and resilience. The science is clear: When stress is controlled through breath, movement follows suit.

As the field of movement science evolves, future research should further explore the intricate connections between breath, stress reduction, the nervous system, and movement patterns. Until then, the best approach is simple. Breathe deeply, breathe intentionally, and use breath to reset both body and mind.

Shannon Willits, Master Pilates Educator

Shannon Willits is a Master Pilates Educator with over 20 years of experience in functional movement and athletic performance. She is STOTT-certified, a Fellow of Applied Functional Science (FAFS), and a Functional Golf Specialist, bringing expertise to both rehabilitation and sport-specific training. As the owner of four Club Pilates studios in Lee County, FL, she trains and mentors aspiring instructors through her Southwest Florida Pilates Academy and innovative apprenticeship model. Shannon is also the host of the Alignment Matters Podcast, where she shares insights on Pilates, movement science, and wellness.

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Retiring in 2025: Navigating New Horizons with Expert Trends, Tips, and Advice

Retirement is evolving quickly in the digital age, offering new opportunities and presenting unique challenges for those entering this exciting chapter of life. For individuals planning to retire in 2025, staying ahead of the curve is essential. Understanding the influence of economic, technological, and social trends can play a crucial role in shaping your retirement planning.

This guide will help you navigate these changes, offering valuable insights and practical advice for anyone who is retired or preparing to retire in 2025. Our mission is to empower you to plan for a fulfilling and secure future as you step into your golden years.



Understanding the Landscape for Retirement in 2025

Economic Trends Affecting Retirement

The retirement landscape in 2025 is significantly influenced by economic factors such as inflation and fluctuating interest rates. These elements can affect the purchasing power of your savings and the stability of your investments. Global economic trends, including market volatility and shifts in employment patterns, also play a crucial role in shaping retirement funds and pensions, emphasizing the need for strategic financial planning.

Technological Advancements

Technology is revolutionizing retirement planning and financial management. From sophisticated online platforms to mobile apps, digital tools are available to help retirees manage their savings,

investments, and healthcare more efficiently than ever before. These advancements offer personalized advice, real-time monitoring of finances, and streamlined access to medical information, significantly enhancing the retirement experience in 2025.

Social and Demographic Shifts

Demographic changes, such as increased life expectancy, are altering traditional retirement models. There's a growing trend towards non-traditional retirement lifestyles, including community living, part-time work, and even continuing education. These shifts reflect a broader desire for more active, engaged, and purposeful retirements.



Planning for Retirement in 2025

Where is the Best Place to Retire in 2025?

Renowned for its tax-friendliness, warm climate, and vibrant retiree community, Florida remains a top choice for retirees seeking sunshine and relaxation. Other popular U.S. states include Alabama, North Carolina, and South Carolina.

International destinations are also gaining popularity among those planning to retire in 2025, as they offer an appealing lifestyle at a fraction of the cost. However, deciding on the best place to retire in 2025 requires careful consideration of various factors such as cost of living, tax-friendliness, healthcare facilities, climate, community, and recreational activities.

What Is the Best Month to Retire In 2025?

Choosing the best month to retire is a pivotal decision that can affect your financial health and overall retirement experience. In 2025, timing your retirement can be strategic, especially when considering tax implications, benefits, and personal circumstances. December is often selected as a favored month for retirement due to several reasons:

- **Year-End Financial Planning:** Retiring at the end of the year offers several advantages, such as maximizing your retirement contributions and fully utilizing employer-matched funds for that year. It also provides a clear cutoff for annual income, simplifying tax planning and ensuring you optimize your financial strategy.

- **Maximizing Benefits:** Waiting until year-end ensures you've accrued the maximum amount of vacation and sick leave, which could be paid out upon retirement, depending on your employer's policies. This can provide an added financial cushion as you transition into retirement.

- **Social Security Considerations:** For those planning to start drawing Social Security benefits, the timing of retirement can affect your benefit amount. Depending on when birthdays fall, retiring later in 2025 might allow some to reach a full retirement age, thereby increasing their monthly benefit.

- **Market Timing and Bonuses:** By retiring after receiving year-end bonuses or other financial incentives, you can boost your retirement savings. Additionally, waiting until year-end provides the opportunity to assess financial market trends, which may help you optimize the timing of withdrawals from retirement accounts.

Of course, the "best" month is highly individual and depends on personal financial situations, health considerations, and lifestyle choices.



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How Much Will You Need to Retire in 2025?
 Calculating how much you'll need to retire in 2025 involves considering multiple factors, such as your lifestyle goals, expected healthcare expenses, inflation, and your planned retirement age. While a common guideline is to aim for a retirement savings amount equal to 25 times your annual expenses, the actual figure will depend on your unique circumstances and needs.

In 2025, financial experts generally recommend having a retirement fund that can replace 70-90% of your pre-retirement income. However, individual needs and goals vary, so personalized financial advice is invaluable in this planning stage.

Healthcare and Insurance

To ensure a worry-free retirement in 2025, it's crucial to understand your healthcare options, including Medicare, private insurance, and supplemental plans. Preparing for long-term care and exploring available insurance choices can help safeguard against future health-related financial challenges.

Tips for a Fulfilling Retirement

Staying Active and Connected

Embracing an active lifestyle through exercise, hobbies, and volunteering can greatly improve your overall health and well-being in retirement. Retiring in 2025 also brings exciting opportunities for lifelong learning and personal development, enriching your post-career life and keeping you engaged.

Nurturing Financial Well-Being

Maintaining financial health in retirement requires thoughtful budgeting and effective expense management. Regularly revisiting your financial plan, safeguarding your credit score, and managing debts responsibly are essential steps toward ensuring long-term financial security and peace of mind.

Social Connectivity and Mental Health

Building and maintaining social connections are essential for a happy retirement, helping to prevent loneliness and promote mental well-being. Engaging in community activities, pursuing hobbies with others, and leveraging mental health resources can support a balanced and fulfilling retirement.

How to Navigate the Challenges and Uncertainties of Retirement in 2025

Preparing for potential challenges, such as financial insecurity or health issues, is an integral part of retirement planning. Staying adaptable, informed, and proactive in managing these uncertainties can help you navigate the complexities of retirement smoothly.

Step into Your Best Years!

Retiring in 2025 offers a blend of challenges and opportunities. By staying informed about the latest trends, planning strategically, and embracing a proactive approach to retirement, you can ensure a fulfilling and secure future. We invite you to share your thoughts, plans, and questions about retiring in 2025, joining a community of like-minded individuals looking forward to their golden years with optimism and excitement.

If you are planning to retire in 2025, consider exploring the possibility of settling at an Acts Retirement campus near you, where you can find a supportive and engaging environment tailored to your lifestyle preferences. For more tips on retirement planning, Acts offers a Consumer's Guide to Retirement Living, to help you make an informed decision about your options. Stay informed and empowered as you embark on this exciting journey into retirement.



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WOMEN'S EYE HEALTH AND SAFETY MONTH: PROTECTING YOUR VISION FOR A LIFETIME

April marks Women's Eye Health and Safety Month, a crucial time to focus on an often overlooked aspect of women's health. Women face unique eye health challenges throughout their lives, from hormonal fluctuations to higher rates of certain eye conditions. Taking proactive steps today can preserve your vision for decades to come.

Women are disproportionately affected by several eye conditions. According to recent studies, women account for nearly two-thirds of all cases of visual impairment and blindness worldwide. This disparity stems from both biological factors and lifestyle considerations that uniquely impact women's eye health.

Hormonal changes throughout a woman's life can significantly affect vision. Pregnancy often brings temporary vision changes, while menopause may increase dry eye symptoms. Birth control and hormone replacement therapy can also influence eye health, sometimes increasing the risk of conditions like cataracts.

Autoimmune disorders, which affect women at higher rates than men, frequently impact eye health. Conditions like rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, and Sjögren's syndrome can cause inflammation and damage to delicate eye tissues. Regular screenings become even more vital for women managing these conditions.

Age-related macular degeneration (AMD), the leading cause of vision loss in older adults, affects women more severely than men. Women also experience higher rates of dry eye syndrome, with post-menopausal women particularly vulnerable due to hormonal changes that reduce tear production.

Cosmetic use presents another unique consideration for women's eye health. Mascara, eyeliner, and other eye makeup can introduce bacteria if used improperly or kept beyond their shelf life. Proper makeup hygiene and regular replacement of products are simple yet effective preventive measures.

Protecting your eye health doesn't require dramatic lifestyle changes. Small, consistent habits can make a significant difference:



Schedule comprehensive eye exams annually, even if your vision seems unchanged. Many serious eye conditions develop without noticeable symptoms until significant damage has occurred.

Wear UV-protective sunglasses year-round. Sun exposure contributes to cataracts and macular degeneration, making proper protection essential regardless of season.

Maintain a nutrient-rich diet with plenty of dark leafy greens, colorful fruits, and omega-3 fatty acids. These foods support eye health by providing essential vitamins and antioxidants that protect against cellular damage.

Manage screen time mindfully by following the 20-20-20 rule: every 20 minutes, look at something 20 feet away for 20 seconds. This reduces eye strain from prolonged digital device use.

Stay hydrated and consider using preservative-free artificial tears if you experience dry eye symptoms, particularly in air-conditioned environments or during extended screen use.

If you smoke, seek support to quit. Smoking dramatically increases the risk of cataracts, macular degeneration, and optic nerve damage.

This April, during Women's Eye Health and Safety Month, make vision care a priority. Your future self will thank you for the gift of clear, healthy vision throughout your lifetime. Remember that many eye conditions are preventable or manageable with early intervention—the key is taking action before symptoms appear.

Your vision connects you to the world around you. Protect it today for a brighter tomorrow.



