

S O U T H W E S T F L O R I D A ' S

# Health & Wellness<sup>®</sup> MAGAZINE

October 2025

Lee Edition - Monthly

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# Connecting You to a Healthier Life in Lee County

By Ilona Yurfeld, MD, Family Medicine at Millennium Physician Group

**C**hoosing a primary care physician is one of the most important decisions you can make for your long-term health. It's more than just checkups and prescriptions – it's about finding someone who is committed to walking alongside you, helping you prevent illness, manage chronic conditions, and feel confident about the choices you make for your health.

I am privileged to care for the families in the Southwest Florida community. Through Millennium Physician Group, I am part of a team that offers multiple locations across Lee County, providing convenient access to the care you need.

## Why Primary Care Matters

Good health begins with primary care, which provides a strong foundation for maintaining your health as well as a source for treatment when needed. As a physician specializing in family medicine, I concentrate on helping adults stay well, detect problems early through preventive care and manage illness with patient-centered services to improve health outcomes.

That means I don't just treat conditions – I listen to my patients and what they need. Whether it's lowering blood pressure or cholesterol, stabilizing diabetes, or adjusting diet and daily habits, we'll work together to craft a care plan that fits your life, your needs, and your priorities.

Clear communication is essential in healthcare, so my goal is to ensure every patient fully understands their health, their options, and their next steps.

**Comprehensive Care for Every Stage of Adulthood**  
Family medicine covers a wide range of health needs. In my practice, we focus on:

- **Preventive Care** – Annual wellness exams, screenings, and lifestyle guidance to help you stay ahead of health issues.
- **Chronic Condition Management** – Ongoing support for conditions like diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure or cholesterol, and arthritis.
- **Acute Care** – Prompt treatment for illnesses and injuries so you can recover faster.
- **Coordination with Specialists** – Helping you navigate care when multiple health concerns overlap.
- **Whole-Person Health** – Addressing physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing.



I also believe medicine works at its best when it's personal. Because your health is more than just numbers on a chart, I take the time to discuss not only your symptoms but also what is happening in your life, including your stress, routines, and goals – the things that truly impact how you feel on a day-to-day basis.

## Millennium Physician Group Cares for Our Community

Millennium Physician Group is one of the largest comprehensive primary care practices in the Southeast, with multiple office locations in Lee County and throughout Florida. As part of the Millennium team of physicians, advanced providers and staff, our comprehensive services include:

- Access to same-day appointments when you need care quickly.
- Coordinated care between your primary care provider and specialists.
- Onsite and nearby lab and radiology services to make testing easier.
- Virtual visits for times when you can't make it to the medical office.

And because Millennium focuses on value-based care, our priority is always to keep you healthy, avoid unnecessary tests and hospital visits, and lower your overall healthcare costs.

Whether you need a routine checkup, help managing a chronic condition, or just someone to listen when you have health concerns, my door is open. At Millennium Physician Group, we're here to connect you to a healthier life.

**We're welcoming new patients and look forward to caring for you.**

## Attention Medicare-Eligible Patients:

Medicare's Open Enrollment Period runs from October 15 through December 7. This is the time each year to review your coverage and make any changes to your Medicare Advantage or Part D prescription drug plan. You can learn more at [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov) or by calling 1-800-MEDICARE.



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# LEE HEALTH CANCER INSTITUTE BRINGS GROUND-BREAKING LIVER CANCER TREATMENT TO SOUTHWEST FLORIDA

Lee Health's HealthyNews Blog

**T**his month, Lee Health became the first health system in Southwest Florida to offer a non-invasive technology that destroys liver tumors without the need for incisions. The Edison System gives hope to patients with liver tumors who previously had few treatment options. The non-surgical, non-invasive treatment represents a major advancement in cancer care.

"This innovative technology is truly a game changer for many liver cancer patients," says Dr. Mark Bloomston, a board-certified surgical oncologist with the Lee Health Cancer Institute. "The Edison System offers a powerful complement to chemotherapy, with the ability to precisely target tumors while preserving healthy blood vessels."

## Addressing the challenge of liver cancer detection

Early liver cancer symptoms are often vague and can cause delayed detection, making treatment more challenging by the time diagnosis occurs. Standard treatment protocols after confirming a tumor with imaging and biopsy typically involve chemotherapy and/or surgery, when possible. However, many patients face limitations with these traditional approaches due to underlying health conditions, tumor location, or treatment tolerance issues, Dr. Bloomston says.

## What makes the Edison System different

The Edison System uses histotripsy, which delivers concentrated ultrasound pulses to create microscopic vapor bubbles within the targeted tumor. The sound waves are strong but directed only to the tumor to be treated, sparing surrounding healthy tissue and blood vessels.

The sound waves create tiny bubbles within the cells of the tumor. The bubbles then expand and collapse quickly, releasing energy that breaks down the cells of the tumor tissue. Essentially, the tumor is liquified at a cellular level.

What sets the Edison System apart is its remarkable precision and real-time visualization capabilities. The platform allows surgeons to control the entire procedure using advanced imaging and robotics under continuous real-time control.

The procedure is performed under general anesthesia, but patients typically experience minimal discomfort during and after treatment. Most patients can complete the treatment in a single session, but it can be repeated if necessary.

Because the Edison System is non-invasive, many patients can return home the same day, experiencing shorter recovery times compared to traditional treatments. The procedure can be performed in an outpatient setting.

"As a surgeon, it's rewarding to be able to offer a procedure where we can precisely destroy liver tumors without using a scalpel or needles, hopefully enabling the patient's quick recovery while avoiding certain complications like surgical site infections or liver injury common with other modalities," Dr. Bloomston says.

## Who can benefit from histotripsy

The Edison System is specifically designed for patients with primary or metastatic liver tumors who are not candidates for surgery. This includes patients with underlying health conditions that make surgery too risky, tumors located in difficult-to-reach areas, or complex tumor presentations that traditional surgery can't address safely. Histotripsy is particularly valuable for patients with hepatocellular carcinoma (primary liver cancer) who also have cirrhosis.

"Most patients with cirrhosis typically can't have a surgical procedure because of the risk of liver failure afterwards," Dr. Bloomston says. "But now we're talking about doing something for the liver without having to operate on it, greatly lowering that risk."

Candidates must have tumors confined to the liver and undergo a comprehensive evaluation by their oncology team to determine suitability for this non-invasive method.

However, not every tumor is suitable for histotripsy treatment. The ultrasound waves can only penetrate to certain depths in tissue; therefore, careful patient and tumor selection is essential to ensure the best outcomes, Dr. Bloomston notes.

## Is histotripsy safe?

Studies have shown that histotripsy is a safe and effective addition to treatments currently available for cancer and liver tumors. Early clinical trials demonstrate impressive results, with a histotripsy success rate of 95.5 percent.

## Breakthrough immune system benefits

Histotripsy's most compelling feature may be its promise of empowering the body's cancer-fighting capabilities. When a liver tumor is liquefied, the proteins that were on the tumor's surface remain displayed to the immune system, allowing it to develop specificity for that type of tumor and seek out other cancer cells throughout the body. This phenomenon, known as the abscopal effect, has shown promising results. In over 2,000 patients treated, many have experienced shrinkage of untreated tumors after having one tumor treated in the liver.

Over time, the body's immune system removes the debris from the broken-down tumor tissue, and the treated cavity gradually shrinks as the immune system processes the liquefied tumor material.

## Looking toward the future

While currently FDA-cleared only for liver tumors, histotripsy's potential applications extend far beyond. Clinical trials are underway for pancreatic and kidney cancers, which Dr. Bloomston calls "the holy grail" due to the complexity and risks associated with traditional surgical approaches for these conditions.

The trial for kidney tumors is expected to be completed around the time Lee Health's system becomes operational, potentially expanding treatment options by next year.



Mark Bloomston, MD  
Cancer Institute – Surgical Oncology



# FOCUSING ON EYE SAFETY: CONTACT LENS AND EYE INJURY PREVENTION MONTH

**A**s we observe Contact Lens and Eye Injury Prevention Month, it's crucial to shine a spotlight on the importance of maintaining optimal eye health and safety. Our eyes are irreplaceable organs that deserve utmost care and attention. This month-long awareness campaign serves as a reminder to both contact lens wearers and the general public about the significance of proper eye care practices and injury prevention measures.

Contact lenses have revolutionized vision correction for millions of people worldwide. However, improper use and care of these tiny optical devices can lead to serious eye problems. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), approximately 45 million people in the United States wear contact lenses. While these lenses provide excellent vision correction, they also come with responsibilities.

One of the primary focuses of this awareness month is educating contact lens wearers about best practices. Proper hygiene is paramount when handling contact lenses. Always wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water before touching your lenses or your eyes. This simple step can significantly reduce the risk of introducing harmful bacteria into your eyes.

It's also essential to follow the recommended wear schedule for your lenses. Overwearing contact lenses, especially sleeping in them when not approved by your eye care professional, can increase the risk of eye infections and corneal ulcers. Always remove your lenses before sleeping, swimming, or exposing your eyes to water, as these activities can introduce harmful microorganisms to your eyes.

Regular cleaning and disinfection of contact lenses are crucial. Use only the solutions recommended by your eye care professional, and never reuse or top off old solution. Replace your lens case every three months to prevent bacterial buildup. These habits can go a long way in preventing eye infections and ensuring the longevity of your lenses.

Beyond contact lens care, this month also emphasizes the importance of preventing eye injuries in various settings. Whether at work, home, or during sports activities, eye protection should always be a priority. According to the American Optometric Association, about 90% of eye injuries are preventable with proper safety eyewear.

In the workplace, especially in industries involving construction, manufacturing, or laboratory work, wearing appropriate safety goggles or face shields is crucial. At home, be cautious when using cleaning products, performing DIY projects, or working in the yard. Simple precautions like wearing safety glasses can prevent devastating eye injuries.

Sports enthusiasts should also take note. Activities like basketball, baseball, and racquet sports pose significant risks to the eyes. Wearing sports goggles or protective eyewear can prevent traumatic eye injuries and potential vision loss.

This awareness month also serves as a reminder for everyone, regardless of whether they wear contact lenses, to schedule regular comprehensive eye exams. These check-ups can detect early signs of eye diseases and ensure your vision prescription is up to date.

As we navigate through Contact Lens and Eye Injury Prevention Month, let's commit to making eye safety a year-round priority. By adopting proper contact lens care habits, using appropriate eye protection, and staying vigilant about potential eye hazards, we can significantly reduce the risk of eye injuries and maintain healthy vision for years to come.

Remember, your eyes are windows to the world – treat them with the care and respect they deserve. Whether you're a contact lens wearer or not, take this month as an opportunity to reassess your eye care routine and make any necessary improvements. Your future self will thank you for the gift of clear, healthy vision.



**BRADLEY MIDDAGH, O.D.**  
Optometric Physician

Dr. Bradley Middaugh is a board-certified optometric physician committed to providing his patients the highest level of care through innovative technology and a focus on providing an excellent patient experience. Dr. Middaugh has extensive training in ocular disease, vision testing, eyewear prescriptions, specialty contact lenses and the diagnosis and treatment of eye disorders for patients of all ages, from pediatric to geriatric.

Dr. Middaugh graduated from Wake Forest University and earned his doctorate at The University of Alabama at Birmingham. He has been in private practice since 1988 and founded The Fort Myers Eye Center in 1993. In 2020, he joined the Center For Sight team to offer his patients direct access to the some of the finest cataract, LASIK, glaucoma, cornea, retina, and oculo-plastics specialists in Southwest Florida.

Dr. Middaugh has served on the Lee County School Board as a member of the Health Care Advisory Panel and the Early Intervention Health Care Panel. He is also an active member of the Southwest Florida Optometric Association, the Florida Optometric Association, and the American Optometric Association, and Above Board Chamber. In addition, he enjoys leading Medical Mission teams annually to El Salvador.

Dr. Middaugh and his wife, Meg, enjoy raising their two boys. The family is very active in their church, Walk to Emmaus, Kairos Prison Ministry, and enjoy serving on medical mission teams.

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# HEARING AND MEMORY LOSS ARE CONNECTED

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



## Hearing Loss Affects the Brain

Hearing loss doesn't just mean an older adult needs to turn up the TV. It's been linked to a range of health problems, including dementia. The latest aging research not only shows the two are connected but also leads scientists to believe that hearing loss may cause dementia. If you have hearing loss, you have a greater chance of developing dementia, according to a 2020 Lancet commission report that lists hearing loss as one of the top risk factors for dementia.

## Brain Strain and Social Isolation

Hearing loss can make the brain work harder, forcing it to strain to hear and fill in the gaps. That comes at the expense of other thinking and memory systems. Another possibility is hearing loss causes the aging brain to shrink more quickly. A third possibility is that hearing loss makes people less socially engaged, which is hugely essential to remain intellectually stimulated. If you can't hear very well, you may not go out as much, so the brain is less engaged and active.

## Quantifying Hearing Loss's Impact

Hearing loss is estimated to account for 8% of dementia cases. This means that hearing loss may be responsible for 800,000 of the nearly ten million new cases of dementia diagnosed each year.

Studies from the National Institute of Health show an association between hearing impairment and dementia while supporting the hypothesis that hearing impairment contributes to cognitive dysfunction in older adults.

## Reducing the Risk of Dementia

Johns Hopkins is leading a large National Institute on Aging study to see if hearing aids can safeguard seniors' mental processes. The study has multiple locations and has recruited nearly 1,000 people ages 70-84 with hearing loss. One group is provided hearing aids, while another group receives aging education. By early 2023, the study should provide definitive results on whether treating hearing loss reduces cognitive decline risk. In essence, we'll know whether the use of hearing aids can potentially reduce brain aging and the risk of dementia.

## Other Effects on Health

Hearing loss has long-term effects on health. It's believed to increase the risk for falls and depression. It also leads to higher health care costs:

People with hearing loss have, over ten years, a 47% increased hospitalization rate. Hearing loss is associated with an increased risk of institutionalization, an increased risk for dementia, and increased health care costs overall for all ages.

## In Summary

Individuals with hearing loss are at an increased risk for developing cognitive decline and dementia. New research finds that treating hearing loss is the single most modifiable risk factor for reducing the risk of dementia. While your risk increases with the degree of hearing loss, it is essential to note that even mild hearing loss can increase your risk by as much as 200%! If you or a loved one struggles to hear clearly, we can help reduce your risk of dementia in Cape Coral and Fort Myers, FL., with our 5-star-rated hearing care.

**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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# ALIGNMENT MATTERS:

## Reconnect the Body, Calm the Mind, Clear the Lymph.

By Shannon Willits,  
Master Pilates Educator

CLUB PILATES® WWW.CLUBPILATES.COM

**N**early 300,000 women in the U.S. are diagnosed with breast cancer each year. For them, survival marks the beginning of a new journey.

One that is deeply personal, often misunderstood, and rarely linear. Long after treatments end, the body holds on. To fatigue. To scar tissue. To stiffness. To fear.

The aftermath of surgery, chemotherapy, radiation, or reconstruction can linger silently. Muscles weaken. Breath shortens. Movement feels foreign. While oncology teams often focus on survival, few offer full-body strategies for restoration.

That's where Pilates becomes more than just exercise. It becomes a bridge. A reconnection. A way back into the body.

### The Disconnection No One Talks About

Breast cancer doesn't just affect cells. It fractures identity. For many survivors, there is a profound disconnect between how the body feels and how it once functioned. Mastectomies, drains, expanders, scar tissue, and nerve damage can make everyday movements feel unsafe. Or impossible.

Physical therapy may address acute healing. But what comes after? How does a woman regain trust in her body? Where does she go when she's cleared for exercise but feels far from whole?

Pilates answers that question. Gently. Intelligently. With precision.

### A Method Designed for Recovery

Created by Joseph Pilates for rehabilitation, the method emphasizes controlled movement, proper alignment, and deep breathing. It meets people where they are. For breast cancer survivors, this is critical.

Each session can be tailored. Modifications are not only welcome, they are expected. A good Pilates instructor sees the whole person. Not just the range of motion. Not just the scar.

Sessions begin with breath. That breath invites safety into the nervous system. It reduces tension. It signals that healing is possible. Then, small movements reawaken dormant muscles. Slowly, confidence builds and stability returns.

The goal isn't to "bounce back." It's to rebuild with care and precision.

### Why Rotation and Circulation Matter Most

One of the most overlooked pieces of recovery is lymphatic health. The lymphatic system doesn't have a pump like the heart. It depends on movement, breath, and muscle activation to function properly.

After surgery or radiation, lymph flow can be restricted. Swelling and lymphedema become a real risk. That's why movement is essential. But not just any movement.

Pilates prioritizes rotation. Twisting motions, gentle spirals, and multi-directional exercises stimulate lymph flow. These movements are often missing from other exercise programs. But they are vital for flushing inflammation and clearing stagnation.

Spinal rotation. Arm arcs. Rib cage mobility. These aren't just Pilates exercises. They are lifelines for the lymphatic system.

### Scar Tissue, Fascia, and the Forgotten Web

Every surgery leaves a mark not just on the skin, but in the connective tissue beneath. Fascia, the web-like tissue surrounding muscles and organs, can tighten, clump, and restrict motion, especially after breast surgery.

Traditional stretching can be aggressive. Pilates offers something more profound. Small, slow, spiraled movements that hydrate and mobilize the fascial layers. Over time, these movements soften restrictions. They create space. They restore flow.

As fascia begins to release, pain often decreases. Range improves. Women feel more like themselves again.

### It's Not Just Physical

The emotional toll of breast cancer is profound. Anxiety. Depression. Grief. Pilates helps here, too.

Movement becomes meditation. Breath becomes the anchor. In a quiet studio, without judgment, something shifts. For many survivors, Pilates is the first time they feel calm in their bodies again.

