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

April 2026

Collier Edition - Monthly

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**FREE** 

Dr. Tamer Eshra



## PARK

*Family & Cosmetic*

## DENTISTRY

Established 2009

TAMER ESHRA, DDS

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# TWELVE CROWNS AND A CELEBRATION: LAURIE MCMAHON'S SMILE STORY



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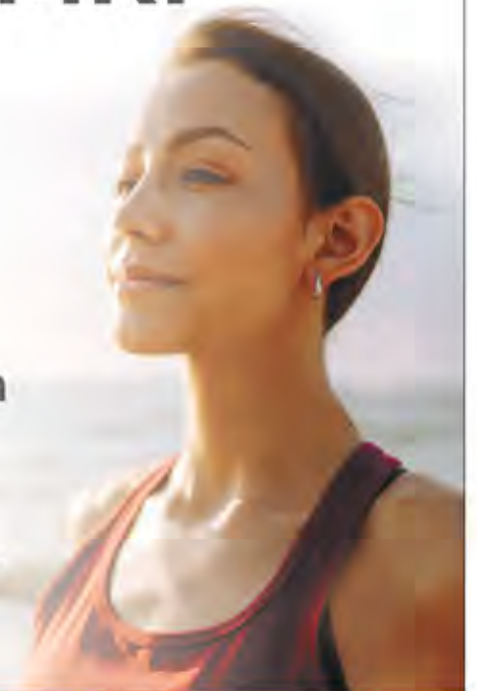
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**+90%**  
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survival

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Cancer  
Diagnosis**



**>20%**  
5-year  
survival

Disclaimer: These figures are general averages and vary by cancer type. Survival rates vary significantly based on cancer type, individual health factors, and available treatments. The statistics referenced are general averages across multiple cancer types and should not be interpreted as specific medical guidance. For personalized health assessments, please consult a licensed medical professional.

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# Twelve Crowns and a Celebration: Laurie McMahon's Smile Story

By Dr. Tamer Eshra

Laurie McMahon initially sought dental care for a practical reason. Over time, she noticed the gap between her two front teeth slowly widening as natural enamel wear changed the shape and spacing of her teeth. What began as a cosmetic concern eventually became uncomfortable, and Laurie assumed she simply needed a functional repair.

That perspective changed after meeting Dr. Eshra at Park Family & Cosmetic Dentistry (PFCD).



During her consultation, Dr. Eshra carefully evaluated Laurie's smile and walked her through a personalized treatment plan. With the help of advanced technology, he showed her digital smile designs, including before-and-after images that brought

the possibilities to life. For Laurie, seeing those images was a turning point, she realized her dental care was not just about correcting an issue, but about reclaiming a beautiful smile and the confidence that comes with it.

Laurie also faced a unique challenge. She has Bell's palsy, a condition that affects facial muscles and can cause one side of the face to appear less responsive than the other. Because of this, one side of Laurie's smile has never appeared as full as the other. She often jokes that she learned to "smile with her eyes," but the condition made her particularly thoughtful about choosing the right dentist for cosmetic work.

From the beginning, Laurie felt confident in Dr. Eshra and his team. She describes him not only as a skilled dentist but also as an artist. His treatment plan addressed the health and function of her teeth while also carefully considering the balance and appearance of her smile.

Her treatment ultimately involved twelve porcelain crowns designed to restore both function and aesthetics.

One aspect of PFCD that Laurie especially appreciated was the in-house dental laboratory. The lab technician, Lance, worked closely with Dr. Eshra to help design Laurie's new smile. According to Laurie, Lance brought an artistic eye to the process as well. Together, they selected the ideal color, shape, and proportions for her crowns so the final result would look natural and flattering.

Because of her Bell's palsy, Laurie sometimes finds dental anesthesia difficult to manage. She notes that oral injections can be challenging with facial nerve involvement. However, she says Dr. Eshra consistently demonstrated careful precision and attention during each procedure, ensuring that anesthesia was placed correctly so she remained comfortable.