Albert Smolyar M.D.
LASIK, CATARACT & LENS
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Dr. Smolyar is a board-certified cataract and refractive surgeon with over 25 years of experience. He received his medical degree from Kursk State Medical University in the former Soviet Union. He completed an ophthalmology residency at the University of Louisville and a fellowship in Neuro-Ophthalmology at Michigan State University. He completed another ophthalmology residency at Ben Gurion University in Israel prior to coming to the United States.

Dr. Smolyar specializes in premium cataract and lens replacement surgery, as well as laser vision correction with LASIK, photorefractive keratectomy (PRK), and phototherapeutic keratectomy (PTK). He also has significant expertise in cosmetic and reconstructive eyelid surgery. Dr. Smolyar is certified by the American Board of Ophthalmology. He was in private practice in Louisville, Kentucky, for many years, where he also served as a clinical Associate Professor at the University of Louisville Department of Ophthalmology.

He has been living in Fort Myers since 2018 with his wife and dogs; they have raised three children together. In his spare time, Dr. Smolyar enjoys swimming, scuba diving, kayaking, and fishing. He has dedicated time to providing free surgical eye care in underserved countries and considers that to be one of his passions.



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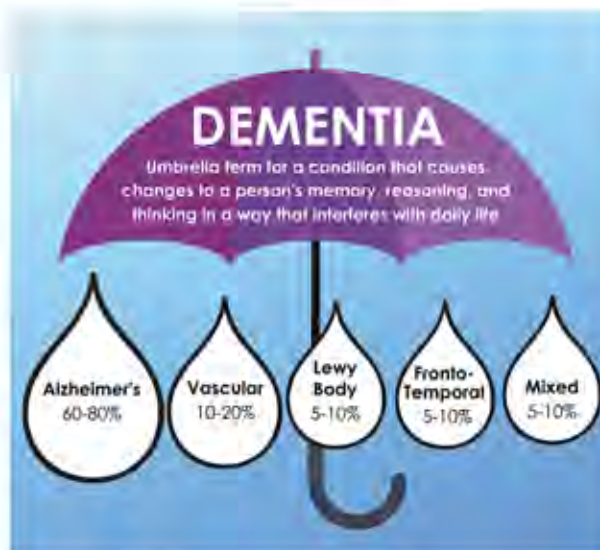
MEMORY MATTERS

Wow, it is already April! How many of you remember the saying “April showers bring May flowers”? It was always important to have your umbrella handy. That is not necessarily true here in Florida, but I remember it distinctly growing up in NW Ohio. We needed a little pep talk to get through the gray, rainy and cloudy days of April with the promise that in May, our gardens would be blooming with the beauty of spring. Lilacs, lilies of the valley, the later blooming tulips all put on a gorgeous show in NW Ohio in May. After a long, cold and sometimes snowy winter, May’s flowers bring hope and happiness.

How do showers and flowers relate to this month’s article? We are going to explore in more detail the topic of dementia, and how it serves as an umbrella term for different types of dementia. The beauty of May’s flowers bring hope, just like research can bring hope to those who are living with Alzheimer’s disease.

Let’s look at the term “dementia” in a bit more detail. The national institute of Aging describes dementia as the loss of cognitive functioning, thinking remembering and reasoning to such an extent that is interferes with a person’s daily life and routine. Personality changes can also be part of the dementia experience. Dementia is not a specific disease, but more of a general term. The Alzheimer’s Association notes that dementia can be thought of as a general term for loss of memory, language, problem solving and other thinking abilities that interfere with daily life.

How does this connect to an umbrella? Dementia can be thought of as an “umbrella” term, where there are many different types of conditions that fall under the umbrella. There are likely over 100 different types of forms of dementia, and the most well known type is Alzheimer’s disease.



Here is a quick overview of the most common types of dementia from the National Institute

Alzheimer’s Disease

Alzheimer’s disease is the most common type of dementia with an estimated 60 – 80% of dementia being of the Alzheimer’s type. In Alzheimer’s disease abnormal deposits of proteins form amyloid plaques and tau tangles throughout the brain. Symptoms include repetitive questions, getting lost in familiar places and as the disease progresses, problems recognizing friends and family, along with impulsive behavior and significant communication issues. Alzheimer’s disease typically impacts individuals in their mid 60s and older, although there are instances of individuals with younger onset Alzheimer’s (occurring before age 65).

Frontotemporal Dementia

In Frontotemporal Dementia (FTD), abnormal amounts or forms of tau and TDP-43 proteins accumulate inside neurons in the frontal and temporal lobes of the brain. Two types of FTD are Primary Progressive Aphasia and the Behavioral variant. There can be difficulty planning and organizing, impulsive behavior, changes in personality as well as apathy. In primary progressive aphasia, there are language challenges such as issues with both verbal communication and understanding speech. This type of dementia is typically diagnosed at a younger age, between mid 40s and 65.

Lewy Body Dementia

In Lewy Body dementia, abnormal deposits of a protein called alpha-synuclein, also called “Lewy bodies” impact the brain’s chemical messengers. Difficulty concentrating, illogical ideas, visual hallucinations, sleep disorders, including vivid nightmares, and challenges with movement can be part of Lewy Body dementia, which typically impacts individuals over the age of 50.

Vascular Dementia

Vascular dementia is a result of damage to the blood vessels in the brain which disrupts blood flow. Symptoms can vary depending on the area of the brain impacted due to the impaired blood flow. Some common symptoms can include confusion, problems with concentration, difficulty with planning, organization and difficulty following directions and learning new information. Hallucinations may be a symptom along with poor judgment. This type of dementia is more common over the age of 65.

Mixed Dementia

Individuals may have more than one type of dementia. In those cases, the person is considered to have mixed dementia.

If you or someone you know is experiencing one or more of these symptoms, it is time to get checked out. We can help! Knowing your cognitive status via an easy and free memory screen is a service we provide to the community. See our ad to learn more. We also offer free memory screens at other times if that is more convenient. Just call us at 239-939-7777. **Memories matter!**

References:
Alzheimer’s Association | Alzheimer’s Disease & Dementia Help
Understanding Different Types of Dementia | National Institute on Aging (nii.gov)



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CHOOSING THE RIGHT FOOTWEAR FOR HAPPY, HEALTHY FEET

By Joe Altepeter, DPM

As a podiatrist, I cannot overstate the importance of selecting appropriate footwear to maintain optimal foot health and overall mobility. Whether you're an avid runner, casual walker, dedicated shopper, or beach enthusiast, wearing the right shoes is crucial, especially for individuals with a history of foot, ankle, or lower extremity issues.

Key Considerations for Shoe Selection

When selecting shoes, the proper fit is essential. Here are a few things to consider when you are out shopping for your summer shoes.

Have your feet measured while standing with full weight using a Brannock device for accurate sizing. Shop later in the day to account for swelling. This will ensure a better fit. Wear the socks you plan to wear with the shoes during the fitting process. Make sure the toe box is wide and deep enough for natural toe movement and that the shoes can accommodate arch supports or custom orthotics if needed.

Understanding Your Foot Type:

Recognizing your foot type is a pivotal step in selecting appropriate footwear, particularly for exercise:

- **Neutral Foot:** Displays a moderate arch; suitable for shoes offering a balance between cushioning and support.
- **Flat Feet (Pronators):** Characterized by a low or absent arch; benefit from shoes with structured support and motion control to stabilize the feet.
- **High-Arched Feet (Supinators):** Marked by a pronounced arch; require cushioned shoes with a softer midsole to aid in shock absorption.

To determine your foot type, consider consulting a podiatrist for a professional assessment. Alternatively, a simple at-home method involves examining your wet footprint: a complete footprint suggests flat feet, a footprint with a significant curve indicates a neutral arch, and a footprint showing only the heel and forefoot implies high arches.

Special Considerations for Toe Deformities

Individuals with toe deformities, such as bunions or hammertoes, should choose footwear carefully to



ensure comfort and prevent complications. Shoes made from soft, flexible materials like mesh or fabric help reduce irritation and pressure on sensitive areas.

A wider or taller toe box is also essential, as it provides extra space for the toes, reducing friction and discomfort. Properly designed shoes can help prevent calluses and worsening deformities, improving overall foot health and mobility.

Choosing the Right Footwear: Guidelines for Specific Shoe Types

Wearing the wrong shoes can contribute to foot pain, instability, and long-term issues. Understanding the potential risks of different footwear styles can help you make choices that support foot health.

Flats and Slides: While stylish and convenient, these shoes often lack adequate support, which can contribute to arch strain and heel discomfort. To enhance foot stability, opt for designs that incorporate firm soles and proper arch support.

Strappy Sandals: The thin straps on these sandals can cause friction between the toes, potentially leading to irritation and callus formation. Choosing styles made from soft, flexible materials can help minimize discomfort.

Wedges and Heels: Elevated footwear increases the risk of ankle instability and places excess pressure on the forefoot. To reduce strain and improve balance, select styles with a wider, lower heel and slip-resistant soles.

Peep-Toe Sandals: These shoes expose the toes, which can lead to irritation, especially for individuals with toe deformities. To prevent discomfort, consider limiting wear or opting for designs with a roomier toe box.

Selecting appropriate footwear is vital for maintaining foot health and overall well-being. By understanding your foot type, considering any existing deformities, and adhering to these guidelines, you can make informed choices that promote comfort and prevent injury. I encourage you to consult with a podiatrist for personalized advice tailored to your unique foot structure and health needs. Choosing the right footwear this spring can pave the way for a more active, pain-free lifestyle all year round.

Disclaimer: This content is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health care provider with any questions you may have regarding a medical condition.

Joe Altepeter, DPM, AACFAS

Joe Altepeter, DPM, AACFAS, is a Podiatrist at Family Foot & Leg Centers in Fort Myers FL. He is a Fellow of the American College of Foot & Ankle Surgeons. Call 239-430-3668 or visit www.NaplesPodiatrist.com to make an appointment. Visit FootHealthFacts.org to learn more about foot and ankle conditions.