That calm matters. Stress impacts immune function, hormone regulation, and healing. A movement practice that lowers cortisol, improves sleep, and restores agency is not optional. It's necessary.

### Science Is Catching Up

Multiple studies now validate what Pilates professionals have seen for years. A 2020 meta-analysis in the *Journal of Clinical Medicine* showed significant improvement in upper limb function, fatigue, and quality of life for breast cancer patients practicing Pilates. Another study in *Supportive Care in Cancer* found that twice-weekly sessions improved body image, sleep, and emotional well-being.

But the research only tells part of the story.

What can't be measured is the smile when a woman lifts her arms overhead for the first time in months. Or the moment she realizes she's breathing fully, deeply, again. Or when she reclaims the word "strong."

### Healing in Layers

For Jennifer Yozzo, an occupational therapist and Pilates instructor, recovery came in layers. Post-mastectomy pain, scar tissue, fatigue, and the guarded posture that follows cancer treatment all demanded patience, persistence, and self-grace.

"From diagnosis to surgery to extended treatments and additional surgery, it felt like my body was just surviving, not thriving. Pain and doubt took over. Until I found Pilates, I struggled."

Pilates offered her not just strength, but a way to rewrite her relationship with her body.

"I learned that scar tissue and guarding had limited my breathing. Pilates breath gave me full expansion of my chest wall, and focusing on breath as I stretched into difficult ranges helped me regain strength and length. I can now reach my arms overhead without pain or tension. My neck and back pain have shifted from constant to occasional. I can lift and move in ways I thought were no longer possible. My shoulders no longer slump forward, and I stand tall, proud of the work I've done to recover.

My journey isn't over. I look forward to continuing Pilates not only for myself but for others who may need the same care of self," Jennifer says.

Breathwork steadied her nervous system, journaling gave her clarity, and movement restored trust. Group classes offered community, while private sessions addressed delicate limitations. What began as survival transformed into confidence, with Pilates the foundation for strength, resilience, and a renewed sense of self.

As her practice deepened, Jennifer saw healing not as linear but as a dialogue between effort and grace. Recovery grew into passion. Having experienced how Pilates teaches the body to be heard, trusted, and supported through every stage of healing, Jennifer advanced her study to become an instructor, committed to guiding others on the path of renewal.

### Pilates Is the New Standard of Care

Survivorship deserves more than maintenance. It deserves momentum. Pilates offers that. Not through intensity. But through intention.

It invites women to move again. To rotate. To breathe. To feel. To reconnect.

And in that reconnection, healing becomes possible. Not just physically. But emotionally. Spiritually. Wholly.

Shannon Willits is a Master Pilates Educator with more than 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 in both rehabilitation and sport-specific training.

As the owner of four Club Pilates studios in Lee County, FL, Shannon trains and mentors aspiring instructors through her Southwest Florida Pilates Academy and innovative apprenticeship model. She is also the host of the *Alignment Matters* podcast, where she shares insights on Pilates, movement science, and wellness—helping others make some of the wisest health decisions of their lives.



# WHY YOU DON'T NEED TO TRAVEL TO TURKEY FOR HAIR TRANSPLANTS

By Axel Ruiz, MD, DABFP, CWS

In recent years, Turkey has become a popular destination for individuals seeking hair transplants. However, with advancements in regenerative medicine, there is no longer a need to travel overseas for hair restoration. Right here in Florida, innovative approaches using exosomes and stem cells are offering promising results for natural hair growth without surgery.

## Exosomes and Stem Cells: The New Frontier

Exosomes and stem cells are powerful biological tools that help rejuvenate the scalp and stimulate the hair follicles. Unlike traditional transplants that involve surgical procedures and downtime, these regenerative methods work by enhancing the natural healing and regenerative capacity of the body. Patients in Florida now have access to these advanced therapies without having to board a plane.

## Benefits of Local Hair Regeneration in Florida

- 1. Non-Surgical** – No cutting, no stitches, and minimal discomfort.
- 2. Faster Recovery** – Most clients return to normal activities the same day.
- 3. Natural Results** – Stimulates your own hair follicles for authentic growth.
- 4. Convenience** – Receive world-class care without traveling overseas.
- 5. Safety** – Local oversight ensures you receive care that meets U.S. standards.

## Real Results You Can See

Before and after results demonstrate the effectiveness of exosome and stem cell applications for hair growth. These photos highlight the visible difference achieved with this innovative approach.

## The Future of Hair Restoration is Here

Traveling abroad for hair transplants is no longer necessary. Florida residents now have access to cutting-edge regenerative medicine that promotes natural hair growth safely and effectively. With exosome and stem cell therapies, the future of hair restoration is available right here at home.



## ABOUT AXEL RUIZ MD, DABFP, CWS

Axel Ruiz MD, DABFP, CWS is a member of the American Academy and a Board of Regenerative Medicine Researcher. Axel has been harnessing the Power of Stem Cells in Joint Pain Management since 2024.

Axel Ruiz, MD, DABFP, CWS, brings over 20 years of dedicated experience to family medicine, with a passion for delivering exceptional patient care. Board-certified in Family Practice (DABFP) and specializing in wound care (CWS), Dr. Ruiz offers a comprehensive and compassionate approach to health and wellness.

He is known for his ability to explain conditions thoroughly and build strong, trusting relationships with his patients. Practicing in Lehigh Acres, FL, Dr. Ruiz is affiliated with HCA Florida Lehigh Hospital, where he contributes to a high standard of hospital-

based care. His commitment to ongoing learning and patient-centered treatment makes him an invaluable partner in your health journey.

If you have questions about the opportunities available to you in our programs, feel free to send us a message or call (855) 734-3620. We will get back to you as soon as possible.



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# Downsizing for Retirement:

## 9 Downsizing Tips for Seniors

**M**any people choose to downsize for retirement. Now that the kids are grown and you simply don't need as much space, downsizing is a great way to boost your retirement fund and make your living situation more comfortable which is why this process is sometimes called "rightsizing for seniors." When you rightsize your home, you get rid of the extra space you don't need to make way for a new living space at a new budget that allows you the budget and time to better live your dream retirement.

However, it's difficult to know how to downsize your home for retirement, since it can feel like an overwhelming task. Consult our expert tips for seniors selling their homes to rightsize their life below.

### Downsizing Tips for Seniors

#### 1. Start Early

Initiate the downsizing process well in advance to reduce stress and make thoughtful decisions. Take your time, ideally over several months, to ensure a smooth transition. Rushing through the process can lead to added stress and hasty decision-making. Instead, embrace the opportunity to reminisce and enjoy the process of downsizing for retirement, making it a pleasant journey rather than a stressful one. Downsizing for retirement can certainly be exciting, but also consider that you surely have a great number of possessions you no longer need, and it will take time to go through it all. Stop and enjoy the process of reflection before selling, donating or throwing away the items. Perhaps you even want to take photos to keep the memory without the item.

The earlier you begin, the more time you'll have to adjust to the idea of letting go of unnecessary possessions and simplifying your life.

#### 2. Define Clear Goals

Why are you downsizing? Whether your goal is to save money, simplify your lifestyle, or relocate to a new area, it's important to set clear financial goals. Envision your desired retirement lifestyle, considering potential healthcare expenses and other future financial needs. By doing so, you can better understand your anticipated costs and how to achieve them while planning for retirement.

#### 3. Create an Inventory of Your Belongings

One of the most useful tips for seniors selling their homes to downsize is to meticulously catalog your



possessions. By doing so, you gain a better understanding of what you own and can make informed decisions about what to keep and what to let go of during the downsizing process. Create a list of all your possessions, including items tucked away in the attic, basement, or storage units to reveal the extent of your belongings. Identify duplicate items and choose the one in the best condition. Certain online tools and programs can help in making this process easier. Also identify items that won't be needed in your new home (for example a lawn mower rendered unnecessary by a move to 55+ area or retirement community that handles lawn care for you), and consider selling or donating them.

#### 4. Measure Your New Living Space

Acts recommends anyone considering downsizing for retirement understand the dimensions of their new living space to determine how much of their belongings they'll be able to bring. Visit your future home or assess online floor plans of potential options and consider the available space. Note any storage spaces like cabinets for kitchen appliances and closets for clothing. Start outlining which possessions will fit comfortably in your new living area. By understanding the layout and dimensions of your new home, you can make informed decisions about what items to bring with you and how to best arrange them in your smaller living space.

#### 5. Organize Your Belongings

You can make the process of downsizing more efficient and less complicated with these organization strategies:

- **Categorize:** Sort your belongings into categories to bring structure to the downsizing process.

- **Ask Yes or No Questions:** Instead of vague, open-ended questions, use clear, binary queries like "have I worn this coat in the last year, and will I in the future?" to simplify decision making.
- **Three-Box Method:** Employ a "Yes, No, Maybe" system within three marked boxes and categorize your belongings into these straightforward options. Keep the "Maybe" box minimal.
- **6-Month Method:** For items unused in the past six months, consider donating or reselling them. Chances are, if you haven't used them recently, they may not be essential in your future life.
- **Hanger Method:** Turn hangers backward and set a time limit of around 6 months to a year. Clothes that remain backward haven't been worn and can be confidently discarded, simplifying closet downsizing.

#### 6. Start Decluttering Your Home

Efficiently declutter your possessions by adopting a purposeful approach. By following these decluttering strategies, you can downsize your belongings while ensuring that your new retirement space is filled with items that truly enhance your life.

#### Tips for Decluttering Your Home:

- **Sell Unneeded and Valuable Items:** Consider selling items you no longer require, especially if you're moving to a smaller home. Identify marketable items like designer handbags or artwork and explore platforms like eBay, Craigslist, or Facebook Marketplace. This can provide quick cash for your move.
- **Dispose of Broken Items:** Throw away broken items immediately, ensuring that only the best-quality possessions accompany you into retirement.
- **Donate:** Items that you can't sell can find new homes through donations to friends, family, or charitable organizations. You may be surprised how cathartic it feels to know a beloved but no-longer-needed item will make a new owner extremely happy.
- **Digitize Important Documents:** Reduce paper clutter by discarding as many unnecessary papers as possible. Scan and store essential documents digitally to save physical space while ensuring easy access when needed.



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

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



- **Give Gifts Now:** Give away gifts you've been saving for scheduled occasions. It's a simple way to declutter while spreading joy year-round.
- **Keep Sentimental Items:** Family heirlooms, photographs, and other cherished possessions should be thoughtfully preserved to ensure that meaningful memories are retained. Would any of your loved ones appreciate the opportunity to own any of these items?
- **Keep Useful Items:** In addition to sentimental items, assess each item's utility and beauty. Keep only those possessions that truly enhance your life, such as essential household items or possessions that spark joy. Really truly view now as the opportunity to declutter.
- **Borrow or Rent Items You Rarely Need:** If you rarely use something, consider if you truly need to own it. You may borrow or rent items as needed rather than keep rarely used possessions.
- **Limit Collections:** Be selective with collections, such as books, greeting cards, crystal, or memorabilia. Keep only what fits within the designated space.
- **Antique Furniture:** If sentimental antique furniture doesn't align with your style, consider photographing it for memories and donating it to a worthy cause.
- **Closet Discipline:** Maintain a wardrobe limit to avoid accumulating excessive clothing. When adding new items, remove an item of the same category.
- **Bathroom Efficiency:** Keep only daily essentials in the bathroom and use baskets for easy access and storage. Discard old or unused toiletries.

This is one of the most stressful downsizing tasks. A helpful downsizing tip for seniors is to embrace change, and to assess your belongings objectively and separate from emotions. Consider whether keeping something aligns with your happiness. Some suggest creating a ceremonial farewell to items you're parting with, offering a sense of control and respect for each possession. This can provide reassurance later if you have doubts.

#### 7. Use Storage Solutions in Your New Home

Maximize the use of space in your new home by being strategic with storage solutions to efficiently organize your belongings and make the most of the available space in your downsized home.

##### Storage Ideas for Organizing Your Home:

- **Shelves and Cabinets:** Consider whether you can enhance existing storage areas by adding shelves and cabinets and utilizing the inside of cabinet doors for hanging.

- **Multi-Functional Furniture:** Choose furniture pieces that serve multiple purposes. For instance, a single table can function as a coffee table, workspace, and dining table. Look for desks that can be closed to conceal workspaces when not in use. Ottomans can serve as storage, extra seating, or even a coffee table.
- **Hall Organizers:** Install a hall organizer at the front door with designated bins for keys, bags, coats, and shoes to maintain a clutter-free entrance.
- **Convertible Seating:** Consider sofas and chairs that can be converted into sleeper beds to accommodate guests in the absence of a dedicated guest room.
- **Storage Containers:** Choose square or rectangle storage containers. Wicker baskets are both attractive and versatile, suitable for sliding under items and stacking on shelves.

#### 8. Get Support

To ensure a successful transition, consider reaching out for support to the following people for help or guidance:

- **Real Estate Agents:** Get an objective assessment of your property's value based on comparable sales in the area, which will enable you to make informed financial decisions.
- **Professional Moving Services:** Explore moving companies that specialize in downsizing and relocation.
- **Professional Downsizing Experts:** These professionals provide customized advice and strategies for a smoother transition, which can be invaluable in making the downsizing process less stressful.
- **Friends and Family:** Enlist the support of friends and family to assist with downsizing. Their help can make the process more manageable and less overwhelming. A great option is to have friends help sort through items to determine what's worth selling, donating, and tracking — and in the process determining which of the items they want to keep themselves!

#### 9. Maintain a Positive and Patient Mindset

Learning how to downsize your home for retirement can be a process that takes time and effort, but with the right mindset, you can navigate it successfully. As you embark on the journey of downsizing for retirement, remember to cultivate a positive attitude and exercise patience with yourself. Understand that it may not be easy, but letting go of things

can bring a sense of liberation. Embrace the process by focusing on the benefits it will bring to your lifestyle. Be patient, and recognize that downsizing takes time, and it's okay to progress at your own pace. Allow yourself the patience to navigate the emotional challenges associated with letting go of belongings.

With a positive mindset, you can tackle downsizing with greater resilience and a sense of accomplishment as you transition to a simpler retirement life.

If you decided to wait until after you retire to downsize, your situation is slightly different. See the advice below for more information:

##### Think About Where You Would Like to Retire:

Now that you're not tethered to your jobs and you are no longer raising a family, you have plenty of options regarding where you can retire. While many retirees choose somewhere warm like Florida, the Sunshine State may not be for everyone. Figuring out where you want to retire can help you in the sale of your current home and in understanding the cost of moving to a new state.

##### Figure Out What Living Situation Best Matches Your Lifestyle:

If you know what you would like to do in retirement and what needs you may have in the future, you can start determining what works best for your situation. Would a retirement community with frequent activities and excursions suit your preferences? Should you rent a condominium or small apartment? Move in with loved ones? Will you want somewhere that provides medical services as you age?

**Sell Items You No Longer Need:** Since you'll likely be moving to a smaller home, you should consider selling items you no longer need. This is a great way to get some quick cash to put toward your eventual move. Please note that for any items you can't sell, you may want to give them to friends and family or donate them.

##### At What Age Do Most Seniors Downsize?

There is no "right" age to downsize, since it all depends on individual situations and lifestyle choices. Generally, studies have shown that people start considering downsizing around their late 50s to early 60s. According to a Consumer Housing Trends Report, most seniors downsize at 55-years-old. For many, downsizing becomes an option once children have left the home. Consider the benefits of choosing a one-bedroom senior apartment as an ideal option for your new lifestyle.



# 2026 Annual Enrollment is Here!

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

**VERY IMPORTANT: Regarding Medicare it is illegal for an insurance agent to call, text, e-mail, knock on your door, hang anything on your door or vehicle or approach you without your consent. If they do as for their National Producer Number NPN, and you will hear a click and removed from their list. If they don't hang-up get their number and report them to Medicare. There is so much fraud where people are being switched to plans that they never approved or were miss led. Shop local, do background checks before you give anyone your personal information. You can google them, google reviews, check their Facebook, etc. Make sure that if you are working with someone you can call them personally if you have any questions or concerns.**

Medicare Annual Enrollment is October 15-December 7th for January 1st, 2026, effective. What can be changed at this time is Medicare Part D Drug Plans and Medicare Advantage Plans. You should have received your Notification of Change from your current insurance plan. This outlines the current year to the new year changes, as an example if your specialist provider costs \$20 now it might say \$35 in 2026 (no correlation just an example).

**Substantial changes to Medicare Part D "most insurance carriers have taken away insurance agents' ability to help you with your Part D Only drug plans his does not apply to most Advantage plans"**, standalone drug plans as well as Advantage Plans, you won't have to pay more than \$2,100 in out-of-pocket costs, which include deductibles, co-pays, coinsurance. It is especially important to check your plans formulary as medication must be in formulary to be capped. 2026 RX deductible will be capped at \$615.00. As a reminder the cost of the plan is not as important as the cost plus your medications, that is what you look at, the total cost. It is important to know what the medication is used for to determine if it is covered by the plan. Example Wycovy may be covered but in order to be covered it must be used for certain heart conditions or diabetes, Medicare does not cover weight loose medications at this time. Many carriers are consolidating Part D plans or eliminating them completely. As a reminder if you choose NOT to ENROLL in a Part D drug plan and in later years you will have to wait

for Annual Enrollment and then you will assed a penalty for every month you did not have a drug plan, that penalty will last for the REST OF YOUR LIFE! Careful not choosing a drug plan.