Equally important to Laurie was the way Dr. Eshra communicated throughout treatment. He spoke calmly and clearly, explaining each step before it happened so she always understood what to expect. During procedures he frequently checked in, asking if she was comfortable or needed a break.

"That made a big difference for my anxiety," Laurie says. "I always knew what was coming next."

Laurie also credits much of her positive experience to the entire PFCD team. She specifically highlights assistants Miriam and Anita, whom she describes as "top-notch." Watching the team work together gave her confidence that every aspect of her care was being handled thoughtfully and professionally.

Her experience extended beyond the treatment room as well. Laurie says the welcoming atmosphere at PFCD begins the moment patients arrive. Outside the office there is a beautiful orchid garden near the entrance, and inside the lobby there is often a charitable project underway.

One program Laurie remembers involved collecting greeting cards for deployed soldiers. More recently, the office participated in Laces of Love, an initiative that gathers athletic shoes for children in need in Collier County. Laurie says seeing the practice support the local community made her feel proud to be a patient there.

"The office really cares about giving back," she explains.

Laurie also appreciates the organization and professionalism of the practice. Appointments begin on time, and the staff maintains a calm and friendly environment throughout the office.

Several team members made lasting impressions on her during visits. Loyse at the front desk brings what Laurie describes as a consistently positive energy when patients arrive. Gigi who worked alongside Dr. Eshra, assisting every step of the way to ensure the procedure was completed comfortably and seamlessly.

After completing her treatment, Laurie experienced a memorable final moment with the team.

At the end of the process, she was invited upstairs for what the staff called her "final smile celebration." When she entered the room, several team members were waiting to congratulate her. A large screen displayed her before-and-after photos while eight members of the team applauded the transformation. The celebration even included champagne (non-alcoholic) to mark the occasion.

For Laurie, it was an unexpected and meaningful way to close her smile journey.

Today she continues to return to Park Family & Cosmetic Dentistry for regular cleanings, and her husband is also a patient of Dr. Eshra. Laurie says the combination of advanced technology, artistic skill, and compassionate care makes the practice stand out.

Most importantly, she says she always feels valued as both a patient and a person.

"It's such a treat," Laurie says, "to be cared for by a dentist instead of being afraid of one."

Her smile transformation, which included twelve carefully designed porcelain crowns, restored not only the appearance of her teeth but also her confidence. For Laurie McMahon, the experience proved that dentistry can be both a science and an art—and that the right team can make all the difference.

### About Tamer Eshra, DDS

Dr. Tamer Eshra combines advanced training with a gentle, patient-first approach. With decades of expertise in cosmetic, restorative, bone augmentation, sinus lift and implant dentistry, he creates healthy, natural-looking smiles through precision and artistry. Licensed and offering IV, oral and nitrous sedation, Dr. Eshra helps even the most anxious patients feel calm and comfortable. His compassionate care and clear communication make every visit a positive, stress-free experience.



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# Gut Check: How Digestive Health Affects You Every Day

By Felipe Gascon, MD, Internal Medicine at Millennium Physician Group

**Y**our digestive system does far more than break down the food you eat. Growing research continues to highlight just how interconnected the digestive system is with the rest of the body. Because of this complex relationship, many scientists and physicians refer to the gut as the body's "second brain" because it plays a central role in your overall health, influencing everything from your immune system to your mood and sleep.

Understanding how your gut works and how everyday habits affect it can help you make key lifestyle changes that support your health and wellbeing.

## What We Mean By 'Gut Health'

When people talk about gut health, they are generally referring to the health of the gastrointestinal (GI) system and the trillions of microorganisms that live inside it, known as the gut microbiome.

This system includes the mouth, esophagus, stomach, small and large intestines, and rectum, along with organs that aid digestion, such as the gall bladder, liver, and pancreas. Together, these organs break down food, absorb nutrients, and remove waste from the body.