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FGCU Addressing Shortage of Mental Health Professionals

Expanded enrollment, enhanced training and community outreach aim to stem crisis

Nearly 1 in 4 American adults lives with a mental illness, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Demand for mental health services is outpacing the supply of providers, while more than half the U.S. population lives in an area with a shortage of mental health professionals.

As a result of these healthcare deserts with scant resources, many individuals seeking help are not getting assistance or at best face long delays due to long waits. In fact, the percentage of need for mental health professionals that is being met in Florida is only 21%, according to Kaiser Family Foundation research.

Marieb College of Health & Human Services at Florida Gulf Coast University is helping address this crisis through several initiatives. These efforts include: expanding enrollment and faculty to train more students to become licensed clinical mental health counselors, licensed clinical social workers and psychiatric mental health nurse practitioners; providing more supervised experience earlier in students' education through FGCU's Community Counseling & Education Center; and taking students to underserved communities in Southwest Florida that lack sufficient access to mental health services.

Southwest Florida is a "mental health desert," according to Sherdene Brown-Simpson, Ph.D., LMHC, director of Marieb College's clinical mental health counseling program. The community has a critical need due to a high percentage of people struggling with mental health issues, she says.

"When you look at the number of people versus the services, there is a need to increase providers in this area," says Brown-Simpson. "That is something we are really working to address in our program. How can we increase the number of licensed mental health counselors? This is an opportune time to really look at how can we impact the community."

Comprehensive training

Marieb College's accredited, standards-based graduate programs prepare students to take on society's big issues and improve quality of life for individuals and communities. With strong demand for clinical mental health counselors, clinical social workers and psychiatric mental health nurse practitioners in every community, FGCU students have the opportunity to make a widespread impact.

Their coursework includes human development, legal and ethical issues, career development, appraisal methods, counseling theories, group and individual counseling, practicum and research, counseling special populations and clinical practice.

Marieb College prepares graduate students with a high degree of counseling competence, technological skills and hundreds of hours of supervised field experience addressing issues like college and career readiness, social-emotional learning, academic achievement, depression, cyberbullying and substance abuse. Practical learning and internships take place in local schools and agencies throughout Southwest Florida and in FGCU's on-campus Community Counseling & Education Center. This intense preparation creates a bridge between classroom learning and real world application.

Because FGCU students are so comprehensively prepared, 100% are employed within three months of earning their counseling degree.

Soaring demand for services

These committed, compassionate professionals join a workforce straining under heavy caseloads. Demand for licensed mental health professionals has skyrocketed in recent years, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic. More people are reporting feelings of anxiety and depression and experiencing substance use problems. Opioid-related deaths sharply accelerated during the pandemic and with increases in illicit fentanyl. In Florida, the number of drug overdose deaths per 100,000 people more than doubled from 2011 to 2021, with 76% of those deaths due to opioids.

"There's an increased need for students to understand how to provide counseling for substance use disorder, which is increasing across the country," Brown-Simpson says. "We're also seeing that there is a need to address issues of trauma and trauma-informed care. If you have mental health disorders that go untreated, that could be very difficult for people to truly embrace a positive quality of life."

Such emergent mental health issues underscore the importance of Marieb College's holistic approach to teaching counseling and providing internship opportunities that ensure graduates become well-rounded practitioners in, social services, government agencies, hospitals, community organizations and private practice.

Some of FGCU's mental health counseling interns are currently bringing their counseling skills to children in several underserved Southwest Florida communities where Marieb College is partnering with local organizations to fill gaps in mental health services. Meanwhile, on campus, the Community Counseling & Education Center also provides students with experience while helping improve the lives of individuals, couples and families affected by depression, anxiety, trauma, relationship and family functioning, and parenting challenges. The center offers low-cost mental and behavioral health services for all ages regardless of socioeconomic status. Call 239-745-4777 for more information.

In these ways and more, FGCU's Marieb College is a growing oasis for solutions amid a mental health desert.

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



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Sleep and Stress: Understanding the Critical Connection During Stress Awareness Month

By Dr. Ernesto Eusebio

April marks Stress Awareness Month, a time when health professionals and communities focus on the causes and management of stress. For individuals living with sleep apnea, the relationship between stress and sleep creates a particularly challenging cycle that demands attention. At SAIF, we recognize that quality sleep is fundamental to managing stress, especially for those with sleep disorders.

Sleep apnea affects millions of Americans, causing breathing interruptions that fragment sleep and prevent the deep, restorative rest needed for optimal health. These disruptions not only affect your energy levels but also significantly impact your body's ability to manage stress hormones.

The Stress-Sleep Apnea Connection

When you suffer from sleep apnea, each breathing pause triggers a stress response in your body. Your brain registers these moments as mini-emergencies, releasing stress hormones including cortisol and adrenaline. Over time, these repeated stress responses during what should be restful sleep create a physiological burden that extends into your waking hours.

Research shows that individuals with untreated sleep apnea often have chronically elevated cortisol levels, which can lead to increased anxiety, irritability, and difficulty managing daily stressors. This creates a troubling cycle: stress worsens sleep quality, and poor sleep heightens stress sensitivity.

How Sleep Apnea Affects Your Stress Response

Without adequate deep sleep, your brain's emotional processing centers become overactive while the logical, problem-solving regions show decreased function. This neurological imbalance makes you more reactive to stressful situations and less equipped to handle them rationally.

The fragmented sleep pattern typical in sleep apnea prevents your body from moving properly through the sleep cycles necessary for stress recovery. The result is a stress response system that remains constantly activated, never fully resetting to a calm baseline.

Breaking the Cycle Through Proper Treatment

At SAIF, we understand that addressing sleep apnea is essential for stress management. When sleep apnea is effectively treated, patients typically report significant improvements in their ability to handle stress, along with enhanced mood and emotional regulation.

CPAP therapy, oral appliances, and other treatments not only improve breathing during sleep but also help restore normal sleep architecture. This allows for longer periods of deep sleep and REM sleep, which are crucial for emotional processing and stress recovery.

Beyond Medical Treatment: Comprehensive Sleep Hygiene

While medical intervention is often necessary for sleep apnea, complementary stress-reduction practices can enhance treatment effectiveness. During Stress Awareness Month, we encourage our patients to adopt comprehensive sleep hygiene practices:

-  Maintain consistent sleep and wake times, even on weekends, to support your body's natural rhythms.
-  Create a calming bedtime routine that signals to your brain that it's time to wind down.
-  Make your bedroom a stress-free sanctuary by removing work materials, electronic devices, and other stress triggers.
-  Limit caffeine and alcohol, both of which can worsen sleep apnea symptoms and disrupt sleep quality.
-  Incorporate gentle movement like yoga or walking earlier in the day to reduce stress without stimulating your system before bedtime.

The Broader Health Benefits

The importance of addressing sleep apnea extends far beyond stress management. Quality sleep supports immune function, cardiovascular health,

cognitive performance, and metabolic balance. By treating sleep apnea, you're investing in your overall health resilience.

During Stress Awareness Month, we invite you to consider how your sleep quality might be affecting your ability to manage life's challenges. If you experience symptoms such as chronic fatigue, morning headaches, irritability, or have been told you snore heavily or stop breathing during sleep, we encourage you to reach out for a comprehensive sleep evaluation.

At SAIF, we're dedicated to diagnosing and treating sleep disorders with personalized approaches that consider your unique circumstances and needs. Our team understands that quality sleep isn't a luxury—it's a necessity for managing stress and maintaining overall wellness.

This Stress Awareness Month, make sleep a priority in your stress management strategy. With proper diagnosis and treatment of sleep apnea, you can break the cycle of stress and sleep disruption, opening the door to improved health, greater resilience, and a more balanced life.

Dr. Ernesto Eusebio

Dr. Eusebio is a renowned sleep specialist, board certified, fellowship trained, and the founder of The Sleep & Apnea Institute of Florida. With over 20 years of experience in the field, he has dedicated his career to helping patients achieve their best sleep.

Dr. Eusebio is known for his compassionate approach to patient care. His expertise in diagnosing and treating multiple sleep disorders has transformed the lives of countless individuals, making him a trusted name in the field.

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PEAK ALLERGY SEASON IN FLORIDA:

Surviving the Spring Pollen Storm

As spring unfolds across the Sunshine State, millions of Floridians brace themselves for the annual allergy season that reaches its crescendo in April and May. With its warm climate and diverse vegetation, Florida creates the perfect environment for pollen production, leaving residents battling itchy eyes, runny noses, and persistent sneezing fits.

Why April and May Is Florida's Allergy Peak

The two months mark the height of Florida's spring allergy season primarily due to tree pollen, which blankets the state in a fine yellow dust. Oak trees, which are abundant throughout Florida, are particularly prolific pollen producers. Joining them are pine, cypress, and bayberry trees, creating a potent airborne cocktail that triggers allergic reactions.

The state's unique climate compounds the problem. While northern states may still be thawing from winter, Florida's warm temperatures and early spring conditions prompt plants to release pollen earlier and for longer periods. Add in Florida's high humidity, which allows pollen to cling to surfaces and remain suspended in the air, and you have the perfect storm for allergy sufferers.

Signs You're Experiencing Seasonal Allergies

- Persistent sneezing and nasal congestion
- Itchy, watery, or red eyes
- Scratchy throat and coughing
- Fatigue and headaches
- Skin rashes or hives in severe cases

Unlike cold symptoms, allergies don't typically cause fever and tend to persist for weeks rather than days.

Effective Strategies to Combat April Allergies

AT HOME

Create a pollen-free sanctuary: Keep windows closed during peak pollen times and use air conditioning with HEPA filters. Remove shoes at the door and change clothes after being outdoors to prevent bringing pollen inside.