Resource: medicare.gov

Medicare Part C / Advantage Plans, most carriers have raised out of pocket limits and copays along with decreased extra value benefits for 2026. Annually Medicare Advantage Plans make changes. They must include all the same features as Original Medicare but not at the same cost share. They can have a premium, Medical and or Prescription deductible, copays and coinsurance can change. Extra Value such as Vision, Dental, Over the Counter, Part B Give Back, transportation, etc. can all change or be eliminated. Medicare sets the annual in-network out of pocket maximum; in 2025 it is \$9,350 for in-network and \$14,00 out-of-network services combined. However, individual insurance plans may set lower limits.

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

If your plan was CANCELLED/DROPPED for 2026, you have a guaranteed issue into a Medigap/Medicare Supplement. This is huge and very important, know your options!

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

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

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

Logical Insurance Solutions is a SWFL Insurance Broker that works with most of the insurance carriers in your area, we are happy to help you through the maze. We offer Free Medicare Seminars, Personal Appointments & Virtual appointments. Please e-mail info@logicalinsurance.com to register or call 239-362-0855 for dates. Medicare's website is www.Medicare.gov.

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# OVERUSE INJURIES

By Joe Altepeter, DPM

**A**s the hot summer weather begins to cool off it can be tempting to transition out of the air conditioning into outdoor activities from zero to sixty. But it is important that we be mindful of our potential for overuse injuries and prevention measures we can take. Largely simplified, Wolff's law suggests that bones will respond to stresses applied and increase density accordingly. In a similar manner, Davis's law applies to the muscles and other soft tissue structures, suggesting that the soft tissues will remodel based on repetitive stresses applied. With appropriate progression, transition into outdoor activities and exercise can be done without having to take a detour along the way. However, with rapid, or in some cases even gradual, increase in activities requiring repetitive motion or trauma, an overuse injury may occur, and could create a potentially significant roadblock in achieving your goals, whether for pleasure in the activities or efforts to improve health.

There are a few ways to decrease your risk of suffering an overuse injury. Start at a reasonable and realistic level by not over exerting yourself from the start. Give yourself time to recover from your workouts, especially if you are trying new exercises or ramping up mileage and reps. When you are increasing mileage or reps, try to keep increases at less than ten percent each week. Consider implementing different exercises or activities rather than sticking with the same set of exercises from day to day. Ensure your body is prepared for each workout with appropriate dynamic warm up prior to, and a sufficient cool down after. And be mindful of your shoe gear by using exercise specific gear and retiring that gear at least once or twice per year. Not only will these ideas help lower chances of suffering an overuse injury, but they can also help maintain enjoyment and motivation in the pursuit of your goals.

While everyone is at risk of suffering this type of injury, factors that may increase risk include age, previous injury, higher body mass index, and issues with training via technique or progression. When it comes to the foot and ankle, there is potential for almost all bone and soft tissue to be overused, with some injuries being far more prevalent than others.



Among the more common overuse injuries that may involve the foot and/or ankle are metatarsal stress fractures, achilles tendinosis, posterior tibial tendinosis, peroneal tendinosis, and shin splints to name a few. These various pathologies can affect the lower extremity in relatively unique ways, so it is important to be evaluated to differentiate between them and manage them appropriately.

If concerned about an overuse injury, the first thing you need to do is listen to your body. If you start experiencing swelling and tenderness that would be out of the ordinary for standard soreness, this is a sign that you need to slow down and let your body recover. If these discomforts linger, or even before they have a chance to linger, seeking medical treatment as soon as possible is imperative for a more predictable and speedy recovery. When consulting a healthcare professional, be transparent about recent changes that have been made in your routine. Depending upon the severity of an overuse injury, treatment could

range, decreasing or stopping aggravating activities, bracing, immobilization, and physical therapy could all be part of the process to get back on track as quickly as possible.

*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](http://www.NaplesPodiatrist.com) to make an appointment. Visit [FootHealthFacts.org](http://FootHealthFacts.org) to learn more about foot and ankle conditions.



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# ER VS. CONVENIENT CARE: What's Right for Your Family?

**W**hen your child gets sick or injured, knowing where to go for care can make a big difference. Lee Health offers both Emergency Rooms (ER) and Convenient Care centers, each designed for different types of medical needs. Understanding the difference helps you make the best decision for your family's health and safety.

## WHAT IS CONVENIENT CARE?

Lee Health's Convenient Care medical centers are walk-in clinics designed to treat non-life-threatening conditions quickly and efficiently. These centers are ideal for:

- Sprains and strains
- Minor cuts, rashes, and burns
- Cold and flu symptoms
- Auto and work-related injuries
- School and sports physicals

Each location is equipped with X-ray capabilities to diagnose fractures and broken bones, as long as the bone is not protruding through the skin.

Convenient Care is especially helpful when:

- You can't get a same-day appointment with your primary care doctor
- You're not currently established with a primary care physician
- You need immediate care for a minor issue

"Convenient Care is a great alternative to using the emergency department for non-life-threatening medical issues—especially during season," says Kris Fay, Chief Administrative Officer of Lee Physician Group. "It gives the community immediate access to quality, hospital-affiliated health care provided by our trusted Lee Physician Group physicians and skilled nurses."

## COLD VS. FLU: KNOW THE DIFFERENCE

As flu season approaches, it's important to understand the difference between the flu and the common cold. While both are respiratory illnesses, they're caused by different viruses and have distinct symptoms.

According to Mary Beth Saunders, D.O., Lee Health's Medical Director of Epidemiology and Infection Prevention, and Steve Streed, Director of Epidemiology and Infection Control, here's how to tell them apart:

## Flu Symptoms:

- Fever or feeling feverish (often over 100°F, though not everyone with flu has a fever)
- Chills
- Severe chest congestion
- Headache
- Fatigue
- Intense muscle aches
- Cough
- Vomiting or diarrhea (more common in children)

## Cold Symptoms:

- Sore throat
- Runny nose
- Nasal congestion

The flu tends to come on suddenly and hits harder than a cold. If your child complains of body aches and seems unusually tired or feverish, it may be more than just a sniffle.

## WHERE SHOULD YOU TAKE YOUR CHILD?

If your child has mild symptoms—like a sore throat, runny nose, or low-grade fever—start by contacting your family physician. If they're unavailable, Lee Health's Convenient Care centers are a great option. These walk-in clinics are staffed by experienced providers and offer quick access to care without the long wait times often associated with ER visits.

Lee Health has four Convenient Care locations across the region, making it easy to find one near you. You can also visit other walk-in or urgent care centers if needed.

## WHEN TO HEAD TO THE ER

While Convenient Care is perfect for minor illnesses and injuries, some situations require emergency medical attention. If your child experiences any of the following, go directly to the ER or call 911:

- Severe bleeding that won't stop
- Head injury with loss of consciousness, fainting, or confusion
- Neck or spine injury
- Electric shock or serious burns
- Chest pain or pain in the arm or jaw
- Sudden confusion or disorientation
- Intense abdominal pain
- Difficulty breathing or changes in skin color
- Fever with vomiting and nausea
- Fever in a baby under 3 months old
- Fever of 104°F or higher in older children
- Sudden dizziness or vision changes
- Falls from a significant height
- Deep or gaping wounds
- Life-threatening injuries
- Seizures lasting longer than 3–5 minutes
- Suspected poisoning
- Car accidents involving unconsciousness or severe injury

These symptoms may indicate serious health risks that require immediate, advanced care only available in an emergency department.

## QUICK TIPS FOR FLU SEASON

To help your family stay healthy this season, here are a few quick tips from Lee Health's infection prevention team:

- **Get vaccinated.** The flu shot is your best defense against serious illness.
- **Wash hands often.** Teach kids to wash hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water.
- **Stay home when sick.** If your child has flu symptoms, keep them home to rest and avoid spreading illness.
- **Cover coughs and sneezes.** Use tissues or elbows—not hands—to prevent germs from spreading.
- **Disinfect surfaces.** Regularly clean doorknobs, light switches, and shared electronics.

## CONVENIENT CARE: FAST, FRIENDLY, AND LOCAL

Lee Health's Convenient Care centers are open seven days a week, with extended hours to fit your schedule. No appointment is needed, and most insurance plans are accepted. Whether your child needs a sports physical, treatment for a minor injury, or help managing flu symptoms, our team is ready to help.

By knowing when to choose Convenient Care and when to head to the ER, you can make informed decisions that keep your family safe and healthy. And remember—when in doubt, don't hesitate to seek emergency care.





# HEALTHY AGING: The Promise of Stem Cell Therapy

By Derek P. Wimmer, PA-C

**A**s we age, our bodies naturally experience a decline in cellular regeneration, leading to reduced energy, slower recovery, and increased susceptibility to age-related conditions. However, advances in regenerative medicine are offering new pathways to support healthy aging, with stem cell therapy emerging as a promising intervention. Wimmer Orthopedics & Regenerative Medicine has developed an innovative quarterly stem cell injection program designed to help individuals maintain vitality and promote cellular renewal throughout the aging process.

## Understanding Stem Cells and Aging

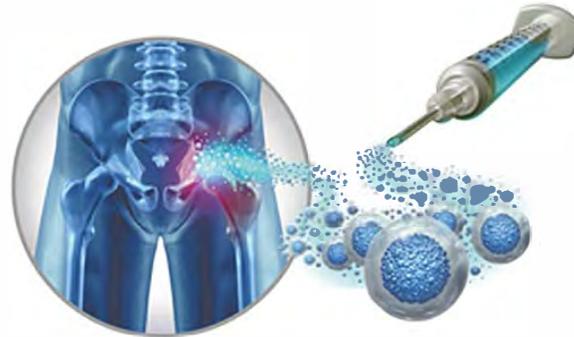
Stem cells are the body's master cells, possessing the unique ability to differentiate into various cell types and repair damaged tissues. As we age, our natural stem cell populations decline, contributing to the physical manifestations of aging such as decreased muscle mass, joint stiffness, reduced cognitive function, and slower wound healing. By supplementing the body's diminishing stem cell reserves through therapeutic injections, patients may experience enhanced cellular repair and regeneration.

The science behind stem cell therapy for aging focuses on the cells' ability to release growth factors and cytokines that promote tissue repair, reduce inflammation, and stimulate the body's natural healing processes. These biological signals can help rejuvenate aging tissues, potentially improving overall health and quality of life.

## The Wimmer Orthopedics Quarterly Program

Recognizing that consistent, sustained treatment often yields better results than sporadic high-dose interventions, Wimmer Orthopedics & Regenerative Medicine has developed a unique quarterly stem cell injection protocol. This innovative approach distributes a full therapeutic dose across four intramuscular injections throughout the year, with each quarterly treatment delivering one-quarter of the total annual dose.

The program operates on a convenient subscription model, with patients paying \$200 monthly to receive their quarterly injections. This affordable payment structure makes advanced regenerative therapy accessible to more individuals seeking to



optimize their aging process. The consistent dosing schedule ensures that patients maintain steady levels of therapeutic stem cells in their system, potentially providing more sustained benefits compared to single large-dose treatments.

## Benefits of the Quarterly Approach

The quarterly injection protocol offers several advantages over traditional single-dose treatments. By spacing injections evenly throughout the year, patients may experience more consistent therapeutic effects without the peaks and valleys associated with intermittent high-dose treatments. This steady approach allows the body to continuously benefit from the regenerative properties of stem cells.

The intramuscular delivery method ensures efficient absorption and distribution of stem cells throughout the body. Muscle tissue provides an ideal environment for stem cell integration, allowing the cells to migrate to areas where they can provide the most benefit. This delivery method is also minimally invasive and well-tolerated by most patients.

## What to Expect

Patients enrolled in the Wimmer Orthopedics quarterly program can expect to receive their injections every three months, administered by trained medical professionals in a clinical setting. Each injection session is typically brief and performed using sterile techniques to ensure safety and efficacy.

Many patients report improvements in energy levels, joint comfort, recovery time from physical activities, and overall sense of well-being. While individual results may vary, the consistent dosing schedule helps maintain therapeutic levels that may support ongoing cellular regeneration and repair processes.

## The Future of Healthy Aging

As regenerative medicine continues to evolve, programs like Wimmer Orthopedics' quarterly stem cell injection protocol represent a shift toward proactive, preventive approaches to aging. Rather than simply treating age-related conditions as they arise, this innovative program focuses on supporting the body's natural regenerative capacity to promote healthy aging from within.

The combination of cutting-edge stem cell therapy with an accessible, patient-friendly delivery model makes this treatment option particularly appealing for individuals seeking to optimize their aging experience. As more research emerges supporting the benefits of regular stem cell therapy, such programs may become increasingly important tools in the pursuit of healthy longevity.

For those interested in exploring how stem cell therapy might support their healthy aging goals, consultation with the experienced team at Wimmer Orthopedics & Regenerative Medicine can provide personalized insights into whether their quarterly injection program aligns with individual health objectives and lifestyle needs. Contact Wimmer Orthopedics & Regenerative Medicine today at 239-829-4300 to schedule your consultation and discover how regenerative medicine can transform your path to healthy aging.

## STEM CELLS

### Revitalize Your Health with Stem Cell Injections

Unlock the power of regenerative medicine with intramuscular stem cell injections, designed to support whole-body wellness.

-  Increased energy and vitality
-  Enhanced immune function
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# MEMORY MATTERS

**D**o you or someone you know experience times when you do not enjoy activities or interests as much as you have in the past? Have you had sleep disturbances, difficulty concentrating or feelings of low energy and fatigue?

While it is important not to assume what is happening, sometimes these can be symptoms of depression or even early memory concerns. How do you know what is causing your feelings? What are some of the signs to look for?

If you are having some of the symptoms noted, it is very important for you to see your health care provider. Take notes on when you are having these concerns. There are many things that may need to be addressed from a health perspective, and consulting with your provider is step one. Sometimes the signs of depression can look like some of the early symptoms of Alzheimer's or another dementia. Guessing about what is going on or consulting "Dr. Google" is not the most effective approaches.

In 2025, October 10th is National Depression screening day. There are simple and quick tools your health care provider can use to identify if your symptoms are due to depression. As the National Institute of Aging notes, depression can impact the way you think, feel and act. While depression can occur as we age, it is not a normal part of aging. The National Council on Aging (NCOA) reports that between 1 – 5 % of adults in the general community may be depressed. The numbers rise for older adults who are hospitalized to around 11.5% and the impact is even greater for older adults who need home health care, or around 13.5%. There are a number of potential causes and risk factors for depression as we age. Chronic medical conditions, decreased mobility and functional ability, and chronic pain can all be contributing factors. Social isolation, loneliness, and stress, including caregiver stress, are also risk factors.

Here are some common signs of depression. Persistent sadness, feelings of guilt and/or worthlessness, changes in appetite and recurring thoughts of death are examples of symptoms that should be checked out. Additional signs include apathy, lack of interest in activities or events that were previously



enjoyed, fatigue, low energy, irritability, difficulty concentrating, and slower speech or movement. The last seven symptoms may also be early signs of Alzheimer's or another dementia. Since symptoms can overlap, it's essential to be screened to know the difference.

Can people with Alzheimer's disease or another dementia, also have depression? According to the Alzheimer's Association, it is estimated that up to 40% of individuals with Alzheimer's disease also have depression. As you can imagine, identifying depression in someone with Alzheimer's disease can be difficult. As outlined earlier, there is some overlap in symptoms.

What are the reasons that people do not choose to get a screening for depression? Interestingly, those reasons are similar to why people choose not to get screened for memory issues. The perceived stigma of mental health issues, as well as memory issues, can prevent people from seeking out diagnostic testing. Addressing the stigma of depression and dementia have some common approaches.

- Talk openly about the topic, be it memory loss or depression. These are medical issues not shameful conditions
- Use person centered, positive language such as a person living with dementia or depression instead of someone "suffering" from dementia or a "depressive" or depressed person
- Respond to misperceptions and misunderstandings with facts and credible resources, such as The Alzheimer's Association [www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org) and The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) <https://www.nami.org/home>

Last month, I introduced you to Lee Belanger, who is currently living with Alzheimer's disease and is participating in a clinical trial at NPRC. I wanted to know her perspective on the barriers to getting screened, and this was her response:

"Denial and fear can get in the way. People can be afraid of receiving a diagnosis, and also may worry about possibly losing independence and control over personal decisions. Sometimes, people may know there is something wrong, but refuse to tell anyone, including their spouse or partner, their closest friend and/or their health care practitioner."

If you are worried about changes in your memory, mood and/or others are noticing changes, it's essential to contact your primary care provider for a health assessment. There are simple depression screenings that can be conducted in your health care provider's office. If you are concerned about your memory, connect with the experienced team at the Neuropsychiatric Research center at 239-939-7777. We have a proven track record of helping individuals and families navigate memory related challenges. Remember, you're not alone on this journey. **#MemoriesMatter.**



**Contact NPRC at 239-939-7777  
today for your free memory screen.**



# BEYOND AWARENESS: What We Can Do for Breast Cancer

By Dr. Doreen DeStefano, DNP, NHD, APRN - Root Causes Holistic Health & Medicine

**E**very October, pink ribbons remind us of the fight against breast cancer. Awareness has saved lives, but awareness alone isn't enough. What women truly need are actionable, science-based therapies that not only target the tumor but strengthen the entire body. At Root Causes Holistic Health & Medicine, we focus on both: terrain first, tumor second™.

Our approach integrates advanced testing, targeted IV nutrient therapies, metabolic interventions, and state-of-the-art modalities like hyperbaric oxygen, photodynamic therapy, PEMF, and local regional hyperthermia. These therapies are not “alternative”—they are evidence-informed tools that help women prevent recurrence, tolerate treatment better, and thrive in survivorship.

## Nutrient IV Therapy: Potent Cellular Support

High-dose intravenous vitamin C continues to gain attention as a complementary therapy. Recent reviews confirm that it may enhance chemotherapy sensitivity while reducing side effects like fatigue and nausea (Doskey et al., 2023). Intravenous quercetin, curcumin, and resveratrol are also being studied for their ability to suppress tumor growth pathways, modulate inflammation, and support healthy apoptosis (Aggarwal et al., 2022).