Inside this system lives a vast ecosystem of microbes – including bacteria, fungi, and viruses – that regulate digestion. When these microbes are balanced and diverse, they help maintain the protective lining of the gut, regulate immune response, and prevent harmful bacteria from taking over.

## How Everyday Habits Affect Your Gut

Your digestive system is constantly responding to the choices you make throughout each day. Diet, stress, and sleep all significantly influence the balance of microbes in your gut and your overall health.

**Diet:** What you eat fuels the trillions of microbes in your gut. Fiber-rich foods help beneficial bacteria thrive, while highly processed or high-sugar foods can reduce microbial diversity and trigger inflammation.



**Stress:** Chronic stress can affect gut function by altering hormone levels and slowing or speeding digestion, which can lead to bloating, cramping, diarrhea, or constipation. Stress can also influence the balance of microbes, potentially triggering inflammation and even affecting mood.

**Sleep:** Your gut and your sleep patterns are closely linked. During restful sleep, your body repairs tissues and processes nutrients. Poor or inconsistent sleep can disrupt microbial balance, increase inflammation, and affect the hormones that control appetite, leading to cravings for high-fat or sugary foods. At the same time, digestive issues such as acid reflux or irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) can make it harder to fall or stay asleep, creating a cycle that reinforces gut discomfort and fatigue.

Together, these lifestyle factors create a dynamic feedback loop within the body. A healthy gut supports better immunity, hormone regulation, and mood, while poor gut health can amplify stress, disrupt sleep, and impact your energy levels.

## Signs Your Gut Needs Attention

Occasional digestive discomfort is normal, but persistent symptoms can signal that something in the digestive system is not working as it should. Common signs include:

- Frequent bloating or gas
- Constipation or diarrhea
- Abdominal pain or cramping
- Acid reflux or heartburn
- Changes in appetite or unexplained weight changes

Additional possible signs include headaches, fatigue, and even joint pain.

## Ways to Support Gut Health

The good news is that it is never too late to start supporting your gut by:

- Eating a balanced, fiber-rich diet including colorful fruits and vegetables, whole grains, legumes, nuts, and seeds.
- Incorporating fermented foods such as kefir, kimchi, sauerkraut, and yogurt, which contain beneficial bacteria to support a healthy microbiome.
- Stay active with regular physical activity that gets your blood pumping to assist digestive functions.
- Manage stress by practicing deep breathing, mindfulness, or yoga to help keep your body calm, supporting healthy digestion.
- Get enough sleep, aiming for a consistent sleep schedule to regulate hormones and support overall health.
- Stay hydrated by drinking enough water to help move nutrients through the digestive system and support healthy bowel movements.

## Supporting Your Gut at Millennium Physician Group

Your digestive health is a key component of your overall well-being. Paying attention to changes in your body, maintaining healthy habits, and seeking medical guidance when you need it can help you protect your gut health for the long term.

At Millennium Physician Group, our healthcare providers take a comprehensive approach to your health. By understanding how lifestyle, nutrition, sleep patterns, and daily stress interact with your overall health, we can work with you to identify concerns and develop a personalized care plan.

Whether you need a gut check or are focusing on preventive health, Millennium Physician Group is here to help support your whole health every day.

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# Take Control of Your Health with BodyView Preventive MRI by Encore Imaging

In an era where healthcare costs continue to rise and medical conditions often go undetected until they become serious, preventive medicine has never been more crucial. Encore Imaging's BodyView Preventive MRI represents a revolutionary approach to health screening, offering comprehensive peace of mind in under 60 minutes through advanced, radiation-free technology.

## Knowledge Is Your Greatest Health Asset

The old adage "knowledge is power" takes on profound meaning when applied to personal health. BodyView Full Body MRI empowers individuals to take charge of their wellbeing by providing detailed insights into their body's current state. This innovative screening technology transforms the traditional reactive approach to healthcare into a proactive strategy that can literally save lives.