Maintain clean surfaces: Regularly wash bedding in hot water, vacuum carpets with a HEPA-filtered vacuum, and use damp cloths for dusting to trap pollen rather than dispersing it.

Consider air purifiers: High-quality air purifiers with HEPA filters can significantly reduce airborne allergens in your home.

PERSONAL HABITS

Track pollen counts: Florida's Department of Health provides daily pollen forecasts. Plan outdoor activities for low-pollen days, typically after rainfall when pollen has been temporarily washed away.

Time your outdoor activities: Pollen counts are highest between 5 a.m. and 10 a.m., so schedule outdoor exercise for late afternoon or evening when possible.

Shield your eyes and airways: Wear wraparound sunglasses to reduce eye exposure and consider using a mask when gardening or doing yard work.

MEDICAL INTERVENTIONS

Over-the-counter remedies: Antihistamines, decongestants, and nasal corticosteroids can provide relief for many allergy sufferers. Start medications before symptoms appear for best results.

Consult an allergist: For severe allergies, an allergist can provide targeted treatments, including prescription medications and immunotherapy options like allergy shots.

Consider saline rinses: Nasal irrigation with saline solution can flush pollen from nasal passages, providing natural relief.

Long-term Solutions

For those with severe reactions, immunotherapy might be the answer. This treatment gradually introduces small amounts of allergens to your system, helping build tolerance over time. While it requires commitment, many Floridians find it transforms their spring from a season of suffering to one they can finally enjoy.

Though April and May allergies in Florida can be challenging, with proper preparation and management strategies, you can minimize symptoms and reclaim the beautiful spring season. By creating safe indoor spaces, modifying outdoor behaviors, and seeking appropriate medical treatment, even the most sensitive allergy sufferers can navigate Florida's peak pollen season with greater comfort.



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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The Relationship Between Hormones and Mental Health

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

Mental health is crucial for a good quality of life, and declining mental health can cause individuals to withdraw from the activities they once enjoyed. In other cases, someone may feel too tired or anxious to care for themselves and nurture their needs, impacting their emotional well-being.

Many factors can affect mental health, but hormones remain a driving force. Despite this, hormone dysregulation is often overlooked when it comes to identifying and treating mental health conditions. This is because many traditional doctors only consider the physical implications of hormone dysfunction and not the emotional toll that can occur.

The relationship between hormone levels and mental health is complex, which is why we have broken it down into the many different components, such as the different hormones influencing mental health and the direct and indirect ways they can do this.

HORMONES AFFECTING MENTAL HEALTH

Listed below are some of the different hormones that can affect mental health and their roles in the body.

Cortisol

Also known as the stress hormone, cortisol is produced by the adrenal glands and causes someone to feel stressed due to its role in the body's fight-or-flight response.

Actions controlled by cortisol include:

- sugar levels in the bloodstream
- metabolism regulation
- blood pressure regulation
- the body's sleep-wake cycle

Estrogen

While estrogen is most commonly known as a female sex hormone, responsible for producing female secondary sex characteristics and regulating a woman's menstrual cycle, it can also impact mental health by increasing anxiousness and irritability when it declines.

The role of estrogen in mental health lies in its role in regulating neurotransmitters such as dopamine, serotonin, norepinephrine, and epinephrine, which all play a role in mood regulation. In particular, estrogen



increases the production of serotonin, which is the "feel good" chemical, while also increasing the activity of serotonin receptors in the brain.

Estrogen also plays a role in regulating endorphins, another type of hormone that brings a rush of happiness when released.

Progesterone

Yet another female sex hormone is progesterone, which is predominantly found at higher levels during the second part of a woman's menstrual cycle following ovulation. However, this rise in progesterone may also lead to increases in depressive thoughts or an overall lowered mood.

The general role of progesterone is to prepare the endometrium for a potential pregnancy after ovulation. It does this by thickening the lining of the uterus and preventing muscle contractions in the uterus that can cause the body to reject the egg.

If the body conceives, progesterone levels remain high, stimulating the blood vessels in the endometrium to feed the growing fetus and prepare the breasts for milk production.

DHEA

Dehydroepiandrosterone (DHEA) is a precursor to other hormones in the body, including testosterone and estrogen. It is a hormone produced in the adrenal gland, and its levels typically peak in early adulthood and then gradually decline with age.

T3 and T4

Two hormones released by the thyroid, T3 and T4, affect metabolic rate, impacting our emotions and energy levels.

Melatonin

Produced in time with your circadian rhythm and light/dark cycles, melatonin increases sleepiness, helping your body prepare for bed.

How Hormones Affect Mental Health

Responsible for regulating actions within the body, hormones also significantly affect mood and mental health. When too much or too little of these hormones are produced, mental health symptoms can worsen.

HORMONES CAN AFFECT MENTAL HEALTH IN THE FOLLOWING WAYS:

Increases Mood Disorders

Specific hormone-related conditions have a higher rate of anxiety and depression. For example, those with PCOS are 3 times more likely to be affected by anxiety or depression. Additionally, a study on endometriosis patients found that 87.5% of the patients presented with anxiety symptoms and 86.5% with depressive symptoms.

Hormone imbalances unrelated to specific conditions can also increase the risk of mood disorders. For example, those with significantly high levels of cortisol can often develop anxiety disorders.

Additionally, while high estrogen levels are typically associated with a better mood, if estrogen levels are overly high while progesterone levels are low, a condition called estrogen dominance can occur, with symptoms of depression and irritability. In some cases, estrogen dominance may also cause anxiety.

Mental health problems can also occur when progesterone is too high, as this is associated with increased amygdala sensitivity. The amygdala is a part of the brain responsible for the body's fight or flight response, so amygdala sensitivity can lead to a greater likelihood of anxiety, depression, or just feeling off.

Depression has also been reported in those with low levels of DHEA. A study even found that treating older patients with depression through DHEA supplements helped address their depressive symptoms.

Impacts Sleep

Many hormones, such as estrogen, melatonin, and cortisol, can make it hard to fall or stay asleep, depending on their levels. When the body does not get enough sleep, your mental health can suffer; this has been proven by research showing that brain activity during sleep significantly affects someone's emotional and mental health.

In particular, REM sleep aids the brain in processing emotional information, and a lack of sleep can impact how much positive emotional content is consolidated. This has been shown to increase the risk of suicidal thoughts or behaviors.

Sleep and mental health share a connection in both directions, meaning lack of sleep can increase the risk of mental health disorders, but sleep may also suffer from existing mental health problems, further worsening symptoms.

Based on this evidence, it is clear that hormonal imbalances affecting the body's ability to fall or stay asleep can then have detrimental effects on mental health.

Causes Mood Swings

One complication of too little estrogen is mood swings, which is why they are a common symptom of women going through menopause. With this stage of life, the amount of estrogen a woman's body produces significantly declines, sometimes resulting in mood swings. This symptom is especially common at the beginning of menopause, when estrogen levels fluctuate.

Lowers Self Esteem

Besides the direct effect of hormones on our mental health, they can also indirectly influence mental health through the way that they change the body. For example, hormonal imbalances can cause physical transformations such as hair thinning, weight gain, acne, and unwanted hair growth. These factors can contribute to your body image and may diminish your self-esteem.

Many doctors overlook how much the physical changes from hormonal imbalance can influence your self-esteem and emotional well-being, which is why seeing a doctor who specializes in hormones, and understands how drastically they affect the body, is essential.

Increases Stress

Besides cortisol, other hormonal imbalances can cause stress to the body in other, less direct ways.

When there is a hormonal imbalance, the body senses it through the insular cortex, a part of the brain that can sense the body's internal state. When hormone levels are incorrect, the insular cortex perceives it, resulting in physiological stress.

Essentially, when your hormones are out of balance, your body "feels off," which can influence your mental well-being.

Affects Fertility

Specific hormones such as estrogen, DHEA, and progesterone can also affect fertility when they are imbalanced. For couples looking to start or grow their family, an inability to do so can significantly affect their emotional well-being.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO IMPROVE YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

There are many actions you can take to help improve your mental health, such as:

Exercise Regularly

Exercising regularly can be good for more than just your physical health; it can also improve your mental health by helping to regulate hormones.

Cortisol, in particular, can become high and build up in the body without regular exercise. By exercising, your body is able to use up some of the cortisol, leaving less behind.

Endorphins such as dopamine also increase when exercising, further improving your mood.

Improve Sleep Hygiene

While hormones can affect your sleep, you can also take action to improve your sleep hygiene and increase your chances of falling and staying asleep.

Some ways to improve sleep hygiene include:

- doing calming activities before bed
- limiting screen time in the hour before bed
- going to sleep and waking up around the same time
- sleeping in a cool, dark, and quiet room

Improving your sleep hygiene helps to regulate your circadian rhythm, which then influences hormone levels.

Correct Imbalanced Hormones

While the above actions can help bolster your mental health, if your mental health decline is due to hormone dysfunction, the most crucial step will be to correct these imbalances.

Hormonal supplements can significantly improve your mental health. For example, a study on depression and thyroid function found that supplementing T3 significantly reduced depressive symptoms in the participants, even relieving some participants of depression entirely.

Many hormones are available in a supplement form and can be found in a pill, tablet, or cream, depending on the hormone being supplemented. Meeting with a physician specializing in hormones is an important step in identifying hormonal imbalances and receiving the correct treatment to correct them.

Receive Help for Your Mental Health Struggle

Mental health issues are not uncommon, and it is estimated that 1 in 4 adults struggle with a mental health condition at some point in their life. When it comes to correcting mental health conditions, it is often most helpful to correct the underlying cause, which is often hormonal.