At Root Causes, we tailor IV formulations to each woman's terrain. Whether it's high-dose vitamin C, artesunate for tumor-specific targeting, or compounds that lower angiogenesis, these therapies are designed to work alongside conventional care—not against it.

## Photodynamic Therapy (PDT): Precision Tumor Targeting

Photodynamic therapy combines a light-sensitive compound with targeted light to selectively destroy tumor cells. Unlike chemotherapy, which affects the whole body, PDT focuses its damage where light is applied.

New research highlights its role in breast cancer treatment. A 2023 preclinical study found that PDT using natural compounds like 5-ALA and curcumin effectively reduced breast tumor growth and improved immune activation (Sharma et al., 2023). PDT is also being studied for its ability to overcome resistance in hard-to-treat triple-negative breast cancers (Han et al., 2022).

By using the Weber Laser and Firefly systems at Root Causes, we bring this cutting-edge therapy to patients seeking options beyond standard protocols.

## Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy (HBOT): Healing and Sensitization

Cancer thrives in low-oxygen environments. HBOT delivers oxygen at high pressure, saturating tissues and creating conditions hostile to cancer cells. Studies show that HBOT can improve sensitivity of tumors to radiation and chemotherapy while reducing inflammation and supporting wound healing postsurgery (Tibbles & Edelsberg, 2023).

At Root Causes, HBOT is also used during recovery to combat fatigue, neuropathy, and tissue damage. For breast cancer survivors with lingering pain or slow-healing surgical sites, HBOT offers a regenerative boost.

## Local Regional Hyperthermia: Heating the Tumor, Protecting the Body

Cancer cells are heat-sensitive. By raising tumor temperature to 41–43°C, hyperthermia weakens cancer defenses, enhances blood flow, and improves drug delivery. Recent clinical trials confirm its synergistic effect with chemotherapy and immunotherapy in breast and gynecologic cancers (Datta et al., 2023).

Our Thermofield system allows us to deliver this therapy safely and locally, intensifying the effect of systemic treatments while sparing healthy tissue. Patients often report reduced pain, softer tumors, and improved quality of life.

## PEMF Therapy: Restoring Cellular Energy

Pulsed electromagnetic field (PEMF) therapy helps restore mitochondrial health and cellular communication. While originally studied for bone and wound healing, newer cancer research suggests PEMF can reduce inflammation, enhance immune responses, and inhibit proliferation of certain cancer cells (Cheng et al., 2022).

At Root Causes, PEMF is integrated into broader treatment plans for patients experiencing fatigue, brain fog, or immune suppression after cancer treatment.

**Advanced Terrain Testing: Guiding Personalized Plans**  
Not all breast cancers are the same, and not all women respond to therapies in the same way. That's why we use advanced testing—tumor genomic profiling, circulating tumor DNA, SNP and methylation panels, and immune function tests—to understand the root drivers of each case.

This precision-medicine approach ensures we're not just giving “one-size-fits-all” treatments. For example, testing may reveal PI3K pathway activation, guiding us toward specific IV therapies and metabolic strategies to target those mutations.

## Survivorship: Thriving Beyond Cancer

The journey doesn't end when active treatment does. Fatigue, fear of recurrence, and metabolic imbalances often remain. At Root Causes, survivorship care includes:

- Detoxification support for hormone and toxin metabolism
- Metabolic rebalancing to reduce insulin resistance and chronic inflammation
- Immune modulation using compounds like mistletoe, mushrooms, and vitamin D
- Cellular regeneration with HBOT, PEMF, and nutrient IVs

Our goal is not just survival—it's helping women thrive in remission with energy, resilience, and confidence.

## Moving Beyond Awareness

Breast Cancer Awareness Month must evolve beyond pink ribbons into action. Integrative oncology isn't about rejecting conventional care; it's about amplifying it, reducing its side effects, and addressing the root causes that drive cancer growth in the first place.

At Root Causes Holistic Health & Medicine, we combine the best of science and integrative medicine to give breast cancer patients and survivors a path to true healing. This October, let's move beyond awareness and into empowered, evidence-based action.

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# REDISCOVER YOUR NATURAL YOUTH: How Sculptra® Aesthetic Restores Collagen for Long-Lasting Results

As we age, our skin gradually loses one of its most essential building blocks: collagen. This naturally occurring protein is responsible for maintaining skin firmness, elasticity, and that youthful plumpness we associate with healthy, vibrant skin. Beginning in our mid-20s, we lose approximately 1% of our collagen each year, leading to visible signs of aging including fine lines, wrinkles, and facial volume loss.

While traditional dermal fillers offer immediate but temporary solutions, Sculptra® Aesthetic takes a revolutionary approach by addressing the root cause of aging – collagen loss – to deliver natural-looking, long-lasting results that can restore your skin to its naturally youthful state.

## Understanding the Science Behind Sculptra® Aesthetic

Sculptra® Aesthetic is not your typical dermal filler. This FDA-approved injectable treatment contains poly-L-lactic acid (PLLA), a biocompatible and biodegradable synthetic material that works as a collagen stimulator. Rather than simply filling wrinkles and hollow areas, Sculptra® gradually stimulates your body's natural collagen production process, essentially turning back the clock on aging from within.

The treatment works by encouraging your skin to rebuild its collagen infrastructure over time. As the PLLA particles are absorbed by your body, they leave behind a network of new collagen that continues to improve your skin's structure, thickness, and overall appearance for months after treatment.

## Expertise in Advanced Aesthetic Medicine

At VIO Med Spa, we specialize in cutting-edge aesthetic medicine and wellness treatments that deliver exceptional results. Our experienced practitioners understand that effective anti-aging treatment requires a comprehensive approach that goes beyond surface-level solutions. With Sculptra® Aesthetic, we help our clients achieve a naturally refreshed appearance that enhances their inherent beauty rather than altering it.

Our team's expertise ensures that each Sculptra® treatment is customized to your unique facial anatomy and aesthetic goals. We take pride in creating subtle, natural-looking improvements that allow you to look like the best version of yourself.



## What Makes Sculptra® Different

Unlike hyaluronic acid fillers that provide immediate but temporary results lasting 6-12 months, Sculptra® offers a gradual transformation that can last up to two years or more. The treatment typically involves a series of sessions spaced several weeks apart, allowing your skin to naturally rebuild its collagen foundation.

Patients often notice improvements beginning around six weeks after their first treatment, with results continuing to develop over several months. This gradual process ensures that changes appear natural, avoiding the "overdone" look that can occur with other treatments. Most clients require three treatment sessions, each spaced 4-6 weeks apart, to achieve optimal results.

## Ideal Candidates and Treatment Areas

Sculptra® Aesthetic is perfect for individuals experiencing volume loss in the face, particularly in the cheeks, temples, and jawline. It's especially effective for those who want to address multiple signs of aging simultaneously, including shallow wrinkles, facial hollowing, and loss of skin firmness.

The treatment is ideal for men and women who prefer gradual, natural-looking improvements over dramatic changes. It's particularly beneficial for those in their 30s and beyond who are beginning to notice the early signs of collagen loss but want to maintain their natural appearance while reversing aging at the cellular level.

## Your Journey to Natural Rejuvenation

At VIO Med Spa, we believe that true beauty enhancement should honor your natural features while restoring the vitality of youth. Sculptra® Aesthetic represents the future of aesthetic medicine – a treatment that doesn't just mask the signs of aging but actively reverses them by restoring your skin's fundamental structure.

The investment in Sculptra® is an investment in long-term skin health and beauty. Unlike treatments that require frequent touch-ups, Sculptra's collagen-building approach means you'll enjoy sustained improvements that enhance your quality of life and confidence.

Ready to rediscover your skin's natural youth? Schedule a consultation with our expert team to learn how Sculptra® Aesthetic can help you achieve long-lasting, natural-looking results that enhance your confidence and well-being.

## The VIO Med Spa Advantage

As a nationally recognized leader in aesthetic treatments with over 56 locations across 20 states, VIO Med Spa has built its reputation on delivering consistent, high-quality results. The Fort Myers location, owned by Marissa and Ryan Kartheiser, brings over 20 years of combined expertise in cosmetology and medical aesthetics to their practice.

This experience ensures that every Sculptra treatment is customized to meet individual client needs and aesthetic goals, creating natural-looking results that enhance each person's unique beauty while promoting long-term skin health.



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# IN THEIR OWN WORDS

## FGCU'S 'LIVED EXPERIENCE' PROJECT GIVES A VOICE TO THOSE WITH IDD

By RICK WEBER

**A**s director of the Golisano Intellectual and Developmental Disability Initiative (GIDDI), Ellen Kroog Donald, PT PhD, has been on a passionate mission to work alongside Florida Gulf Coast University faculty and staff to increase awareness and education related to the unique qualities and needs of individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) of all ages.

Over the years, she has led the charge to create opportunities for students to learn through additions to their curriculum, informal conversations, employment and volunteerism.

And now she is taking it to the next level.

Donald, Assistant Professor of Physical Therapy in FGCU's Marieb College of Health & Human Services, has worked with Joseph Buhain, Director of Inter-professional Simulation and Emerging Technology for Marieb College, to develop a project called "Lived Experience."

The underlying philosophy: Capture individuals' life experiences in their own words.

"Often, children and adults with IDD do not get to tell their own story," Donald says. "Well-meaning parents, teachers, health professionals and other caregivers often tell the story. This project allows people to express themselves using their unique communication style and state their answers to questions in a way that is meaningful to them."

"I believe this project is innovative and demonstrates the philosophy that we have at GIDDI where each individual is valued for their unique strengths and experiences."

Donald and Buhain, along with colleagues from seven other health disciplines, developed a series of questions related to a person's experience with family, friendships, healthcare, school, interests, employment (or future employment) and life goals/dreams. These questions form the framework for the interviews that they will conduct with individuals from the community. If individuals are unable to speak for themselves, family members will speak from their perspective.

Donald and Buhain are in the process of identifying individuals in the community and conducting pre-interviews to see if they will be comfortable in front of a camera. They will interview a wide variety of individuals based on life stage, gender, diagnoses, level of independence, preferred communication style, cultural background, etc.

Those participants are invited to campus for a 90-minute time block and interviewed in a specialized studio set up to capture unique images using Dr. Hologram technology, which provides holographic projections to create immersive and interactive learning experiences. Innovative technology creates a three-dimensional image of the person, making a standard video come alive.

These recordings will then be used in the classroom, where interprofessional discussion groups will listen, make observations and bring in different perspectives to a discussion related to these individuals' "lived experience."

With further development, these will become more interactive and allow for opportunities for simulations of the interactions that students will have in practice.

"By creating these recordings, more students can have access to hearing from a variety of individuals without time and place restrictions," Donald says. "They can take the learning that they have had through their individual course materials and apply it within these interprofessional discussions."

"The follow-up to these interprofessional discussions will be to have immersive experiences in the community to provide the opportunity to interact with individuals with IDD in their natural environments such as recreational activities, supportive employment programs and social groups."

Donald says this project will help satisfy the strong need for an increased focus on this population, for interprofessional learning and to promote the importance of hearing the needs of individuals directly from the person and the family/caregiver.

"It is a push to increase the focus on training our future workforce on meeting the needs of those with IDD and learning in the context of an interprofessional experience—not just learning with others who have come from the same training, but learning across professions," she says. "The focus is on the person, not a diagnosis or disability, and hearing the perspective of the person with IDD in their own words. It goes beyond hearing something in a lecture or reading it in a textbook, but demonstrating value in observing and listening to the real experiences of people."

"We welcome interest from the community for participating in one of these interviews. We believe that there are many members of the community who are living with an intellectual or developmental disability themselves, or in their family, who have so much to offer to others. We would love to expand this project and will be looking for other opportunities for funding future growth."

GIDDI was established in FGCU's Marieb College of Health & Human Services through funding by the Golisano Foundation. The foundation's other philanthropy in the region includes Golisano Children's Hospital of Southwest Florida and Golisano Children's Museum of Naples.

Intellectual and developmental disabilities are usually present at birth or early in life and can affect an individual's physical, intellectual and/or emotional development. Many of these conditions affect multiple body systems, such as the nervous system, skeletal system, the senses and metabolism.

Developmental disabilities include diagnoses that result in impairments in physical, learning, language or behavior areas, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Recent estimates show that 1 in 6, or about 17%, of American children 3 to 17 years old have one or more developmental disabilities, such as autism, genetic disorders or attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder. The CDC reports the incidence of children with IDD rose from 7.4% to 8.5% in recent years.

In Southwest Florida, it is estimated that 24,000 to 27,000 individuals live with IDD, based on 2023 census data, according to Donald. The need is most likely greater than these numbers reflect, reinforcing the importance of effective training for our future workforce.

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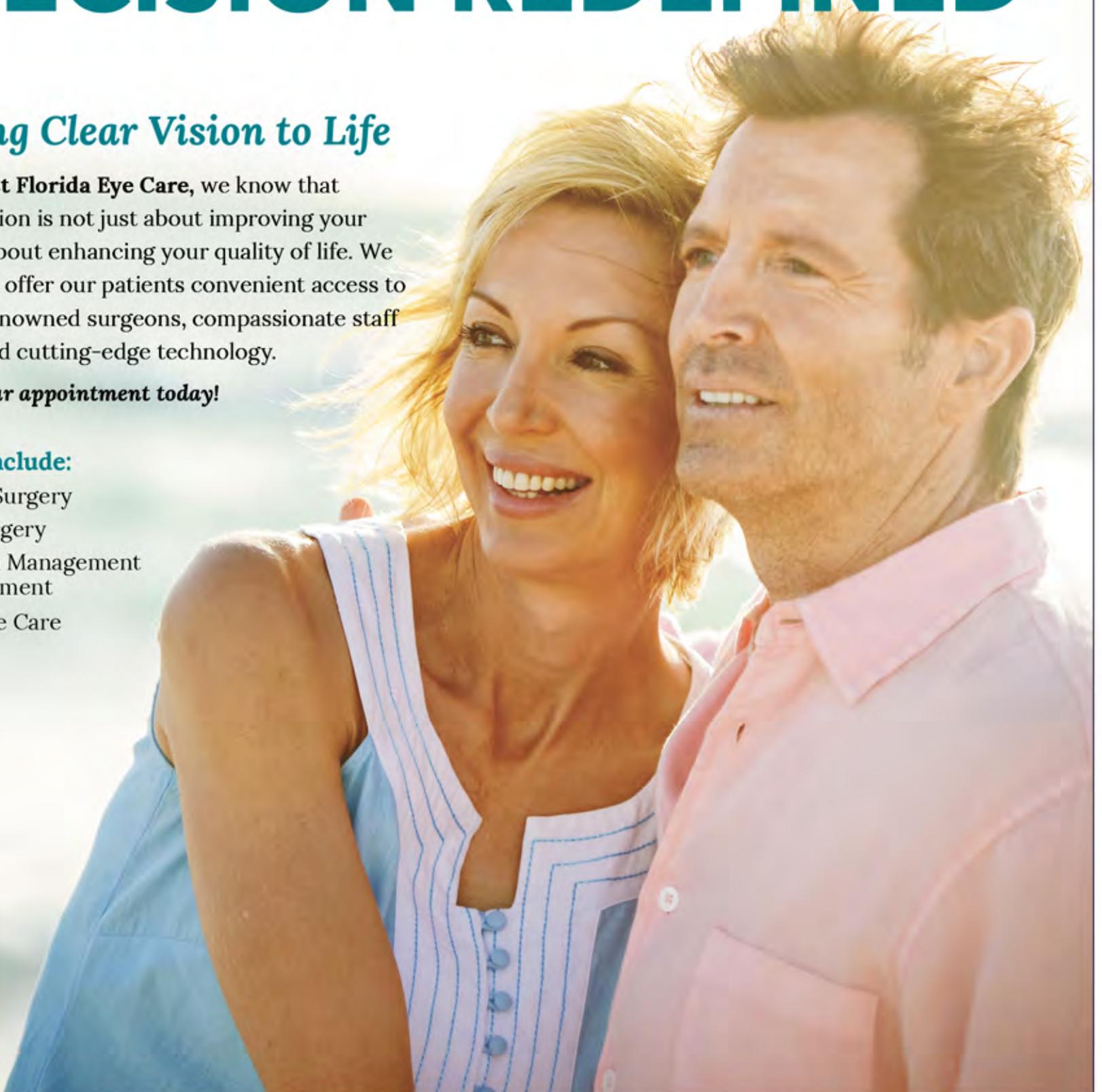
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# Marsh Cove Dental Brings Specialized Full-Arch Implant Expertise to Fort Myers

By Dr. Eugene Titov and Dr. Olga Titov

Residents of Fort Myers and surrounding communities will soon have access to world-class dental implant care as Naples-based Marsh Cove Dental announces the opening of their new specialized facility. Unlike traditional dental expansions, this new location will focus exclusively on providing revolutionary full-arch dental implant treatments, bringing their cutting-edge technology and unparalleled expertise to Lee County.

## Specialized Full-Arch Implant Center

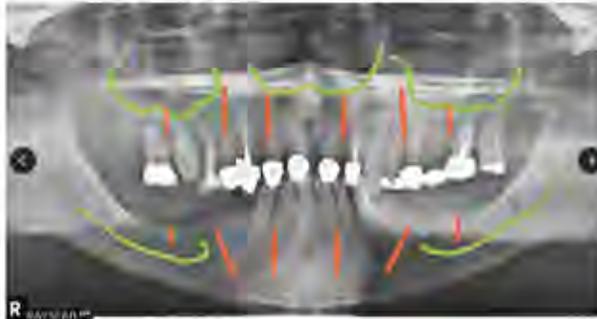
The new Fort Myers location will exclusively focus on full-arch dental implants – also known as All-On-4, Teeth-In-A-Day, or Same-Day Teeth – making them Southwest Florida's premier destination for this life-changing procedure. By concentrating solely on full-arch treatments, Marsh Cove's specialized team performs these complex procedures daily, offering a level of expertise unmatched by offices that only occasionally offer such services.