If you are struggling with symptoms of anxiety, depression, or insomnia or are experiencing irritability, difficulty concentrating, or problems with weight or appetite, you may be experiencing a hormonal imbalance.

Hormonal imbalances can dramatically affect many parts of your health and well-being. However, that also means that identifying and remedying the imbalance can return peace to your life.

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NAVIGATING SOBRIETY:

April's Alcohol Awareness Month Brings Focus to Health and Support

By Jo Ortiz, PMHNP-BC

April marks National Alcohol Awareness Month, a time dedicated to increasing public understanding about alcohol-related issues and reducing the stigma that often surrounds alcohol use disorder. Established in 1987 by the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD), this observance has evolved into a crucial annual campaign that encourages communities to reflect on drinking habits and promotes resources for those seeking recovery.

The impact of alcohol misuse extends far beyond individual health concerns. According to recent data, excessive alcohol consumption contributes to approximately 95,000 deaths annually in the United States alone. These statistics represent not just numbers, but families disrupted, careers derailed, and potential unfulfilled.

"Alcohol awareness isn't just about identifying problematic drinking," explains Dr. Sarah Martinez, addiction specialist at Harbor Recovery Center. "It's about understanding how alcohol affects our bodies, recognizing warning signs, and knowing that effective treatment options exist for those who need support."

The pandemic years brought significant changes to drinking patterns nationwide. Many people reported increased alcohol consumption during isolation periods, with studies showing a 41% rise in heavy drinking among women. As communities continue recovering from these disruptions, Alcohol Awareness Month offers a timely opportunity to reassess relationships with alcohol.

This year's campaign emphasizes several key messages. First, understanding what constitutes moderate drinking—defined by health authorities as up to one drink daily for women and up to two for men—helps individuals make informed choices. Second, recognizing risk factors for alcohol use disorder, including family history, early-onset drinking, and mental health conditions, enables proactive prevention. Finally, knowing that recovery is possible through various treatment approaches offers hope to those struggling.



Community involvement remains central to the month's success. Many organizations host alcohol-free activities throughout April, demonstrating that social connection doesn't require drinking. Schools implement educational programs addressing underage drinking prevention, while healthcare providers often offer free screenings and resources during this period.

"We see Alcohol Awareness Month as a catalyst for year-round conversation," says Michael Chen, coordinator for the Sober Living Coalition. "The discussions started in April frequently lead to sustained support networks that continue long after the month ends."

For individuals concerned about their own drinking patterns, April presents an ideal time to explore options. Many choose to participate in challenges like "Dry April," temporarily abstaining from alcohol to evaluate its role in their lives. Others may seek professional assessment through their healthcare providers or connect with support groups offering peer understanding.

"What makes recovery possible for many people is knowing they're not alone," notes recovery advocate Jamal Washington. "When communities openly discuss alcohol issues during awareness campaigns, it reduces isolation and shows pathways forward."

The healthcare community emphasizes that seeking help represents strength, not weakness. Treatment approaches have diversified significantly in recent

years, ranging from traditional 12-step programs to medication-assisted treatment, cognitive behavioral therapy, and holistic approaches addressing underlying factors.

Digital resources have expanded access to support, with numerous apps and online communities providing assistance for those unable to attend in-person meetings or seeking anonymous help. These technological innovations complement traditional recovery methods, creating more entry points for healing.

As April unfolds, workplaces, religious organizations, and community centers nationwide will host workshops and information sessions highlighting available resources. Public health campaigns will appear across media platforms, sharing stories of recovery and challenging perceptions about alcohol dependency.

Ultimately, Alcohol Awareness Month serves as a reminder that conversations about drinking habits shouldn't be confined to those already experiencing problems. By fostering open dialogue about alcohol's effects on individuals and communities, April's observance helps create healthier relationships with alcohol year-round.



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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One Simple Will Change Can Protect Your Spouse and Life Savings: The LTC Protection Clause Your Will Is Missing

By Carl Zacharia

Have you ever wondered what would happen to your life savings if your spouse needed nursing home care after you're gone?

The average cost of nursing home care in Florida now exceeds \$10,400 per month. Without proper planning, your spouse could be forced to spend down nearly everything you've worked so hard to build before qualifying for assistance.

The Estate Planning Gap Most Attorneys Miss
Most Wills are drafted to leave everything to a person's surviving spouse. And while this sounds like a caring plan, it can actually create a financial disaster. If your Will provides for your spouse to inherit your entire estate, and he or she later needs long-term care, those assets must be spent down before Medicaid will help.

So, what is the unintended result? Your children and/or other heirs may receive little or nothing of your legacy.

Our Exclusive Protective Provision

At Zacharia Brown, our personalized estate plans include a specific provision that most attorneys don't offer—a flexible protection mechanism that is activated only when needed. This provision will:

- Protect your spouse by ensuring they have resources for quality care.
- Preserve your legacy by protecting assets for your children and heirs.
- Provide flexibility to address different levels of care needs (from in-home support to nursing facilities).
- Create a safety net through a special needs trust structure; and
- Give control to someone you trust to make the right decisions.

How It Works

1. If your spouse is healthy when you pass away, they can inherit normally—no restrictions.

2. If your spouse needs or may soon need care, your personal representative can:

- Place a portion of your estate (from 33% to 100%) into a protective trust.



- Ensure that your spouse gets proper care without spending everything; and
 - Preserve remaining assets for your children or other beneficiaries.
3. Your spouse receives support from both:
- Government benefits they qualify for more quickly, and
 - The protected trust assets for additional comforts and needs

Real-Life Scenario

Without Protection: John passes away and his Will leaves his \$400,000 estate to his wife Mary. John had been taking care of Mary, who had been dealing with physical and cognitive issues, and she now needs nursing home care without John there to help. Mary must spend down her inheritance to \$2,400 before qualifying for Medicaid. John and Mary's children receive nothing of their parents' lifetime of work.

With Protection under Zacharia Brown's Estate Plan: John's will includes our special provision, and when he passes, his executor places his \$400,000 estate in a special needs trust. Mary qualifies for Medicaid much sooner while still benefiting from trust funds for extra comforts. When Mary later passes away, \$285,000 remains to pass on to their children.

Don't Let Your Life Savings Disappear

The standard "I love you" or sweetheart Will (everything to spouse) can be a costly mistake. Zacharia Brown's approach balances caring for your spouse while protecting your family legacy. We include both the 'everything to spouse' provision you want AND a protective escape hatch if your spouse later needs expensive long-term care. This provides you with the best of both worlds - simplicity when things go right, and protection when they don't.

Schedule a consultation today by calling 239.345.4545 or by visiting ZacBrownLaw.com to learn how we can help you to protect what matters most.

This innovative approach to estate planning is just one example of how we create personalized solutions that address real-world concerns that most standard wills ignore.

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Exploring the Synergy of Hyperbaric Oxygen Treatment and Nutrients in Biohacking

In the realm of biohacking, where individuals seek to optimize their physical and cognitive performance through lifestyle interventions, the integration of innovative therapies and nutrients has gained considerable attention. Among these, hyperbaric oxygen treatment (HBOT) is promising, particularly when combined with specific nutrients like Methylene Blue, Nicotinamide Adenine Dinucleotide (NAD), and Phosphatidylcholine. Let's delve into the synergistic potential of these elements in the pursuit of enhanced well-being.

Hyperbaric Oxygen Treatment (HBOT): Enhancing Cellular Oxygenation

HBOT involves breathing pure oxygen in a pressurized environment, typically within a hyperbaric chamber. This therapy aims to increase the oxygen supply to body tissues, promoting healing, reducing inflammation, and enhancing overall cellular function. Research suggests that HBOT may have various applications, including wound healing, neurological conditions, and sports recovery.

Methylene Blue: A Mitochondrial Powerhouse

Methylene Blue, a synthetic dye with antioxidant properties, has garnered attention for its potential role in biohacking. Studies have indicated its ability to enhance mitochondrial function, the powerhouse of our cells responsible for producing energy. Methylene Blue can optimize ATP production by acting as an electron carrier in the electron transport chain, thereby boosting cellular energy levels and supporting cognitive function.

Moreover, Methylene Blue has neuroprotective effects, making it a promising candidate for conditions like Alzheimer's disease and cognitive decline. Its antioxidant properties help combat oxidative stress, a common feature of aging and neurodegenerative disorders.

Nicotinamide Adenine Dinucleotide (NAD): Fueling Cellular Metabolism

NAD is a coenzyme found in all living cells, playing a crucial role in cellular metabolism and

energy production. As we age, NAD levels decline, impacting various physiological processes, including DNA repair, cellular communication, and energy metabolism.

Supplementation with NAD precursors like nicotinamide riboside (NR) or nicotinamide mononucleotide (NMN) has emerged to replenish NAD levels and potentially mitigate age-related decline. NAD optimization may enhance vitality and longevity by supporting mitochondrial function and cellular repair mechanisms.

Phosphatidylcholine: Building Blocks for Cellular Membranes

Phosphatidylcholine, a phospholipid found in cell membranes, is integral to cellular structure and function. It is a precursor for acetylcholine, a neurotransmitter essential for cognitive function and memory.

Supplementation with phosphatidylcholine has been linked to improved cognitive performance, liver health, and lipid metabolism. Additionally, phosphatidylcholine plays a role in emulsifying fats and aiding in their transport and metabolism, making it relevant for individuals pursuing weight management and metabolic optimization.

The Synergy of HBOT and Nutrients: Optimizing Biohacking Strategies

Combining HBOT with targeted nutrient interventions like Methylene Blue, NAD, and Phosphatidylcholine holds promise for synergistic health benefits. By enhancing cellular oxygenation, mitochondrial function, and cellular integrity, this integrative approach may support cognitive performance, physical recovery, and overall well-being.

It's important to note that while preliminary research is promising, further studies are needed to fully elucidate the mechanisms and long-term effects of these interventions. Additionally, individual responses to biohacking strategies may vary, highlighting the importance of personalized approaches and consultation with healthcare professionals.

Integrating hyperbaric oxygen treatment and specific nutrients represents a novel frontier in biohacking, offering potential avenues for optimizing health and performance. As research in this field continues to evolve, individuals are encouraged to explore these strategies under the guidance of qualified practitioners, prioritizing safety, and evidence-based practices in their quest for vitality and longevity.

Call us at 239-425-2900 to learn more about these innovative approaches and how they may contribute to improving your health and well-being.



Doreen DeStefano, PhD, APRN, DNP

Dr. DeStefano is also a lifelong student. She holds a bachelor's degree in nursing and another in exercise physiology. She has a Master's (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 attends educational seminars in integrative and functional medicine twice yearly to stay abreast of the most recent, cutting-edge therapies available.

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

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ORAL CANCER AWARENESS

By KELLY M. DAINIAK, DMD, GENERAL DENTIST

April is Oral Cancer Awareness month. As a dental professional the most important part of my job is to screen and detect oral cancer. The dental professional has optimal lighting and mouth mirrors that enable the best visualization of the oral cavity. In general, most mouth lesions disappear in 7 to 10 days. If a lesion persists it is important to have an Oral Maxillofacial Surgeon do an examination and possibly a biopsy. Oral cancer has the best prognosis when caught in early stages.

Risk factors include any tobacco product (cigarettes, cigars, vapes, chewing tobacco), Human Papilloma Virus (HPV), age (increased with age), poor oral hygiene, sun exposure and genetics.

Symptoms are:

1. Lesion does not heal
2. Red and/or white spot
3. Difficulty swallowing
4. Bad breath (Halitosis)
5. Ear pain
6. Numbness or tingling
7. Rough spot around lips or inside mouth
8. Lesions do not always cause pain/discomfort

If you have any of these symptoms, do not delay in scheduling a comprehensive dental examination. Regular dental check ups are important not only for preserving teeth and healthy gums but also for cancer screening. Often it is easy to fall behind on your dental health. If you missed a dental cleaning, do not delay in calling your dental professional. Teeth can be repaired or replaced (with dental implants) but cancer detection could save your life and ultimately give you a better health span.

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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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IN OFFICE HYSTEROSCOPY

By Joseph Gauta, MD, FACOG

What is a hysteroscopy?

Hysteroscopy is a procedure that can be used to both diagnose and treat causes of abnormal bleeding. The procedure allows your doctor to look inside your uterus with a tool called a hysteroscope. This is a thin, lighted tube that is inserted into the vagina to examine the cervix and inside of the uterus. Hysteroscopy can be a part of the diagnosis process or an operative procedure.

What is diagnostic hysteroscopy?

Dr. Gauta normally performs a diagnostic hysteroscopy in the office. The patient receives analgesia so they will be comfortable during the test. It is used to diagnose conditions such as abnormal uterine bleeding, adhesions, fibroids, polyps or to locate displaced intrauterine devices IUDs.

One of the newest technologies he uses in the office and in conjunction with the hysteroscope is RESECTR™. RESECTR allows Dr. Gauta to gently remove and eliminate intrauterine fibroids without the need to remove or even cut the uterus and without harming your uterine lining. This is especially important if you want to have children in the future. The procedure is performed under local analgesia and most patients experience only mild to moderate cramping. Patients go home the same day and on average, a 3 cm fibroid (about the size of a grape) can be removed in approximately 10 minutes.

What is operative hysteroscopy?

Operative hysteroscopy is used to correct an abnormal condition that has been detected during a diagnostic hysteroscopy. If an abnormal condition was detected during the diagnostic hysteroscopy, an operative hysteroscopy can often be performed. Many conditions can be treated in the office using advanced technologies such as RESECTR which eliminates the need for a second visit and is a cost savings to the patient.

The time it takes to perform a hysteroscopy can range from less than five minutes to more than an hour depending on your specific condition. If an operative hysteroscopy is required Dr. Gauta will determine if it should be done in the office or surgery center. The choice is yours however where you would like your procedure done.



When is operative hysteroscopy used?

Your doctor may perform a hysteroscopy to correct the following uterine conditions:

- **Polyps and fibroids:** Hysteroscopy is used to remove these non-cancerous growths found in the uterus.
- **Adhesions:** Also known as Asherman's Syndrome, uterine adhesions are bands of scar tissue that can form in the uterus and may lead to changes in menstrual flow as well as infertility. Hysteroscopy can help your doctor locate and remove the adhesions.
- **Septums:** Hysteroscopy can help determine whether you have a uterine septum, a malformation (defect) of the uterus that is present from birth.
- **Abnormal bleeding:** Hysteroscopy can help identify the cause of heavy or lengthy menstrual flow, as well as bleeding between periods or after menopause. Endometrial ablation is one procedure in which the hysteroscope, along with other instruments, is used to destroy the uterine lining in order to treat some causes of heavy bleeding.

When should hysteroscopy be performed?

Your doctor may recommend scheduling the hysteroscopy for the first week after your menstrual period. This timing will provide the doctor with the best view of the inside of your uterus. Hysteroscopy is also performed to determine the cause of unexplained bleeding or spotting in postmenopausal women.

How is hysteroscopy performed?

Prior to the procedure, your doctor may prescribe a sedative to help you relax. You will then be given analgesia appropriate for where you are having the procedure done. The procedure itself takes place in the following order:

- The doctor will dilate (widen) your cervix to allow the hysteroscope to be inserted.
- The hysteroscope is inserted through your vagina and cervix into the uterus.
- Carbon dioxide gas or a liquid solution is then inserted into the uterus, through the hysteroscope, to expand it and to clear away any blood or mucus.
- Next, a light shone through the hysteroscope allows your doctor to see your uterus and the openings of the fallopian tubes into the uterine cavity.
- Finally, if surgery needs to be performed, small instruments are inserted into the uterus through the hysteroscope.

What can I expect after a hysteroscopy?

Most patients require nothing more than tylenol or ibuprofen to help with mild cramping.



Joseph Gauta, MD



Nicole Houser, PA-C



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Stress is Sabotaging Your Health— Here's How to Take Back Control

In the modern whirlwind of life, stress has become an unavoidable companion. The relentless pace of work, family obligations, and societal pressures often leaves little room for relaxation and rejuvenation. This neglect of self-care plays a crucial role in the elevation of cortisol, our primary stress hormone, compelling our bodies into a constant state of “fight or flight.” Research indicates that chronic stress is a significant contributor to a myriad of health issues, including obesity, diabetes, autoimmune disorders, and digestive dysfunction (McEwen, 2006). The implications extend beyond physical health; they also include mental well-being, cognitive function, and emotional stability. While it is tempting to zone out with television programming, doom scroll on social media, or eat yet another box of cookies to manage stress, these activities fail to address the damaging physical effects of stress and may even perpetuate a negative cycle into more stress, in some cases.

Ignoring the importance of relaxation and engaging in parasympathetic-dominant activities can accelerate the aging process, leading to premature aging and a heightened risk of early mortality (Seeman et al., 2001). Chronic stress profoundly impacts various bodily systems, leading to a cascade of negative effects.

The Gut-Brain Connection: How Stress Disrupts Digestion and Overall Health

The digestive system is particularly vulnerable to stress. When the body is in a prolonged “fight or flight” state, digestion slows, nutrient absorption decreases, and the gut microbiome becomes imbalanced. Stress can lead to conditions such as irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), acid reflux, bloating, and food sensitivities. It also weakens the gut lining, increasing inflammation and contributing to “leaky gut,” which may trigger autoimmune responses and chronic fatigue.

The gut and brain are deeply connected via the vagus nerve, which regulates digestion and relaxation. Chronic stress reduces vagal tone, impairing gut motility and the body's ability to regulate inflammation. As a result, the digestive system struggles to function optimally, further exacerbating stress-related symptoms like brain fog, anxiety, and fatigue.



The Role of the Parasympathetic Nervous System in Stress Recovery

The parasympathetic nervous system (PNS) is responsible for counteracting stress by promoting relaxation, digestion, and healing. When activated, the PNS lowers cortisol, reduces heart rate, and supports hormonal balance, allowing the body to shift from a state of survival to one of restoration.

Activities that engage the PNS include:

- **Meditation & Breathwork** – Lowers cortisol and improves vagal tone.
- **Mindful Eating** – Enhances digestion and absorption of nutrients.
- **Nature Exposure** – Reduces stress hormones and increases serotonin.
- **Aromatherapy** – Stimulates relaxation through the olfactory system.
- **Yoga & Gentle Movement** – Reduces muscle tension and enhances nervous system regulation.

Creating Your Personalized Self-Care Stress Management Plan

The first step in addressing chronic stress is prioritizing scheduled self-care—just like you would an important meeting or doctor's appointment. A structured plan ensures you make space for relaxation and healing, preventing stress from compounding over time.

One of the most effective ways to commit to self-care is by incorporating HOCATT sessions into your wellness routine. The Hyperthermic Ozone and Carbonic Acid Transdermal Technology (HOCATT) system offers a multi-layered approach to relaxation and stress reduction, working in synergy with the body's natural healing mechanisms.

How HOCATT Helps You Take Back Control of Your Health:

- **Vagus Nerve Stimulation** – Encourages deep relaxation and activates the parasympathetic nervous system.
- **Oxygenation & Circulation** – Enhances blood flow, ensuring that oxygen and nutrients reach the brain, organs, and tissues more effectively. Proper oxygenation supports the nervous system, reducing stress-related fatigue and brain fog while improving energy levels and emotional resilience.
- **Reduction of Oxidative Stress** – Chronic stress fuels inflammation, and inflammation, in turn, amplifies stress—creating a vicious cycle that wreaks havoc on the body. HOCATT helps break this cycle by delivering antioxidants that neutralize free radicals, reducing systemic inflammation and promoting cellular repair. This not only helps restore balance but also mitigates the long-term health risks associated with chronic stress.
- **Scheduled Self-Care** – Ensures you consistently engage in relaxation without excuses, giving your body the time and space to recover from daily stressors.