"Our decision to focus exclusively on full-arch dental implants in Fort Myers stems from recognizing a significant gap in specialized care in the area," explains Dr. Titov, the practice's leading implant specialist. "We're bringing an alternative to corporate chain offices that often treat patients as just another number. Our patients consistently tell us how different their experience feels with our personalized approach."

## State-of-the-Art Technology Under One Roof

The Fort Myers facility will house Marsh Cove's complete suite of advanced technology, including their 3D CBCT scanner, RayFace Scanner, 3Shape digital scanner, and in-house dental lab. Additionally, the revolutionary Yomi robot-assisted implant system will be coming to the Fort Myers office, bringing the precision of robotic guidance to select implant procedures. This FDA-cleared robotic system provides real-time guidance during implant surgery, ensuring placement accuracy to within fractions of a millimeter while allowing Dr. Titov to maintain complete control throughout the procedure.

A standout feature of their approach is the in-house manufacturing capability. Using digital scans taken before and during surgery, the team designs and creates temporary arches on their 3D printer within hours of implant placement, ensuring every patient



leaves with functional teeth the same day as surgery. Final restorations are milled in their on-site lab using zirconia, dentistry's strongest material.

## Advanced Solutions for Complex Cases

Marsh Cove Dental has built a reputation for successfully treating patients previously told they weren't candidates for full-arch implants due to bone loss. While less experienced providers might require extensive sinus lifts and bone grafting, Dr. Titov often employs zygomatic implants, anchoring into the cheekbone and eliminating the need for sinus procedures.

"We routinely welcome patients who've been turned away elsewhere," shares Dr. Titov. "Our advanced techniques allow us to provide solutions even in challenging cases with significant bone loss."

## Comprehensive Care with Patient Safety Focus

Another distinguishing element of their approach is the use of dedicated anesthesia professionals. Unlike many practices where the dentist manages both sedation and the surgical procedure, Marsh Cove partners with licensed anesthesiologists and CRNAs, allowing Dr. Titov to focus exclusively on the dental procedure while ensuring optimal patient safety.



"Having dedicated anesthesia professionals is especially valuable for medically compromised patients," explains the practice manager. "It also significantly reduces sedation time, as Dr. Titov can work efficiently without dividing his attention."

The new Fort Myers location will maintain Marsh Cove's signature comprehensive care model, from complimentary consultations with transparent treatment planning to personalized support throughout the healing process. Patients can schedule a consultation to view before-and-after transformations, hear patient testimonials, and experience firsthand the difference specialized care makes.

For Fort Myers residents seeking an alternative to corporate dental chains for full-arch implant treatment, Marsh Cove Dental offers the rare combination of specialized expertise, advanced technology, and personalized care, all under one roof. Schedule your complimentary consultation today at (239) 300-0290 to discover how our life-changing full-arch implant solutions can restore both your smile and confidence—and see why our patients consistently recommend us as Southwest Florida's premier dental implant specialists.



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www.marshcovedental.com

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## See What Our Patients Say



**REGINA M.**

After five disappointing consultations elsewhere, Regina found hope at Marsh Cove Dental who provided detailed explanations and complete transparency about her 4-on-4 dental implant surgery. Despite suffering from dental anxiety, she never felt anxious during any visit with the caring staff who treated her like family. With her brand new smile, Regina has gained new confidence and can finally enjoy foods she hasn't been able to eat for a long time.



**DANIEL B.**

My name is Daniel and for me Marsh Cove Dental is the best dentist office I've ever been to - their knowledgeable staff took time to explain procedures, answer all my questions, and they've gone above and beyond my expectations.



**CHRIS S.**



**PAMELA F.**

Pamela enthusiastically recommends Dr. T and the staff at Marsh Cove for dental implants, highlighting their exceptional care, the doctor's perfectionism, and how the experience transformed her smile and life.



**KAREN W.**



**CHERYL D.**



**JOHNNY**

My name is Johnny I was very happy with my experience at Marsh Cove Dental... **so happy in fact,** I brought my friend in to have his teeth fixed also.

The Doctor has a very discerning eye and my outcome was **aesthetically pleasing and most importantly functional.** Dr. Titov has state of the art digital technology and an on-site lab. The staff very knowledgeable, kind and caring and make you feel like one of the family.



**PAMELA**

My name is Pamela and I **give Marsh Cove 5 Stars!!!** From my first visit to my most recent visit I have only great things to say. Everyone is so friendly and knowledgeable, patient and kind. **All my questions were answered and my anxiety was addressed not only in person but also via telephone.** I had 17 teeth pulled and permanent implant supported "dentures" placed. Following all directions and taking products provided I had very little swelling, no bruising and returned to work in 5 days!

**I highly recommend Dr. Titov and all his group at Marsh Cove Dental and Implant Center.**



**TOBY R.**



**MIKE S.**



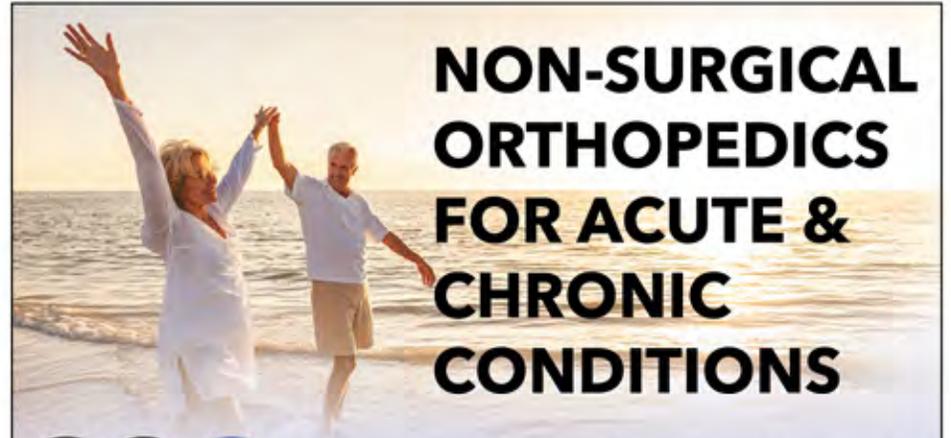
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# Hormonal Imbalance and Its Effect on Skin Health

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

**T**he skin is no unsubstantial organ. In fact, it's the body's largest and a significant defender from outside contagions. Beyond the protection it offers your body, the skin also offers a unique ability for you to gauge your internal health purely by looking at it.

However, with an organ so large, many things can affect it, one of which is your hormones or, more accurately, an imbalance in them.

## Hormonal Imbalance

Much as the name suggests, a hormonal imbalance occurs when your hormones are no longer balanced, either because a hormone is secreted too much or too little.

Hormonal imbalance can be disastrous for your well-being because your hormones regulate many different processes in the body, including your development, metabolism, and reproduction. So, if you're producing too much or too little hormones, it can also affect these processes.

Some of the impacts of hormonal imbalance include primary ovarian insufficiency, early menopause, and polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) in women, and prostate cancer in men.

## Symptoms of Hormonal Imbalance

While the symptoms of hormonal imbalance can vary based on the hormone out of balance, some of the general symptoms of hormonal imbalance include:

- increased stomach issues
- sudden weight loss/gain
- weakness
- skin dryness
- fatigue
- body aches
- increased urination
- persistent thirst
- anxiety
- mood swings
- changes in appetite
- hair loss
- infertility

If you notice any of these symptoms, it's best to visit a doctor specializing in hormones to pinpoint the cause of the imbalance and correct it. Often, hormonal imbalance can be an indicator of an even bigger issue, and choosing to ignore the symptoms may cause life-threatening risks, which is why it is always recommended to address hormonal imbalances as soon as you notice them.

Luckily, hormonal imbalance can often manifest on your skin, helping you see if something is unbalanced internally. If you're aware of what to look for, and what skin conditions may be due to hormonal imbalances, you have the advantage of knowing when there is a need to look more closely into your hormone levels.

## How Hormonal Imbalance Affects Your Skin

As we know, the skin is the largest organ in your body, so its health relies on many things. However, one of the most important components of your skin comes from the sebaceous glands under your skin that produce sebum, a natural oil secreted through the pores of your skin.

Sebum helps protect the skin from UV radiation, locks in moisture, and transports fat-soluble antioxidants to the surface of the skin, which can then help prevent oxidative skin damage.

However, as with all things, too much can be a problem. In fact, too much sebum production is often the cause of various skin issues like inflammation and acne. One reason for excess sebum production? An imbalance of androgen, or male sex hormones that are present in those of both genders.

Sebum is not the only important part of the skin, either. Your skin is composed of the protein collagen, which is a building block of your skin. It is collagen that helps to give your skin a youthful appearance, and when your collagen production is down, your skin may start to sag.

Estrogen, a female sex hormone, is crucial in producing collagen and helps keep your skin thick and hydrated. If your estrogen levels are low, such as the case with older women entering menopause, skin can become thinner and more sensitive.



It's not just those entering menopause who see these results of low estrogen, though. A survey found that 2 out of 5 women still getting a period each month report unusually sensitive skin before and during their menstruation, which is generally the time when estrogen levels drop. Many women also notice an increase in sebum production before and during their menstrual cycle, which can contribute to acne.

When we look at the effects of hormonal changes on the body, it's clear that hormonal imbalance can manifest in changes to your skin.

## Hormonal Imbalance as Skin Manifestations

Let's take a look at the different skin imperfections that can result from hormonal imbalances.

### Under Eye Dark Circles

The constant companion for college students staying up all night to study, under eye dark circles are a skin problem resulting most often from adrenal fatigue.

When you experience more stress, your body produces more of the stress hormone cortisol. However, excess cortisol production can cause poor sleep at night because it tends to make people feel restless. If you continually suffer from poor sleep, dark circles can appear around your eyes.

Furthermore, if you're suffering from low estrogen levels, the skin under your eyes can become thinner, which can make the darkness even more prominent.

**Dry Skin**

While common during the dry and cold winter months, dry skin can also occur to those with hormonal imbalances, specifically if hormones such as estrogen decline. This is because a reduction in estrogen can cause a decrease in sebum production. Sebum is essential for retaining moisture in your skin, so if your body is not producing enough sebum, it will not stay hydrated enough and can experience dryness, roughness, and flakiness.

In addition to estrogen, thyroid hormones also stimulate the oil glands, but instead of increasing sebum production, they reduce it. So, if you suffer from hyperthyroidism, or an overproduction of thyroid hormones, you may experience dry skin.

**Acne**

It can be frustrating to experience acne in your 20s and 30s, with most people assuming it is an affliction only for teenagers. However, hormones can significantly influence your body's sebum production, leading to acne, regardless of age.

For women, estrogen and progesterone, which are key players in your menstrual cycle, can increase the amount of sebum produced, clogging your skin's pores and leading to acne. As for men, an excessive amount of testosterone can also produce excess sebum.

For those experiencing acne due to hormonal imbalance, they most often appear on the chin, forehead, and nose.

**Skin Tags**

Skin tags are small skin-colored growths on the skin of your neck or eyelids, resulting from a compromise in your insulin and glucose hormonal balance. When these hormones start changing, estrogen can dramatically reduce, which affects your skin's elasticity and can cause overlapping in your skin layers. When these skin layers experience constant friction, skin tags can occur.

In general, skin tags are most often associated with metabolic syndrome, PCOS, and diabetes.

**Pale or Yellow Skin**

Hormonal imbalance can affect your blood vessels, making your skin appear pale and waxy. However, hormonal imbalance is not the only cause of this appearance, with liver failure also lending itself to pale or yellow skin. If you notice that your skin or eyes appear yellow, check in with a doctor to determine the cause.

**Balancing Hormones and Regulating Skin Health**

If your skin is suffering from imbalanced hormones in the form of dry, thin, sensitive, or pale skin, correcting the hormonal imbalance is the best way to address the root of the problem and see improvements in your skin as a result.

*The following are some of the possibilities for correcting a hormonal imbalance:*

**Oral Contraceptives**

Oral contraceptives can help correct hormonal imbalance in women and, in some cases, are prescribed to treat acne. Oral contraceptives help to target the hormones that peak at ovulation, which is generally when those experiencing hormonal acne may see an increase in breakouts. Oral contraceptives keep hormone levels more even, lessening breakouts.

However, oral contraceptives are not for everyone, with those with a history of breast cancer, high blood pressure, or blood clots potentially unfit for this treatment. Talk to your doctor to determine if this is an adequate treatment for your skin and hormonal needs.

**Anti-Androgen Drugs**

As discussed, high levels of androgens, such as testosterone, can increase sebum production in some people, increasing the odds of clogged pores and acne breakouts. Anti-androgen drugs help to keep androgens from rising too high, which can help manage skin issues.

**Testosterone Replacement**

On the opposite end of the spectrum are medications that help address low testosterone, including testosterone gels and patches. These therapies help to fight the decline in testosterone production seen in some in men.

**Check Your Lifestyle**

While medications and therapies can help with hormonal imbalance, it is also best to ensure your lifestyle reflects healthy habits aimed at keeping your hormones balanced. Some of these habits include:

- exercising regularly
- getting enough sleep each day
- having a balanced diet
- drinking enough water
- managing stress levels
- reducing alcohol consumption
- avoiding smoking

These habits help keep your hormone levels regular while also supporting healthy skin.

**The Influence of Hormones on Your Skin**

Hormones are chemical messengers used throughout your body, and one area they can impact is your skin. Stress hormones such as cortisol and sex hormones like estrogen, progesterone, and testosterone can all cause unwanted skin reactions if unbalanced, such as acne, dry skin, sagging skin, or increased sensitivity.

If you're noticing skin problems and can't determine their cause, it might be something more internal. Reach out to a hormone specialist to get a reading on your hormone levels, see if there is an imbalance, and devise a treatment plan to help restore the equilibrium that your entire body, including your skin, will benefit from.

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# WHAT DOES A CAVITY LOOK LIKE?

By KELLY M. DAINIAK, DMD, GENERAL DENTIST

**W**e all know cavities are bad news, but have you ever stopped to think, "What does a cavity actually look like?" It's not always as obvious as a giant hole in your tooth, especially in the early stages. Recognizing the signs of tooth decay can help you seek treatment sooner and prevent further damage.

Let's take a visual tour of what cavities can look like, from their subtle beginnings to more advanced stages.

## THE EARLY SIGNS: OFTEN HARD TO SPOT WITHOUT A PROFESSIONAL

In their very initial stages, cavities are often invisible to the untrained eye. This is why regular dental check-ups are so crucial! Your dentist uses specialized tools and X-rays to detect these microscopic changes.

- **White Spots:** One of the earliest signs of demineralization (the first step towards a cavity) is the appearance of a small, chalky white spot on the tooth surface. This indicates that the enamel is losing minerals. It might be slightly rough to the touch, but it's often overlooked. At this stage, the cavity might even be reversible with fluoride treatment and excellent oral hygiene!

## AS THE CAVITY PROGRESSES: NOTICEABLE CHANGES

As the decay progresses and more minerals are lost, the appearance of the cavity starts to change.

- **Light Brown to Dark Brown/Black Spots:** The white spot will begin to darken as the decay penetrates deeper into the enamel and dentin. It can appear light brown, dark brown, or even black. These spots might be small and localized, or they could spread across a larger area of the tooth. They might look like:

- **Small Pits or Grooves:** Especially on the biting surfaces of your molars, cavities can form in the natural pits and fissures, appearing as dark lines or dots within these grooves.

- **Discoloration Between Teeth:** If a cavity forms between two teeth, you might notice a grayish or brownish discoloration when you floss, or your dentist might spot it on an X-ray.

- **Rough Spots:** The smooth surface of your enamel can become rough or even feel "sticky" when decay is present.

## MORE ADVANCED STAGES: THE OBVIOUS SIGNS

When a cavity is left untreated, it will continue to grow and become more noticeable.

- **Visible Holes or Pits:** This is what most people picture when they think of a cavity- a noticeable hole or pit in the tooth. This hole can range in size from tiny to quite large, sometimes even exposing the darker dentin layer underneath.

- **Sensitivity:** While not a visual sign, increased sensitivity to hot, cold, or sweet foods and drinks is a common symptom of a progressing cavity. This sensitivity occurs as the decay gets closer to the nerve of the tooth.

- **Pain:** As the cavity deepens and affects the pulp (the innermost part of the tooth containing nerves and blood vessels), you may experience toothaches, especially when biting down or eating.

- **Pus or Swelling (in severe cases):** If the decay leads to an infection, you might see pus around the tooth or experience swelling in your gums or face. This is a sign of a dental emergency and requires immediate attention.



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

## WHAT TO DO IF YOU SPOT A CAVITY

If you notice any of the visual signs of a cavity, or if you're experiencing any tooth sensitivity or pain, it's crucial to schedule an appointment with your dentist as soon as possible. Don't wait for the problem to worsen! Early detection and treatment can:

- Prevent the cavity from growing larger.
- Avoid more extensive and expensive treatments like root canals or extractions.
- Preserve your natural tooth structure.

Regular dental check-ups and good oral hygiene (brushing twice a day, flossing daily, and a balanced diet) are your best defense against tooth decay. Your dentist can spot cavities long before they become visible to you, saving you pain, time, and money in the long run.