Health coaching, stress management techniques, meditation, and yoga are also available to support your journey toward a calmer, healthier life. But the key to transformation starts with taking action.

Start Your Personalized Program to Annihilate Stress Today!

Prioritize your well-being by scheduling your first HOCATT session. Give your body the gift of relaxation, renewal, and resilience—because you deserve to thrive, not just survive.

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Exploring the Potential of CBD in Managing Parkinson's Disease Symptoms

Parkinson's disease is a progressive neurological disorder that affects movement, causing tremors, stiffness, and difficulty with balance and coordination. While there is no cure for Parkinson's disease, various treatments aim to manage its symptoms and improve the quality of life for patients. In recent years, there has been growing interest in the potential therapeutic effects of cannabidiol (CBD), a compound derived from the cannabis plant, in managing Parkinson's disease symptoms.

CBD is one of over a hundred cannabinoids found in cannabis. Unlike tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), another well-known cannabinoid, CBD does not produce psychoactive effects. Instead, it is believed to interact with the body's endocannabinoid system, which plays a role in regulating functions such as mood, sleep, appetite, and pain sensation.

Research into the potential benefits of CBD for Parkinson's disease is still in its early stages, but preliminary studies and anecdotal evidence suggest that it may offer some relief for certain symptoms of the condition.

One of the most common symptoms of Parkinson's disease is tremors, involuntary shaking of the hands, arms, legs, jaw, or tongue. Some studies have suggested that CBD may help reduce tremors and improve motor function in Parkinson's patients. A study published in the Journal of Psychopharmacology found that CBD significantly reduced both the frequency and severity of tremors in Parkinson's patients

compared to a placebo. However, more research is needed to confirm these findings and understand the mechanisms underlying CBD's effects on tremors.

In addition to tremors, Parkinson's disease can cause muscle stiffness and rigidity, making it difficult for patients to move freely. CBD's potential muscle relaxant properties may offer relief for these symptoms. A study published in the European Journal of Pain found that CBD applied topically reduced muscle stiffness and improved mobility in rats with arthritis, suggesting that it may have similar effects in Parkinson's patients. Further clinical trials are needed to determine the optimal dosage and delivery method of CBD for managing muscle stiffness in Parkinson's disease.

Furthermore, Parkinson's disease can have a significant impact on mood and mental well-being. Depression and anxiety are common among Parkinson's patients, partly due to changes in brain chemistry caused by the disease. CBD has been studied for its potential antidepressant and anxiolytic properties, with promising results in both animal and human studies. By modulating the endocannabinoid system and interacting with serotonin receptors in the brain, CBD may help alleviate symptoms of depression and anxiety in Parkinson's patients. However, more research is needed to determine the long-term effects and safety of CBD for managing mood disorders in this population.

It's important to note that while CBD shows promise as a potential treatment for Parkinson's disease symptoms, it is not a cure, and it may not work for

everyone. Additionally, CBD can interact with certain medications commonly prescribed to Parkinson's patients, so it's essential to consult with a healthcare professional before incorporating CBD into your treatment regimen.

In conclusion, while more research is needed to fully understand the effects of CBD on Parkinson's disease, early evidence suggests that it may offer relief for symptoms such as tremors, muscle stiffness, and mood disorders. As scientists continue to explore the therapeutic potential of CBD, it holds promise as a complementary treatment option for Parkinson's patients seeking relief from the debilitating symptoms of the disease.

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 industry, that kept getting requests from clients to use CBD oils because of their natural healing properties.

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Health Insurance

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

It is illegal for an insurance agent to call you regarding Medicare.

Do not talk to someone you have not given permission to call. Ask them for their National Producer number and report them to Medicare for an unsolicited call.

CMS has made many rules for 2025 Medicare season. If you want to enroll or review your plan over the phone, you need to agree to be recorded and Medicare requires us to keep the recording for 10 years. In person appointments do not have that requirement, but you need to sign a scope of appointment that authorizes us to talk to you about Medicare Advantage or a Drug Plan. It does not allow us to do anything but talk to you about these topics.

Many plans have decreased the cost of Insulin which will be a huge savings for so many in 2024. Part D after you, the plan and the pharmaceutical company paid \$8,000 you no longer have a cost for your medications for the rest of the year.

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-month 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?



We offer **Free Medicare Seminars** in Lee & Collier County please e-mail info@logicalinsurance.com to register or call 239-362-0855 for dates. Medicare's website is www.Medicare.gov.

Individual/Family Health Insurance – Being young and healthy does not mean you do not need health insurance. Do you know anyone that knew when they were going to be diagnosed with cancer, or when they were going to have a heart attack or even a serious accident? I do not, it happens, and insurance is there to help you get the care you need and limit your financial exposure. What are your insurance options, and what is best for you? Employer Group Coverage, Individual Medically Underwritten Health Insurance, Medicaid, or the Government Marketplace Guaranteed Issue Health Insurance. There is a lot to know about the differences, as well as the cost. The monthly premium should not be your only consideration. *You do not know what you do not know* so ask the experts, which do know about all the plans and can help educate and guide you through the enrollment process. When it comes to medically underwritten plans, most of them you can enroll all year long, but you can also be denied based on medical underwriting. The cost is the same as going directly with the insurance carrier, so why would you not seek free professional help from an agent that sells all or most of the companies in your area?

Travel Insurance – Did you know that most health insurance does NOT cover you outside of the country and that includes a cruise, in international

waters (4 miles out). Travel insurance is not just about trip cancellation but most importantly what if you got sick or had an accident on your trip. Medical Trip insurance is very important and most of the time not very costly when you weigh the benefits.

Pet Insurance – Your 4-legged family members need insurance as well, especially for the big sudden emergency room services. The younger the pet the less the cost of insurance and there are unlimited benefits as well.

Life Insurance – You are never too young to have life insurance and many types offer living benefits. As an example, I purchase life insurance for my grandchildren almost as soon as they are born. Their policy continues to build cash value that they can use during their lives, for maybe education, wedding or even a 1st home purchase. The younger you are the lower the cost.

Long Term Care Insurance – Overall, 48.7% of older adults with ADL difficulties (or an estimated 3 million persons aged 70 and older) reported needing some sort of personal assistance with one or more ADLs, and, of those individuals with need, 20.7% (or an estimated 629,000 persons) had an unmet need. Long Term Care Insurance helps pay for in home, or facility-based needs, such as assistance with acts of daily living or help with paying for a facility. Start shopping for this insurance in your 40's, but it's never too late to try. Your overall health will pay a major roll in the cost of the plan's premium. The sooner than later for affordability. Remember Medicare is NOT meant for Nursing Home Care/Skilled Nursing.

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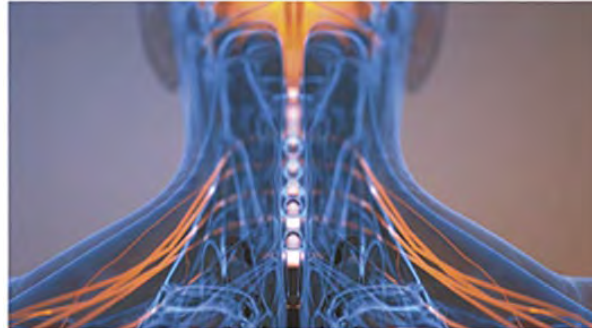
The Matterhorn Method: A Seamless Integration Between Pain Relief and Performance

By Angela Puchalla, MS, ATC, LAT

The leading company in Florida for identifying and correcting neurological compensation is Naples-based Matterhorn Fit. Through their proprietary process, called the Matterhorn Method, they have been able to successfully treat thousands of active seniors, over 70 professional athletes and 11 Olympians, in as little as two weeks. Through their comprehensive initial evaluation, they will identify exactly where the root cause of your problem is coming from, create a plan to fix it quickly, and prevent it from returning.

“Many of our clients have lost hope. They have tried traditional treatment methods and still live with pain. When you address pain, injury, and movement dysfunction from a neurological level, the results are immediate and our clients become hopeful again,” says Matterhorn Fit CEO Ryan Vesce.

Ryan Vesce was on the verge of retirement from his professional hockey career after major back and hip surgery, but mentally he was not ready. Ryan teamed up with professional athlete strength coach, Sean Sullivan, to find a solution to his chronic pain. The team spent the next five years compiling various techniques they had learned in professional sports into a systematic process and applied it to Ryan’s rehabilitation. The results were immediate and it enabled Ryan to keep playing for an additional 5 years pain free. Ryan and Sean founded Matterhorn Fit in 2018 to bring their newly developed process, called the Matterhorn Method, to everyday people who struggle with pain.



“When I retired in 2018, we had to tell the world what we had discovered,” says Vesce. “So we started testing our new process on pro athletes, and it worked. We started testing on active seniors in the area (60-80 yr olds) and it worked. In fact, the Matterhorn Method worked so well that our clients told all of their family and friends about it. That’s when we knew we had something really special. Within 2 weeks, virtually all of our patients were seeing a major reduction of pain and that has held true for thousands of our clients through today. The process worked fast. The culture was inspiring, and we began to take off.”

WHY IT WORKS

The reason why Matterhorn Fit has been able to consistently relieve pain in two weeks is credited to their proprietary process called the Matterhorn Method. The Matterhorn Method identifies the root cause of the issue from a neurological level and allows for muscles that were inactive to support the body again which eliminates the pain response from the brain.

The first step in Matterhorn Fit’s process is a comprehensive initial evaluation. Through their evaluation, they will be able to identify any neurological compensation in the client’s system. If they do find compensations, there is a very high probability that they can improve the client’s pain in two weeks.

“Through our initial evaluation we will be able to determine IF we can help you. If we do find something that we can fix, then we will start you with 6 sessions over a two week period to resolve your symptoms,” says Vesce. “Over 94% of our clients have reported a major reduction of pain within two weeks. After the symptoms are resolved, we build a personalized movement plan to prevent the problem from returning.”

To schedule an initial evaluation visit
matterhornfit.com or call the office at
 239.676.5342.

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CARING FOR A LOVED ONE WITH DEMENTIA: Practical Tips for Managing Anxiety

By Cynthia Perthuis, CDP, CADDCT, CSA

Caring for a loved one with dementia can be a challenging and emotional journey. As a caregiver, you play a crucial role in providing support and comfort to your loved one as they navigate the complexities of this progressive neurological condition. One common challenge faced by individuals with dementia is anxiety, which can manifest in various ways and significantly impact their well-being and yours. In this article, we will explore practical tips for managing your loved one's inevitable anxiety, understand why they experience it, and examine how your own anxiety as a caregiver can affect them.

Anxiety is a common symptom experienced by individuals with dementia or Alzheimer's and can be triggered by a variety of factors, including:

• Cognitive Decline

As dementia progresses, individuals may experience memory loss, confusion, and difficulty understanding their surroundings. These cognitive changes can lead to feelings of uncertainty and fear, contributing to anxiety.

• Environmental Changes

Any changes in the environment, such as moving to a new place, changes in routine, or unfamiliar faces, can trigger anxiety in individuals with dementia. They may struggle to adapt to new situations and feel overwhelmed by the unfamiliarity.

• Loss of Independence

Dementia can gradually strip away a person's independence, leading to feelings of frustration, helplessness, and anxiety. Tasks that were once routine and effortless may become challenging, causing distress and anxiety.

• Communication Difficulties

Individuals with dementia may have difficulty expressing their needs and understanding verbal cues. Certainly, most experience slower processing abilities and may also have lowered hearing ability. This can lead to feeling isolated and misunderstood, further exacerbating their anxiety.

As a caregiver there are strategies you can employ to help manage your loved one's anxiety and promote their well-being:

• Establish a Calm and Familiar Environment

Create a soothing and familiar environment for your loved one by minimizing noise, clutter, and other potential stressors. Maintain a consistent daily routine to provide stability and predictability, which can help reduce anxiety.

• Practice Effective Communication

First, slow your communication down. Provide time for your loved one to follow the conversation and process what you have shared or asked. Use clear, simple language and nonverbal cues to communicate. It can be helpful to comment on their emotions which can help them identify how they are feeling. For example, "Mom, it seems like you might feel nervous...." If your loved one's language skills remain intact, your ability to voice and hold space for their emotions can help them connect with their own emotions. Validate their feelings. Reassure them they are not alone.

• Engage in Meaningful Activities

Encourage your loved one to participate in activities that they enjoy and find meaningful. Engaging in hobbies, music therapy, art therapy, or gentle exercise can help distract them from their worries and reduce anxiety. Loneliness and anxiety breed loneliness and anxiety. As the disease progresses, they will need more help initiating activity.

How Caregiver Anxiety Affects Your Loved One:

It is essential to recognize that as a caregiver, your own anxiety and stress can impact your loved one's stress.

• Emotional Contagion

Individuals with dementia are highly attuned to the emotions of those around them and may notice your anxiety and stress. If you are feeling anxious, your loved one may mirror those emotions, leading to increased agitation and distress for you both. They may not be able to articulate it but if your loved one feels extra stressed or anxious, check in with yourself regularly. Is your loved one picking up on your emotions?

• Reduced Quality of Care

Caregiver anxiety can impair your ability to provide effective care. When you are feeling overwhelmed or anxious, you may be less patient, attentive, and compassionate, which can negatively impact your



loved one's well-being. Chronic caregiver stress and anxiety can strain your relationship with your loved one, leading to increased tension and conflict. This can further exacerbate their anxiety and make it challenging to maintain a supportive and nurturing environment.

Managing Caregiver Anxiety

Taking care of your own mental and emotional well-being is essential for effectively caregiving. Reach out to friends, family members, or support groups for emotional support and encouragement. Talking to others who understand what you are going through can provide validation and comfort. It may be difficult, but maintain connection to your life outside of caregiving and dementia. Accept that you cannot control dementia nor provide perfect care. Set realistic expectations for yourself. Give yourself time to rest and recharge by taking regular breaks from caregiving duties. Enlist the help of other family members, friends, or respite care services to give yourself a much-needed break.

In conclusion, caring for a loved one with dementia requires patience, compassion, and understanding. By implementing practical strategies to manage anxiety and taking care of your own well-being, you can create a supportive and nurturing environment that promotes your loved one's overall quality of life. Remember that you are not alone, and there are resources available to help you navigate this challenging journey.



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When You Are At Your Wits End

Have you ever been at your wits' end? Have you ever been so confused that you didn't really know which way was up? Have you ever had the feeling, "I know I need to do something...but I don't know what 'something' to do."

The Bible tells the story of a group of sailors who went out to sea and encountered a huge storm that almost killed them:

²³Others went out on the sea in ships; they were merchants on the mighty waters. ²⁴They saw the works of the LORD, his wonderful deeds in the deep. ²⁵For he spoke and stirred up a tempest that lifted high the waves. ²⁶They mounted up to the heavens and went down to the depths; in their peril their courage melted away. ²⁷They reeled and staggered like drunken men; they were at their wits' end. ²⁸Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and he brought them out of their distress. ²⁹He stilled the storm to a whisper; the waves of the sea were hushed. ³⁰They were glad when it grew calm, and he guided them to their desired haven. ³¹Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for men. Psalm 107:23-31

Can you relate to this group of sailors? Maybe the circumstances in your life have caused your courage to melt away. Perhaps you are going through a storm of your own. You may find yourself at your wits' end without any clear direction as to what to do next. If so, follow the example of the sailors in the Bible.

There first thing they did was cry out to the LORD in their trouble. Don't underestimate the power of prayer. An old gospel song says, "when God is all you have, you'll find He's all you need." God responded to the sailor's prayer by bringing them out of their distress. In fact, it says he stilled the storm to a whisper and the waves of the sea were hushed. God can do that in your life and in your situation as well. Call out to him. His timing is not always as quick as we may like but He knows what is best for each of us.

When the storm was over, the text says that God guided the sailors to their desired haven. They found their place of rest and peace. Storms don't last forever... and neither will yours. Keep your faith in God. Cry out to Him in your pain. Trust that He knows what's best and keep praying and seeking your desired haven... it may be just around the corner.

And then, don't forget to thank God when He does bring you through the storm. The story concludes by saying, "Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for men."

Storms, crises, pain and problems are an unfortunate reality of life. We grow through the pain and learn valuable lessons during these times. Don't give up, give in, or quit. When you find yourself at your wits' end...hang on, cry out to God, and look for His deliverance.

Tim Neptune is the lead pastor of Venture Church in Naples, Florida. Venture Church meets on the campus of FSW State College on Lely Cultural Blvd. in East Naples. For times and directions, visit www.venturenaples.com.



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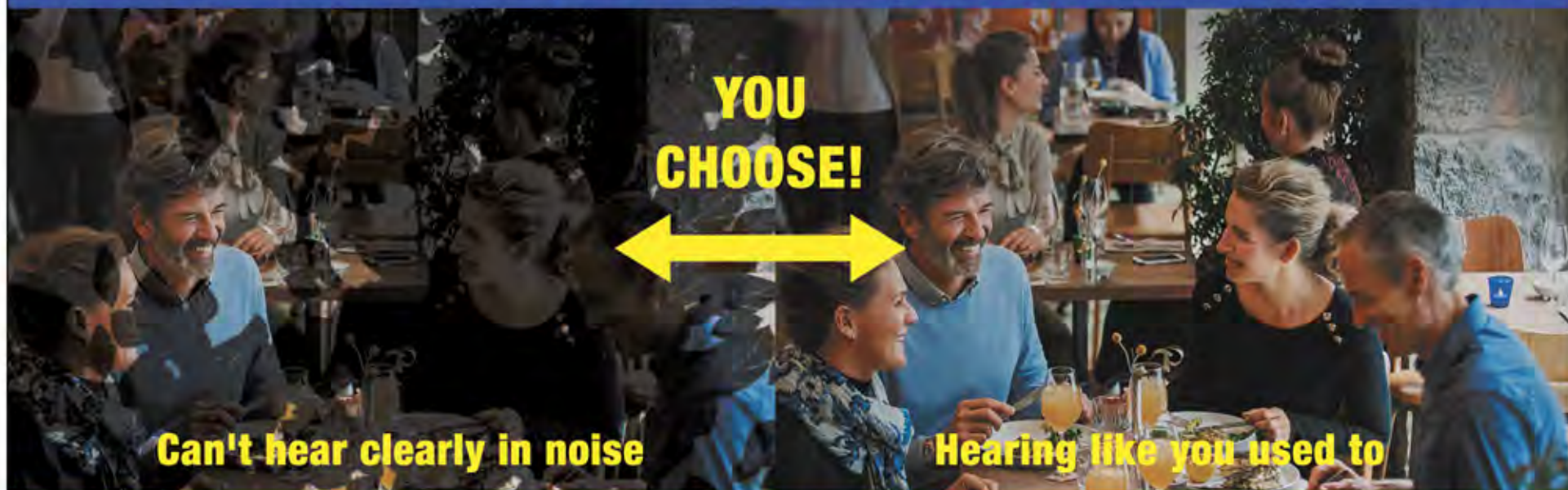






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