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# THE ESSENTIAL ROLE OF SPLINTS IN ORTHOPEDIC HAND SURGERY: EXPERT CARE NOW AVAILABLE IN-OFFICE

By Dennis O. Sagini, MD

**W**hen it comes to orthopedic hand surgery and recovery, splints serve as one of the most critical components in ensuring optimal healing and functional restoration. At our practice, we're excited to announce that we've recently obtained our Durable Medical Equipment (DME) license, allowing us to provide custom splints and orthotic devices directly from our office for enhanced patient convenience and care coordination.

## Understanding Splints in Hand Surgery

Splints are external devices designed to support, protect, and immobilize injured or surgically treated hands and fingers. Unlike casts, splints offer controlled flexibility and can be adjusted as healing progresses. According to Dr. Dennis Sagini, MD, "Splints are invaluable tools that bridge the gap between surgical intervention and full functional recovery. They provide the precise support needed while allowing for gradual mobilization as tissues heal."

The primary functions of splints in orthopedic hand surgery include protecting surgical sites from trauma, maintaining proper alignment of bones and joints, preventing contractures and stiffness, reducing pain and swelling, and facilitating controlled movement during rehabilitation phases.

## Types of Splints for Different Conditions

Different hand conditions require specific splinting approaches. Static splints provide complete immobilization and are typically used immediately after surgery or for fracture management. Dynamic splints incorporate springs or elastic components to allow controlled movement while maintaining support. Serial static splints are progressively adjusted to gradually restore range of motion.

Common conditions that benefit from splinting include fractures of the hand and wrist, tendon repairs and transfers, ligament injuries, post-surgical immobilization, arthritis management, and nerve compression syndromes like carpal tunnel syndrome.

## The Treatment and Recovery Process

Dr. Sagini emphasizes that proper splint application is crucial for successful outcomes. "The timing, duration, and type of splinting must be precisely tailored to each patient's specific condition and



surgical procedure. Too little support can compromise healing, while excessive immobilization can lead to stiffness and prolonged recovery."

The splinting process typically begins immediately after surgery with initial protective splinting for wound healing and tissue protection. This progresses to transitional splinting that allows for gentle, controlled movement, followed by functional splinting to support return to daily activities, and finally weaning from splint use as strength and mobility improve.

## Benefits of In-Office Splint Services

With our new DME license, patients can now receive immediate splint fabrication and fitting without the inconvenience of visiting separate facilities. This streamlined approach offers several advantages including immediate post-surgical splint application, custom fitting by trained specialists, convenient follow-up adjustments, coordinated care between surgery and rehabilitation, and reduced wait times and scheduling complications.

Dr. Sagini notes, "Having the ability to provide splints directly in our office means we can ensure perfect fit and immediate adjustments. This level of control over the entire treatment process significantly improves patient outcomes and satisfaction."

## Conclusion

Splints represent a cornerstone of successful orthopedic hand surgery recovery. With our enhanced in-office capabilities, patients can now experience seamless, coordinated care from initial consultation through complete recovery. Our commitment to providing comprehensive orthopedic

hand care, combined with our new DME services, ensures that every patient receives the highest standard of treatment and the best possible outcomes for their hand and wrist conditions. Contact our office at 239-302-3216 to schedule a consultation and take the first step toward pain-free movement and improved quality of life.



## Dennis O. Sagini, MD

TDr. Sagini is an orthopedic surgeon with specialization in hand and upper extremity surgery. He specializes in arthritis of the hand, nerve compression, muscle and tendon injury, fracture care, and upper extremity dysfunction.

He completed his Bachelors of Science in Microbiology from the University of Oklahoma in Norman, Oklahoma in 1998 and his Doctor of Medicine at Temple University in Philadelphia, PA in 2002. It was during medical school training that Dr. Sagini developed an interest in orthopaedic surgery. His residency in orthopaedic surgery was completed at Howard University Hospital, Washington, DC. Dr. Sagini completed his fellowship training in Hand and Upper Extremity surgery at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center in Pittsburgh, PA.

Dr. Sagini is a member of the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons, the American Medical Association, the Florida Medical Association, and the American Society for Surgery of the Hand.

Dr. Sagini is active in research and community service and has a passion for overseas medical mission work. He also enjoys running, traveling, listening to music, cooking, tennis, and spending time with his family and friends.



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# Understanding COPD and Sleep Apnea Overlap Syndrome

By Dr. Ernesto Eusebio

**C**hronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) and Obstructive Sleep Apnea (OSA) are two distinct but often overlapping respiratory conditions that impact millions of Americans. COPD is a progressive condition, characterized by difficulty in breathing due to long-term exposure to lung irritants, while OSA is a sleep disorder marked by repeated episodes of blocked airflow during sleep. When these conditions co-occur, they form what is known as "COPD and Sleep Apnea Overlap Syndrome." This complex syndrome presents unique challenges in diagnosis, treatment, and management. Dr. Ernesto Eusebio, Board Certified in Sleep Medicine at the Sleep and Apnea Institute of FL, explores the critical aspects of this condition and highlights the importance of early intervention and specialized care.

## The Mechanisms of COPD and OSA

COPD is primarily caused by chronic exposure to harmful irritants, most notably tobacco smoke, which leads to irreversible damage to the lungs. Individuals with COPD often experience symptoms such as shortness of breath, frequent coughing, and chest tightness, which can worsen over time. OSA, on the other hand, is commonly linked to physical obstruction in the upper airway, resulting in intermittent oxygen deprivation during sleep. The repetitive airway blockage often disrupts sleep and can lead to systemic complications, such as hypertension and cardiovascular disease.

In individuals with COPD, the presence of OSA can exacerbate breathing difficulties, particularly during sleep, when respiratory muscle tone naturally decreases. As detailed in a publication on the National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI), the interaction between COPD and OSA may intensify hypoxemia (low blood oxygen levels), leading to further declines in respiratory function and overall health impact of Overlap Syndrome.

The combination of COPD and OSA presents distinct challenges. While each condition independently increases the risk of cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and decreased quality of life, together, they amplify these risks. Overlap Syndrome, as a combined condition, is associated with more severe nocturnal hypoxemia and an increased risk of mortality compared to those with COPD or OSA alone.

Studies show that individuals with Overlap Syndrome are more likely to experience:

- **Higher levels of hypoxemia:** The co-occurrence of COPD and OSA worsens oxygen deprivation, especially during sleep, which can significantly stress the cardiovascular system.
- **Increased risk of acute exacerbations:** Overlap Syndrome is associated with more frequent exacerbations of COPD symptoms, which may lead to increased hospitalizations.
- **Higher likelihood of pulmonary hypertension:** Persistent low oxygen levels can lead to pulmonary hypertension, where the blood vessels in the lungs experience high blood pressure, leading to increased strain on the heart.

The NCBI review underscores the elevated mortality rate in Overlap Syndrome patients and the need for specialized interventions to mitigate these compounded health risks.

## Sd Diagnosis

The symptoms of Overlap Syndrome may overlap with those of COPD and OSA, making it crucial to recognize the distinct clinical indicators. Common symptoms include:

- **Chronic shortness of breath, especially during sleep**
- **Daytime fatigue and sleepiness, often due to sleep disruptions from OSA**
- **Loud snoring and episodes of gasping for air during sleep**
- **Morning headaches and dry mouth, often linked to sleep apnea**

Diagnosing Overlap Syndrome requires a comprehensive evaluation that includes both pulmonary and sleep assessments. Polysomnography (sleep study) is typically used to confirm OSA, while spirometry is essential for evaluating COPD severity. Dr. Eusebio emphasizes the importance of coordinated diagnostic efforts, as a combined assessment can provide a more accurate picture of a patient's respiratory health.

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## Treatment Approaches

Treatment for Overlap Syndrome often involves a combination of therapies aimed at addressing both COPD and OSA. Dr. Eusebio advocates for an individualized treatment approach, recognizing that no two patients with Overlap Syndrome are alike. Core elements of Overlap Syndrome management include:

**1. Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAP) Therapy:** CPAP is the primary treatment for OSA and is beneficial for individuals with Overlap Syndrome. It helps maintain airway openness during sleep, reducing episodes of apnea and hypopnea. This therapy also improves oxygen saturation, thereby mitigating the hypoxemic effects of both OSA and COPD.

**2. Supplemental Oxygen:** For those with significant nocturnal hypoxemia, supplemental oxygen may be prescribed alongside CPAP therapy to improve oxygen levels during sleep.

**3. Medications:** Individuals with COPD often use bronchodilators and inhaled corticosteroids to manage symptoms and prevent exacerbations. These medications can also help manage Overlap Syndrome by improving airflow and reducing inflammation.

**4. Lifestyle Modifications:** Smoking cessation, regular exercise, and a healthy diet are foundational in managing both COPD and OSA. Weight management is also essential, as excess weight can exacerbate both conditions by increasing respiratory demand and airway obstruction.

**5. Pulmonary Rehabilitation:** This supervised program combines exercise training, nutritional advice, and counseling to improve lung function and overall quality of life in patients with COPD and Overlap Syndrome.

## Importance of Specialized Care

Managing Overlap Syndrome requires a multi-disciplinary approach to address the various facets of both COPD and OSA. Dr. Eusebio encourages patients with COPD who experience symptoms of sleep apnea, such as snoring, daytime fatigue, and morning headaches, to schedule an appointment soon.

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# Robotic Spine Surgery for Spinal Stenosis: A New Era of Precision and Safety

By Amanda N. Sacino, MD-PhD • Neurosurgeon and Managing Partner

**S**pinal stenosis is one of the most common and debilitating conditions affecting the aging population in the United States. Characterized by a narrowing of the spinal canal that compresses the spinal cord and nerves, it can lead to chronic back pain, numbness, weakness, and difficulty walking. For many patients, when conservative treatments such as physical therapy, injections, and medications fail, surgery becomes the most effective option to restore mobility and quality of life.

Traditionally, spinal stenosis surgery—often in the form of laminectomy, decompression, or spinal fusion—has been performed using open surgical techniques or with the aid of fluoroscopic guidance. While effective, these methods carry risks such as blood loss, longer recovery times, and potential inaccuracies in implant placement. Today, robotic spine surgery is revolutionizing how spinal stenosis is treated, offering patients safer, more precise, and less invasive procedures.

## Understanding the Role of Robotics in Spinal Stenosis Surgery

Robotic spine surgery integrates advanced imaging, navigation systems, and robotic technology to enhance a surgeon's ability to operate with unmatched accuracy. Before surgery, high-resolution imaging such as CT scans is used to create a three-dimensional map of the patient's spine. Surgeons then plan every detail of the procedure, including the exact placement of screws, rods, and decompression pathways.

During the operation, a robotic arm guides instruments along these preplanned trajectories. Unlike autonomous machines, the robot does not act independently; the surgeon remains in full control. The robotic system simply ensures that every movement is executed with submillimeter precision. This guidance is particularly critical in spinal stenosis cases, where the spinal canal is already narrowed and the margin for error is extremely small.

## Benefits of Robotic Spine Surgery for Spinal Stenosis

### 1. Improved Accuracy and Safety

Spinal stenosis surgery often involves decompression of the nerves combined with stabilization of the spine using screws and rods. Incorrect placement of implants can risk nerve damage or instability, which may worsen symptoms rather than improve them.



Robotic assistance significantly increases the accuracy of screw and implant placement, reducing the risk of complications and improving long-term stability.

### 2. Minimally Invasive Approach

Many patients with spinal stenosis are older and may have other medical conditions that increase surgical risk. Robotic systems make it easier for surgeons to perform minimally invasive procedures, which require smaller incisions and cause less disruption to muscles and soft tissue. For patients, this translates into reduced blood loss, shorter hospital stays, less postoperative pain, and faster recovery.

### 3. Reduced Radiation Exposure

Traditional spinal stenosis surgeries often rely heavily on fluoroscopy, exposing both the patient and the surgical team to significant amounts of radiation. With robotic guidance, the need for continuous fluoroscopy is dramatically reduced. This is particularly beneficial in multi-level stenosis cases, which otherwise require prolonged imaging.

### 4. Consistent, Reproducible Results

Robotic technology helps eliminate some of the variability that naturally occurs in traditional surgery. Every spinal stenosis case is unique, with differences in anatomy, severity of stenosis, and presence of instability. Robotics allows surgeons to consistently execute the surgical plan, regardless of these variations, leading to more predictable and reliable outcomes.

## Patient Outcomes and Quality of Life

For patients suffering from spinal stenosis, the goal of surgery is straightforward: relieve pressure on the nerves, reduce pain, and restore mobility. Robotic-assisted spine surgery is delivering on these goals more effectively than ever before.

Patients undergoing robotic-assisted decompression and fusion procedures for stenosis often report quicker improvements in leg pain and walking tolerance

compared to traditional surgery. Shorter hospital stays and faster return to daily activities are especially valuable to older patients, who may otherwise face prolonged recovery periods. Moreover, by improving surgical accuracy and reducing complications, robotic systems help lower the likelihood of revision surgeries, sparing patients from additional procedures and recovery time.

## Growing Adoption Across the United States

Robotic spine surgery was once limited to a handful of specialized centers, but it is now spreading rapidly across the United States. Systems such as the Globus ExcelsiusGPS are increasingly available in both academic hospitals and community medical centers. As more surgeons become trained and proficient in robotic techniques, the option of robotic-assisted treatment for spinal stenosis is becoming more widely accessible to patients. Last year, Physician's Regional Collier Boulevard Hospital became the first hospital in the county to have a robotic neurosurgery program with the acquisition of the Globus ExcelsiusGPS system.

## The Future of Spinal Stenosis Treatment

Looking ahead, the role of robotics in treating spinal stenosis will only expand. Advances in artificial intelligence and machine learning may allow robotic systems to adjust surgical plans in real-time, further personalizing procedures for each patient's anatomy. Integration with augmented reality could enhance surgeon visualization during decompression, while improvements in robotic hardware will make systems more compact and efficient.

Most importantly, patients are increasingly aware of robotic options and are seeking out surgeons and centers that offer this technology. As awareness and demand grow, robotic spine surgery will continue to shape the future of spinal stenosis care in the United States.



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# Examining Long-Term Care Options in Florida: Medicaid Waiver, ICP Medicaid, and PACE

By Carl Zacharia

**A**fter working as an elder law attorney for many years, I can honestly say that I am still surprised by the number of people who are unaware of the long-term care options available to them. Unfortunately, this particular topic is usually not on someone's radar until they are faced with making a care decision for themselves or a loved one, and then it becomes overwhelming. I am often asked about the programs available to help seniors and individuals with disabilities access the care they need. In this article, we'll explore three key options: Medicaid Waiver, ICP Medicaid, and the PACE program, with a special focus on the latter and its local provider, Hope PACE. This article does not outline every available option, but instead focuses on benefit programs that will pay, or help to pay, for long term care through Medicaid.

## Medicaid Waiver

The Medicaid Waiver program, also known as the State-wide Medicaid Managed Care Long-Term Care Program (SMMC LTC), is designed to provide home and community-based services to eligible individuals who would otherwise require nursing facility care. This program allows recipients to receive care in their homes or communities, often delaying or preventing the need for institutional care. Eligibility for this program is based on both financial criteria and the level of care needed.

### Key features of the Medicaid Waiver program include:

- Personal care services
- Home health aide services
- Homemaker services
- Adult day care
- Respite care
- Medical equipment and supplies

## ICP Medicaid

Institutional Care Program (ICP) Medicaid is designed for individuals who require long-term care in a nursing home setting. This program covers the cost of nursing home care for eligible individuals who meet both financial and medical criteria.

### ICP Medicaid provides:

- Nursing home care
- Physician services
- Hospital services
- Prescription drugs

While ICP Medicaid is essential for those who require intensive, round-the-clock care, many seniors prefer to avoid or delay nursing home placement if possible.

## PACE Programs

The Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE) is an innovative model that provides comprehensive medical and social services to certain frail, elderly individuals who qualify for nursing home care but wish to remain in their communities. PACE represents a shift towards more integrated, person-centered care that aims to keep seniors independent for as long as possible.

### Key aspects of PACE include:

- Comprehensive medical care
- Social services
- In-home care and support
- Adult day care
- Transportation to medical appointments
- Prescription drug coverage
- Therapy services (physical, occupational, and speech)
- Meals and nutritional counseling
- Recreational and social activities

One of the most significant advantages of PACE is its all-inclusive nature. Unlike traditional fee-for-service models, PACE providers receive a set amount per participant to provide all needed care. This incentivizes keeping participants healthy, and in the community, rather than in costly institutional settings.

## Hope PACE: Our Local PACE Provider

In our area, Hope PACE is the designated provider for the PACE program. Hope PACE has established a strong reputation for delivering high-quality, compassionate care to eligible seniors in the community.

### Hope PACE offers:

1. **A team-based approach:** Each participant works with a dedicated team of healthcare professionals who collaborate to provide personalized care.
2. **PACE Center:** A central location where participants can receive medical care, participate in social activities, and enjoy nutritious meals.
3. **In-home services:** For those who need assistance at home, Hope PACE provides necessary services to help maintain independence.
4. **Flexibility:** Care plans are regularly reviewed and adjusted based on the changing needs of each participant.
5. **Family support:** Hope PACE recognizes the importance of family caregivers and provides education and support to help them in their roles.

### To be eligible for Hope PACE, individuals must:

- Be 55 years or older
- Live in the service area
- Be certified by the state as needing a nursing home level of care
- Be able to live safely in the community with PACE support

It's important to note that while enrolled in PACE, participants agree to receive all their health care services through the PACE organization, except in emergencies.

### Choosing the Right Option

Deciding between Medicaid Waiver, ICP Medicaid, and PACE depends on individual circumstances, including:

- Level of care needed
- Desire to remain in the community
- Family support system
- Financial situation

As someone who is familiar with all of the different options, I recommend thoroughly exploring all of them and consulting with an elder law attorney, healthcare providers and family members before making a decision.

For many seniors in our area, Hope PACE offers an excellent balance of comprehensive care and community living. It's worth considering for those who qualify and wish to maintain their independence while receiving all-inclusive care.

Remember, the goal of all these programs is to ensure that seniors and individuals with disabilities receive the care they need in the most appropriate and least restrictive setting possible. Whether through Medicaid Waiver, ICP Medicaid, or PACE, Florida offers several great options to support our aging population and their caregivers.

For more information on long term care and estate planning issues, contact Zacharia Brown's Bonita Spring office at 239.345.4545



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# PHYSICAL THERAPY MONTH

## How Proper Arch Support Enhances Physical Therapy Outcomes

Every October, Physical Therapy Month reminds us to celebrate the power of movement and the professionals who help us heal, recover, and live more active lives. Whether you're recovering from an injury, managing chronic pain, or working to improve mobility and balance, physical therapy often serves as a lifeline. But here's something many people overlook: the health of your feet—the foundation of your body—plays an essential role in how effective physical therapy can be. And one of the simplest yet most transformative tools in the process? Proper arch support.

### Why Feet Matter More Than We Think

It's easy to forget just how much our feet do for us. They carry the weight of our entire body, absorb shock, and keep us balanced as we walk, run, or even just stand still. Each foot contains 26 bones, 33 joints, and more than 100 muscles, tendons, and ligaments—an intricate system working tirelessly every single day.

But when your arches aren't properly supported, this delicate system can quickly become unbalanced. Flat feet, high arches, or even slight misalignments in the way your feet hit the ground can ripple up through the body, leading to pain in the ankles, knees, hips, and lower back. That's where arch support comes in. By restoring proper alignment and distributing pressure evenly, supportive inserts or orthotics give your body a stable foundation to heal and thrive—especially during physical therapy.

### The Missing Piece of the Puzzle

Many patients begin physical therapy because they're dealing with pain: maybe a knee that's been sore for years, a stubborn case of plantar fasciitis, or a back that flares up after long days of sitting. Physical therapists do an incredible job helping people strengthen muscles, improve flexibility, and retrain movement patterns. But when poor foot mechanics are part of the problem, exercises alone may not fully resolve the issue.

Arch support addresses the root cause, complementing the therapist's work. For example, if you're doing strengthening exercises for your quads and hips to relieve knee pain, but your arches collapse every time you take a step, that knee is still under extra stress. By adding arch support, you're reinforcing the foundation so the therapy work "sticks." It's a one-two punch: support plus movement training.

### Better Alignment, Better Results

One of the key benefits of arch support is improved alignment. Think of it like building a house: if the



foundation is crooked, no matter how much work you do on the walls or roof, the structure won't be stable. Your body is the same way. Proper arch support helps your ankles stay in a neutral position, which in turn keeps your knees, hips, and spine aligned.

This alignment doesn't just reduce pain—it also allows the muscles you're strengthening in physical therapy to function as they're supposed to. For instance, if your glutes are weak, your therapist might give you targeted exercises. But if your feet roll inward with every step, those glutes will keep over-compensating. Supportive arches remove the extra strain, letting your therapy progress more smoothly and effectively.

### Relief That Encourages Consistency

Let's be honest: physical therapy requires commitment. The exercises work, but only if you stick with them. Pain can make it tempting to skip sessions or put off doing your at-home program. Proper arch support can provide relief that makes it easier to stay consistent. When every step feels more comfortable, motivation to keep moving naturally increases.

Patients often report that when their feet are supported, they're able to walk farther, exercise longer, and engage more confidently in their therapy routines. This kind of momentum is exactly what makes recovery possible.

### Beyond Recovery: Preventing Future Problems

Physical therapy isn't just about fixing what hurts—it's also about preventing future injuries. Arch support plays a role here too. By correcting imbalances before they lead to wear and tear, supportive orthotics reduce the likelihood of recurring issues. For athletes, that could mean fewer shin splints or stress fractures. For older adults, it could mean improved balance and a reduced risk of falls. For anyone, it simply means moving through life with less pain and more ease.

### Finding the Right Support

Not all arch supports are created equal. The best results usually come from supports that are personally fitted to your feet, ensuring that they match your unique arches and activity level. Your physical therapist can often guide you toward the right type of support, whether that's a custom orthotic, an over-the-counter insole, or a specialized shoe.

What matters most is making sure your feet get the attention they deserve. Just like you wouldn't ignore your core strength or posture, foot health should be part of your overall wellness strategy.

### The Takeaway

Physical therapy gives people their lives back—helping them move with less pain, more confidence, and greater freedom. But like any powerful tool, it works best when paired with the right support system. Proper arch support provides the stable foundation your body needs to get the most out of every stretch, every exercise, and every step toward recovery.

This Physical Therapy Month, take a moment to honor the professionals guiding us on the path to healing. And while you're at it, don't forget to look down: your feet just might be the key to unlocking even better outcomes in your journey to health and mobility.

## DID YOU KNOW...?

Improving the alignment, positioning, and functionality of the feet can be achieved through Good Feet's 3-Step Arch Support System. Combined, these three "steps" of arch support, strengthen and massage the feet toward a more ideal position, helping them achieve the ultimate shape for proper distribution of energy while walking, running, and standing. Each of Good Feet's arch supports are designed to function as a specific component of the overall 3-Step System design.

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# Understanding Otolaryngologists: The Ear, Nose, and Throat Specialists

When health issues arise involving your ears, nose, or throat, you may be referred to a medical specialist known as an otolaryngologist. Often simply called an ENT (Ear, Nose, and Throat) doctor, these physicians possess specialized training to diagnose and treat a wide range of conditions affecting some of our most vital sensory organs and communication pathways.

## What is an Otolaryngologist?

An otolaryngologist is a physician who specializes in diagnosing and treating disorders of the ears, nose, throat, and related structures of the head and neck. The term "otolaryngology" combines three Greek words: "oto" (ear), "laryngo" (larynx or throat), and "logy" (study). These specialists complete four years of medical school followed by at least five years of specialized residency training, making them highly qualified to handle complex conditions affecting these interconnected areas of the body. Many further specialize in areas like pediatric ENT, neurotology, or facial plastic surgery.

## Areas of Expertise

Otolaryngologists provide comprehensive care for various body systems that affect our ability to communicate, breathe, taste, and hear. Their expertise spans several key areas:

**Ear Conditions:** ENT doctors diagnose and treat hearing loss, ear infections, balance disorders, tinnitus (ringing in the ears), ear pain, and congenital disorders. They perform surgical procedures such as cochlear implants for severe hearing loss, tympanoplasty to repair damaged eardrums, and procedures to address chronic ear infections or Ménière's disease.

**Nasal and Sinus Conditions:** They manage allergies, sinusitis, nasal obstruction, smell disorders, polyps, and deviated septums. Procedures like endoscopic sinus surgery, septoplasty, and turbinate reduction help patients breathe more freely and reduce chronic inflammation. They also address issues related to the sense of smell and taste that originate in the nasal cavity.

**Throat Disorders:** Otolaryngologists treat voice and swallowing problems, throat cancer, tonsillitis, and sleep-related breathing disorders like sleep apnea.



They might perform tonsillectomies, vocal cord surgeries, or other procedures to restore proper function. Voice rehabilitation is another important aspect of their practice.

**Head and Neck Issues:** They handle thyroid disorders, facial trauma reconstruction, cancers of the head and neck, and facial plastic surgery needs. This may include removing tumors, performing reconstructive surgery, addressing cosmetic concerns, or managing salivary gland diseases.

## When to See an Otolaryngologist

Patients are typically referred to an ENT specialist when primary care physicians identify concerns requiring specialized attention. Common reasons for referral include persistent sinusitis, chronic ear infections, hearing difficulties, voice changes lasting more than two weeks, difficulty swallowing, unexplained lumps in the neck, or recurrent dizziness and balance problems.

## The Collaborative Approach

Many otolaryngologists work collaboratively with other specialists like audiologists, speech pathologists, allergists, neurologists, and oncologists to provide comprehensive care. This multidisciplinary approach ensures patients receive treatment addressing all aspects of their condition, from diagnosis through rehabilitation. For complex cases, ENT specialists often participate in tumor boards where various experts discuss treatment options.

Otolaryngologists blend medical knowledge with surgical expertise to address conditions affecting some of our most essential functions—hearing, breathing, speaking, and swallowing. Their specialized training makes them invaluable healthcare providers for conditions affecting quality of life and vital sensory experiences throughout all stages of life, from newborns to elderly patients.

## Expert Care You Can Trust

If you're experiencing symptoms related to your ears, nose, throat, or head and neck region, seeking specialized care is essential for proper diagnosis and treatment. Dr. Price Sonkarley and his dedicated team provide comprehensive otolaryngology services with a patient-centered approach. Their expertise spans the full spectrum of ENT conditions, ensuring you receive the highest standard of care for your specific needs. Don't let persistent symptoms affect your quality of life—schedule a consultation with Dr. Sonkarley's office today by calling 239-495-6200.



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.

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# Pain, Dryness & Irritation:

## How Women Are Rejuvenating Their Lives

By Joseph Gauta, MD, FACOG

**W**ho doesn't want to feel better and more confident about their sexual health? Many women try to hide their condition from their partner, or suffer in silence because they believe it's "normal" for them. That couldn't be further from the truth. Whether your pain is caused by endometriosis, pelvic conditions, vulvovaginal atrophy, hormonal dysfunction, or from medications, there are answers.

### Female Sexual Dissatisfaction Has Many Causes

Natural processes like aging, childbirth and menopause can have deleterious effects on a woman's sexual well-being and sensations. Since we all tend to avoid anything that doesn't feel good, a woman's sexual desires and success in achieving them are inversely related to the atrophy and scarring in the vaginal canal that these life-events can create, like tearing of the vagina during childbirth, dryness of the vaginal tissues after menopause, and the laxity of the vagina causing decreased sexual sensation. Sexual satisfaction can be negatively impacted by hormonal changes after menopause, but many women cannot take vaginal estrogens or do not find this treatment to be effective or convenient enough. This is where laser energy comes in: CO2 laser energy has been proven to regrow normal collagen (a necessary protein found in all of our organs) in the vaginal and vulvar tissues leading to improved "accommodation" and "stretchiness" of the vagina which in turn leads to greater sexual satisfaction and lubrication and a decrease in discomfort during and after sex.

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Although, hormone therapy can be used to treat vaginal vulvar atrophy and dyspareunia (painful intercourse), sometimes it isn't enough. The CO2RE Intima procedure has helped countless women enjoy life like they used to. It is noninvasive, nonsurgical and is performed in your physician's office.



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# KIDNEY CANCER: Are You at Risk?

By Neetu Malhotra, MD

**T**he kidneys are a major part of our detoxifying system. These two small bean-shaped organs clean the blood and filter waste products and toxins from the body through the urine. Kidney cancer is one of the ten most prevalent cancers. The lifetime risk for developing kidney cancer is about 1 in 46 in men and 1 in 82 in women.<sup>1</sup>

The symptoms of kidney cancer often go unnoticed or don't begin to show until the tumor(s) has grown. However, some of the key indicators are as follows:

- Blood in the urine
- Fatigue
- Loss of appetite
- Weight loss
- Fever or infection
- Swollen abdomen
- Lump on the side of the abdomen (with or without pain)
- Anemia
- Swollen legs and ankles
- Chronic inflammation
- High blood pressure
- Shortness of breath

If you have symptoms or your physician finds a lump during a physical examination, they will order diagnostic testing such as a renal arteriogram, MRI, CT Scan, blood and urine analysis, and a needle biopsy may be necessary.

There are some increased risk factors, which make some individuals more susceptible to renal cancer. The risks factors included:

- Being over the age of 40
- Being male
- Being black
- Smoking
- Obese
- Overuse of NSAIDs and other prescription medications
- Family History
- Chemical Exposures
- Kidney disease

Most kidney cancer appears first in the tubules of the kidneys. When the malignant cells form a tumor(s) the growth rate is typically slow, so the

likelihood of an early diagnosis is increased, and the treatment can usually be performed before the tumor has metastasized into any other organs.

### Treatment

Depending on the stage and size of the tumor(s), your physician will develop a specific treatment plan tailored to your needs.

Typically, performing a nephrectomy treats kidney cancer. There are three main types of this surgical option. The first is a Partial nephrectomy, which removes the tumor and some of the surrounding tissue. The second is a Simple nephrectomy, which removes the entire kidney, and the third treatment method is a Radical nephrectomy, which removes the kidney, adrenal glands, lymph nodes, and any questionable surrounding tissue margins. These procedures can usually be done laparoscopically. Some patients may also require radiation or chemotherapy treatments.

### Associates in Nephrology

Associates in Nephrology has been providing comprehensive kidney care and transplant services in Southwest Florida since 1984. Our team of nephrologists, nurse practitioners, and medical assistants are engaged in all aspects of providing the most advanced services for kidney disease and kidney transplants.

### Chronic Kidney Disease Program

Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD) means that the kidneys have become damaged. The common causes of CKD are diabetes mellitus, hypertension, inherited diseases, and nephritis.

The purpose of the CKD program is to slow the progression of damage to the kidneys and treat associated complications such as hypertension, anemia, and bone disease. If we are unable to arrest the disease process and the kidney damage progresses to end stage renal disease (ESRD), our plan is to manage these complications while preparing patients for renal (kidney) replacement therapy. This therapy can consist of peritoneal dialysis, hemodialysis, home hemodialysis, or kidney transplantation.

Source:

1. [https://www.nftr.org/cancer-types/kidney-cancer/?gclid=CjwKCAIAYc2BBhAaEiwA44-wW9qTM7gXbIKsBU1dxNN-rM7OKwmG3j43bZni6h175MIIQCzwNsKORoCE5QQAvD\\_Bwe](https://www.nftr.org/cancer-types/kidney-cancer/?gclid=CjwKCAIAYc2BBhAaEiwA44-wW9qTM7gXbIKsBU1dxNN-rM7OKwmG3j43bZni6h175MIIQCzwNsKORoCE5QQAvD_Bwe)

Managing these complications and preparing patients for renal replacement therapy is a complex process of visits, treatment, and teaching sessions. Our medical team consists of nephrologists (kidney doctors), nurse practitioners, registered dietitians, nurses, and medical assistants.

### Services Provided

Associates in Nephrology provides treatment for many kidney related conditions, as well as kidney transplant services.

- All forms of Dialysis – Hemodialysis and Peritoneal
- Diabetic Kidney Disorder
- Dietitian Services for Kidney Patients
- Disorders of Blood Chemistry
- Electrolyte Disorders
- Fluid Overload, Edema (swelling)
- Glomerulonephritis
- Hypertension
- Injections of Aranesp for Anemia related to Kidney Disease
- Kidney Transplant Services: Patient and Donor Evaluations, Post-Transplant Follow-up Care
- Lupus Nephritis
- Nephrotic Syndrome
- Pyelonephritis
- Polycystic Kidney Disease
- Recurring kidney stones
- Renal Failure
- Renal Insufficiency

We work collaboratively with a patient's primary care physician and specialists to slow the progression of chronic kidney disease (CKD) and prevent or manage complications such as hypertension, anemia, and bone disease. Additionally, our multidisciplinary team of professionals can assist you in arranging a wide array of supportive services and education programs for patients in all stages of CKD. For patients with end-stage renal disease (ESRD), our nephrologists can prepare them for all renal replacement therapies: in-center or home hemodialysis, peritoneal dialysis, and kidney transplant.

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# FROM MELANOMA SURVIVOR TO PATENT HOLDER: Local Inventor Develops Patented Skincare Applicator

**W**hen Kathe D'Alfonso faced melanoma, the Penfield resident knew her daily routine had to change. Suddenly, applying sunscreen to every inch of her body became not just important—it became life-saving. But like most people, she discovered a frustrating reality: reaching the middle of her back was nearly impossible.

Rather than accept this limitation, the 55-year-old inventor decided to create her own solution. Three years of development later, D'Alfonso holds a patent for Solo Beauty, a flexible wand applicator that's transforming how people approach their skincare routines.

## Innovation Born from Necessity

Solo Beauty features a unique design: a sturdy wand topped with a flexible, mitt-covered head that angles perfectly to reach those troublesome spots between the shoulder blades. The interchangeable mitts come in three varieties—a lotion applicator made from material that resists absorption, a body exfoliator, and a face exfoliator.

"I don't know anyone who can reach the middle of their backs," D'Alfonso said with a laugh, highlighting the universal problem her invention solves.

The path to patent approval wasn't guaranteed. D'Alfonso's attorney cautioned her that patent acquisition is far from automatic. When the U.S. Patent Office approved her application in April 2024, it validated not just her design but her persistence through years of prototype development.

## Engineering for Real-World Use

D'Alfonso's commitment to quality shows in her development process. She created eight different prototypes before settling on the final design, testing each version rigorously. Her current prototype has survived more than 550 machine wash cycles—a testament to the product's durability.

"The biggest thing is it has the right angle," she explained. "Just hold it up and put it over your shoulder. The mitt can be washed and dried. There's no product out there that does that."

This washability factor sets Solo Beauty apart from competitors while offering environmental benefits. Unlike similar products with disposable heads, Solo



Beauty's reusable design reduces waste and saves customers money over time.

## Expanding Beyond the Original Vision

While D'Alfonso initially created Solo Beauty for sunscreen application, customer feedback revealed broader applications. People with arthritis, Parkinson's disease, and mobility limitations have found the tool invaluable for maintaining independence in their skincare routines. Others use it to apply topical medications without exposing their hands to the treatment.

***"Customers absolutely love it," D'Alfonso reported. "It solves a lot of problems and has been helping people."***

The response from wheelchair users has been particularly meaningful to her. "Some customers use wheelchairs. They go through a lot of struggles and this helps," she noted, emphasizing how the product addresses accessibility challenges she hadn't initially considered.

## Local Manufacturing, Personal Touch

D'Alfonso has built her business around local partnerships. She cuts all materials herself and works with a local seamstress for mitt construction, while sourcing wands from regional suppliers. This approach keeps production close to home and allows for customization—including one memorable request for Holstein cow print mitts.

Her sales channels reflect this personal approach. Starting at the Webster Farm Market, D'Alfonso now operates a physical store in Irondequoit and maintains an online presence at [solobeautyroc.com](http://solobeautyroc.com). The direct customer interaction has been rewarding, she says, with repeat customers and enthusiastic word-of-mouth recommendations driving growth.

## Looking Forward

Solo Beauty retails for \$28.99 online, with replacement mitts available for \$12.99 to \$14.99. For D'Alfonso, the success isn't just measured in sales figures but in the problems solved.

"For the average person, this product solves a problem and makes your life easier," she reflected. "Once you use it, you'll never stop."

What started as one woman's response to a health challenge has evolved into a solution that addresses universal accessibility needs in personal care. D'Alfonso's journey from melanoma patient to patent-holding entrepreneur demonstrates how personal necessity can spark innovations that benefit entire communities.

As Solo Beauty continues to reach new customers, D'Alfonso's story serves as inspiration for other would-be inventors: sometimes the best business ideas come from solving your own problems first.



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# COMPASSIONATE HOME CARE:

## Empowering Independence in Southwest Florida

By Dennis Agrusti

When families face the challenging decision of how to best care for aging parents or loved ones with special needs, the desire to maintain dignity, comfort, and independence often leads to one clear solution: quality home care. Home Helpers Home Care of Southwest Florida understands this deeply personal journey and has dedicated itself to providing exceptional care that honors the fundamental belief that everyone deserves to age gracefully in the comfort of their own home.

### A Philosophy Rooted in Compassion

*"Giving Care The Way You Want To Be Cared For"* isn't just a motto for Home Helpers Home Care of Southwest Florida – it's a guiding principle that shapes every interaction, every service, and every relationship they build with families throughout Fort Myers, Cape Coral, and the surrounding areas. This philosophy recognizes that receiving care shouldn't mean sacrificing independence or personal preferences. Instead, it should enhance quality of life while providing the support necessary to thrive at home.

The team at Home Helpers understands that choosing home care represents a significant decision for families. It often comes during times of transition, uncertainty, or health challenges when emotions run high and practical concerns feel overwhelming. Their approach acknowledges these realities while focusing on solutions that bring peace of mind to both clients and their families.

### Personalized Care That Adapts to Life's Changes

What sets Home Helpers Home Care of Southwest Florida apart is their commitment to truly personalized service. Rather than offering one-size-fits-all solutions, their dedicated senior caregivers invest time in understanding each client's unique circumstances, preferences, and goals. This thorough assessment process ensures that care plans reflect individual needs rather than generic protocols.

The services offered span a comprehensive range of daily living support. Companionship services combat isolation and loneliness, providing meaningful social interaction that contributes to mental and emotional wellbeing. Light housekeeping maintains a clean, safe living environment without the physical strain that cleaning can place on seniors or



those with mobility limitations. Meal preparation ensures proper nutrition while accommodating dietary restrictions and personal tastes.

Transportation services prove invaluable for maintaining independence and social connections. Whether it's medical appointments, grocery shopping, or social outings, reliable transportation keeps clients engaged with their communities. Personal care services, delivered with utmost respect for dignity and privacy, assist with activities of daily living when needed.

### The Extended Family Approach

Home Helpers Home Care of Southwest Florida operates on the principle that effective caregiving extends beyond completing tasks – it involves building genuine relationships. Their caregivers are trained not only in technical skills but also in the art of compassionate communication and emotional support. This approach transforms the caregiver-client relationship from a purely professional arrangement into something more meaningful: an extended family connection built on trust, respect, and genuine caring.

This philosophy proves particularly valuable for seniors who may feel vulnerable or uncertain about accepting help. When caregivers approach their work with warmth and authentic concern, clients feel more comfortable and confident in their care arrangements. Families, too, experience greater peace of mind knowing their loved ones are receiving not just professional service but genuine personal attention.

### Supporting Independence Through Dependable Care

The ultimate goal of quality home care is to enhance independence rather than replace it. Home Helpers Home Care of Southwest Florida structures their services to support clients' existing

capabilities while providing assistance where needed. This balanced approach helps maintain self-esteem and personal autonomy while ensuring safety and wellbeing.

For families in Southwest Florida seeking compassionate, professional home care services, Home Helpers Home Care offers a partnership built on understanding, flexibility, and unwavering commitment to quality care. Their dedication to treating each client as they would want their own family members treated creates a foundation for successful, long-term care relationships that truly make a difference in people's lives.

### About Dennis Agrusti, Owner

Dennis Agrusti has been a proud resident of the Fort Myers area for over 39 years, raising two exceptional children who remain local: daughter Angela, a bank Vice President, and son Anthony, a Firefighter/EMT. He's blessed with six amazing grandchildren and credits his faith in God for guiding his journey. As an Army veteran, Dennis feels a deep responsibility to support fellow veterans, which is why his company is a VA provider affiliated with several veteran programs. His professional background includes over 20 years as an Allstate agent and 10 years as a realtor, along with active community involvement.

After retiring from insurance to care for his ailing mother in Texas, Dennis experienced firsthand the challenges families face as caregivers. This personal experience, combined with his own perspective as a senior citizen, inspired him to open Home Helpers. He chose this reputable franchise with over 20 years of nationwide service because of their industry-leading training and commitment to excellence. Dennis's mission is helping seniors maintain independence in their homes while providing families peace of mind, truly "Making Life Easier" for everyone involved.

Call Home Helpers Home Care of Southwest Florida today at (239) 312-5759 to schedule your free, no-obligation home care assessment and discover compassionate support and a senior caregiver tailored to your family's needs!



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# ADVANCE CHRONIC MOBILE WOUND CARE:

## How Amniotic Membrane Therapy Is Saving Lives in Southwest Florida

**F**or the millions of Americans suffering from chronic wounds that refuse to heal after 30 days, hope arrives through advanced regenerative medicine. Jean Remy, FNP-BC, brings cutting-edge amniotic membrane therapy directly to patients throughout Southwest Florida offering a life-saving solution for diabetic ulcers, chronic pressure ulcers, venous leg ulcers, and other non-healing chronic wounds unresponsive to traditional treatments.

### The Critical Nature of Chronic Wound Care

Chronic wounds affect over 6.5 million patients annually in the United States, with approximately 5 million deaths resulting from complications including severe infections, sepsis, and gangrene. These non-healing wounds—defined as wounds that fail to progress through normal healing stages within 30 days—create devastating impacts on patients' quality of life while placing enormous strain on healthcare systems and families.

Common chronic wounds include diabetic foot ulcers, pressure ulcers (bedsores), venous stasis ulcers, arterial ulcers, surgical wounds with delayed healing, and traumatic wounds resistant to conventional therapy. Without proper treatment, these conditions can rapidly progress to life-threatening infections requiring amputation or resulting in death.

### Advanced Amniotic Membrane Technology

Amniotic membrane allografts represent a revolutionary approach to chronic wound healing. These bioactive tissue grafts, derived from human placental tissue, contain powerful growth factors, cytokines, and structural proteins that stimulate cellular regeneration and reduce inflammation. Unlike traditional wound dressings that simply cover wounds, amniotic membranes actively promote healing at the cellular level.

The membranes provide a natural scaffold for new tissue growth while delivering essential nutrients directly to damaged areas. This advanced therapy has shown remarkable success rates in healing wounds that have remained open for months or even years, often preventing the need for amputation and dramatically improving patient outcomes.

### Concierge-Level Chronic Wound Care

Jean Remy, FNP-BC, provides personalized, concierge-level mobile wound care services that extend far beyond traditional clinical visits. Understanding that chronic wound patients often face mobility challenges, he offers comprehensive home visits throughout southwest Florida and in his downtown Naples location. He will also make visits to independent living facilities, assisted living communities.

His collaborative approach involves working directly with patients' primary physicians, caregivers, family members, and home health agencies to ensure seamless continuity of care. This coordinated treatment model ensures proper wound assessment, infection management, amniotic membrane application, and ongoing monitoring throughout the healing process.

### Flexible Treatment Options

Recognizing that chronic wounds require urgent attention regardless of the day or time, Jean Remy maintains availability five days a week for wound treatments. His downtown Naples office provides a welcoming and safe clinical environment, while his mobile services bring advanced care directly to patients who cannot travel.

Services are available for Cigna and Medicare patients, making advanced amniotic membrane therapy accessible to those who need it most. This insurance

coverage removes financial barriers that often prevent patients from accessing life-saving wound care treatments.

### Comprehensive Wound Assessment and Treatment

Each patient receives thorough wound evaluation including assessment of underlying conditions contributing to delayed healing such as diabetes, peripheral vascular disease, or autoimmune disorders. Treatment protocols address infection control, proper wound preparation, precise amniotic membrane application, and detailed aftercare instructions.

The goal extends beyond simply healing wounds—it's about restoring patients' independence, keeping them in their preferred living situations, and preventing the devastating complications that can result from untreated chronic wounds.

For patients and families struggling with chronic wounds that won't heal, Jean Remy's advanced amniotic membrane therapy offers new hope for recovery and improved quality of life.

### About Jean E. Remy, FNP-BC

Jean Evins Remy, FNP-BC is a dedicated healthcare provider with a diverse background in medicine and nursing. Originally from Haiti, Remy earned his medical degree from Faculté de Médecine et de Pharmacie, Université d'Etat d'Haïti, and practiced as a licensed doctor of medicine before relocating to the United States. Here, he pursued further education, graduating with honors from Florida International University with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing and a Master of Science in Nursing.

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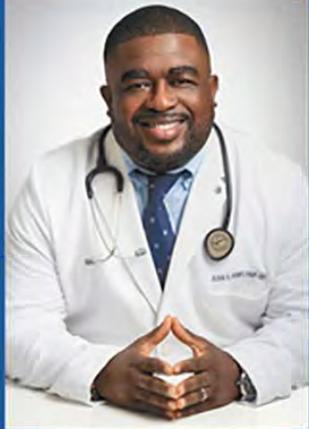
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# Mobile Rehab & Lymphatics – Supporting Breast Cancer Survivors with Gold-Standard Lymphedema Care

**F**or many breast cancer survivors, the journey doesn't end when treatment does. Surgery, lymph node removal, and radiation can lead to a lifelong condition known as lymphedema—a chronic buildup of lymphatic fluid that causes swelling, discomfort, and increased risk of infection.

At Mobile Rehab & Lymphatics, we specialize in helping breast cancer survivors manage and overcome these challenges. Our mobile outpatient clinic brings expert, evidence-based therapy directly to patients' homes across Southwest Florida, making high-quality care both accessible and convenient.

## Specialized Lymphedema Therapy for Breast Cancer Survivors

Lymphedema after breast cancer treatment is a common yet often under-recognized condition. Swelling can occur in the arm, chest wall, breast, or hand, and without proper treatment, it can progress and significantly affect quality of life.

Our licensed occupational and physical therapists are Certified Lymphedema Therapists (CLWTs), trained in the internationally recognized Complete Decongestive Therapy (CDT) approach, the gold standard for lymphedema management.

CDT is a comprehensive, multi-step program that includes:

- **Manual Lymphatic Drainage (MLD):** A gentle hands-on technique that stimulates lymphatic flow, reducing swelling and discomfort.
- **Compression Wrapping & Garments:** Specialized bandages and garments provide consistent pressure to prevent fluid buildup.
- **Therapeutic Exercise:** Customized movement programs encourage natural lymphatic flow and restore function.
- **Skin Care Education:** Preventing infection and maintaining skin integrity are critical to long-term success.

This integrated approach not only helps reduce swelling but also improves comfort, mobility, and confidence for survivors navigating life after breast cancer.

## Innovative Lymphedema Assessment – The LymphScanner™

Mobile Rehab & Lymphatics is proud to use the LymphScanner™, a non-invasive tool that allows our therapists to assess tissue changes and detect lymphedema early—even before it becomes visibly noticeable. This cutting-edge device helps us:

- Identify lymphedema in its earliest stages.
- Track changes over time with precision.
- Tailor treatment plans based on real, measurable data.

By incorporating the LymphScanner into our mobile practice, we bring advanced technology directly to patients' doorsteps, ensuring accurate assessments without requiring hospital or clinic visits.

## Garment Fitting Through Our In-House DME

Breast cancer survivors often need specialized compression garments as part of their long-term care. At Mobile Rehab & Lymphatics, we streamline this process by offering in-house Durable Medical Equipment (DME) services. Our therapists measure, fit, and order garments customized to each patient's needs, eliminating the stress of navigating this process alone. Medicare and many insurance plans provide coverage for these garments, and our team helps guide patients through their options.

## More Than Therapy — A Mission of Support

While lymphedema management is highly clinical, our approach is also deeply personal. Many survivors feel isolated by the lasting effects of breast cancer treatment. We aim to change that by combining expert care with compassion and education, empowering patients to feel in control of their health again.

By treating survivors in the comfort of their own homes, we reduce barriers like transportation challenges, fatigue, or the burden of juggling multiple medical appointments. Our mission is simple: to meet patients where they are and walk alongside them in their recovery journey.

## Meet the Co-Owners

Mobile Rehab & Lymphatics is co-owned by James Ferrara, OTR/L, CLWT, and Lexie Lundquist, OTR/L, CLWT.



James (Jim) Ferrara earned his Master's Degree in Occupational Therapy from Spalding University in 2006 and has been a certified lymphedema therapist for more than six years. With over five years as a business owner, Jim brings expertise in both patient care and leadership. He is also a wound care specialist, integrating wound management and lymphedema treatment to improve outcomes for complex cases.



Lexie Lundquist earned her Doctorate in Occupational Therapy from the University of Florida in 2022 and became a certified lymphedema therapist in 2023. She is passionate about empowering patients through education, hands-on care, and individualized treatment plans, ensuring each survivor feels supported and encouraged throughout their journey.

Together, Jim and Lexie bring a balance of experience, innovation, and compassion, ensuring Mobile Rehab & Lymphatics continues to set the standard for mobile outpatient therapy in Southwest Florida.

## Our Commitment This Breast Cancer Awareness Month

As we honor Breast Cancer Awareness Month, we recognize the resilience of survivors and the importance of specialized care. Lymphedema should never be a barrier to living fully after breast cancer. At Mobile Rehab & Lymphatics, we are committed to providing the tools, expertise, and support survivors need to thrive—today and for years to come.

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# HUNGRY HEART

By Alex Anderson

**T**he songwriter and performer Bruce Springsteen was right when he wrote,

"Everybody's got a hungry heart..."

Inside of every human is this need or hunger. Sometimes we try to fill it with love for another person, but for some reason...another person is not the answer.

Sometimes the hungry heart destroys the very things we love and want.

Springsteen goes on to sing,

"We fell in love, I knew it had to end...we took what we had and we ripped it apart...everybody's got a hungry heart...don't make no difference what nobody says...ain't nobody like to be alone...everybody's got a hungry heart."

I do believe our hungry heart is about loneliness, not for another human...but for God himself. We were created in the very image of God (Genesis 1:26) but when man left God...man missed, and still misses, God. They had a bond that filled man with joy and satisfied his heart like nothing else.

C.S. Lewis calls this the, "Numinous Awe." It seems to be built into mankind, this *ravenous hungry heart to know God*. And it's so strong nothing can fill it but God himself.

Psalms 34:8 says, "Taste and see that the Lord is good."

**And the truth is...** If you don't get that deep ravenous hunger in your heart satisfied by Jesus you will starve to death spiritually, while eating everything else.

So how do you do that? How do you find the true satisfaction that calms your hungry heart?

If you are a Christ-follower, then you know how to do this. You...'do again'...something that you have already experienced when you asked God to be your Lord and Savior. You "make up" with God and you're back to stay.

You are so glad to be back together. Glad that God owns you and your life. So you decide to be happy because God owns you and is your life partner (Philippians 4:4).

Feel the pleasure, the joy and the delight again about Jesus being your master. Let this fact cause you happiness, pleasure and delight.

Be full of joy because Jesus paid a high price for your life. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

Let the reality of what He has done sink over you.

Not only are you in His family now, but you can live the life of a victorious and joyful person of God; with all the rights and privileges of a child of rich royalty.

*"You are my child says the Lord...my very rich child says the Lord...let the riches of your heart begin to overflow into all of your life."* (3 John 2)

You can, should, and must rejoice always in the Lord...way before anything changes physically in your life.

The seed of hope and joy is there if you have become one with Jesus Christ. His seed is within you. If your hope is nonexistent then find the seed once planted deep in your heart by the Holy Spirit.

Like a precious pearl search for it (Matthew 13:45).

When you find it (that small seed), clean it up. Polish it and put it in the center room of your heart, shine the brightest light you can find on it and let its magnificent beauty captivate you. Stare at it with intentional focus as though you are searching and waiting for hope itself.

**Its magnificent light will light up your life.**

For it will change everything about you as you clearly see and feel the love that God has shed in your heart...that is for you (Romans 5:5).

It is so worthy of your time my friend to mediate and think about Jesus, again.

Whether things in your life are going well or not...you have the power of a Christ-follower to focus on Jesus...the author and finisher of your faith and the centerpiece of your heart.

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