For individuals with a family history of cancer or other hereditary conditions, the psychological burden of uncertainty can be overwhelming. BodyView MRI addresses this concern head-on, offering a simple yet comprehensive scan that can deliver worry-free results or identify potential issues while they're still manageable. The relief that comes from knowing your body is healthy – or the advantage of early detection – cannot be overstated.

## Comprehensive Screening Without Compromise

What sets BodyView apart from traditional screening methods is its remarkable scope and safety profile. This radiation-free scan screens for cancer and over 500 different medical conditions across 13 vital organs, providing a full internal snapshot of your health in a single session.

The scan examines critical areas including the brain, thyroid, spine, lungs, liver, gallbladder, pancreas, spleen, kidneys, adrenal glands, bladder, and reproductive organs (ovaries, uterus, and prostate). This thorough approach means that potential health issues across multiple body systems can be identified simultaneously, eliminating the need for multiple separate screenings and reducing the overall time and cost associated with comprehensive health monitoring.

1 in 2 Men.  
1 in 3 Women.  
Will Develop Cancer

Most don't know until it's too late.

Don't wait for symptoms.

BodyView PREVENTIVE MRI

## The Power of Early Detection

Perhaps the most compelling aspect of BodyView Preventive MRI is its ability to reveal hidden conditions before they become symptomatic. Many serious health conditions, including various forms of cancer, develop silently over months or years. By the time symptoms appear, treatment options may be more limited and outcomes less favorable.

BodyView MRI changes this narrative by enabling early intervention. When conditions are detected in their initial stages, treatment is typically more effective, less invasive, and often less expensive. For health-conscious individuals who understand the value of prevention, this technology represents the ultimate proactive health tool.

## Safety and Convenience Combined

Unlike traditional CT scans or other imaging methods that expose patients to ionizing radiation, BodyView MRI utilizes magnetic resonance technology that is completely radiation-free. This safety advantage makes it suitable for regular health monitoring without the cumulative radiation exposure concerns associated with other screening methods.

In less than an hour, patients receive a comprehensive health screening followed by a virtual consultation with a physician to review the results in detail, which would traditionally require multiple appointments, various specialists, and extensive testing. This efficiency makes preventive screening accessible to busy professionals and anyone who values their time while prioritizing their health.

## Investing in Your Future Self

BodyView Preventive MRI represents more than just a medical screening – it's an investment in your future health and quality of life. The peace of mind that comes from comprehensive health knowledge allows individuals to plan confidently, whether that means pursuing aggressive career goals, planning family expansion, or simply enjoying life without the nagging worry about undetected health issues.

For those ready to embrace truly preventive healthcare, Encore Imaging's BodyView MRI offers an unparalleled opportunity to gain comprehensive health insights quickly, safely, and conveniently. In the world of modern medicine, this level of preventive screening allows you to be in control of managing your health and your future.

*Take the first step. It's peace of mind and early detection when it matters most.*

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# PRESERVÉ BREAST AUGMENTATION: The Future of Natural Enhancement Is Here

**W**hen it comes to breast augmentation, most women want the same thing: beautiful, natural-looking results that feel like their own, achieved without unnecessary trauma to their body. For decades, traditional breast augmentation has delivered dramatic outcomes, but often at the cost of significant tissue disruption, longer recovery times, and visible scarring. That is changing. At Naples Aesthetic Institute, Dr. Kiran Gill is proud to offer Preservé breast augmentation, a revolutionary minimally invasive technique that is redefining what is possible in aesthetic breast surgery.

## What Is Preservé Breast Augmentation?

Preservé is a minimally invasive approach to breast augmentation designed to limit tissue disruption while maximizing natural-looking results. Unlike conventional techniques that require more extensive incisions and internal dissection, Preservé uses a carefully refined method to create a precise implant pocket with significantly less trauma to surrounding tissue. The result is a procedure that honors the anatomy of the breast rather than working against it.

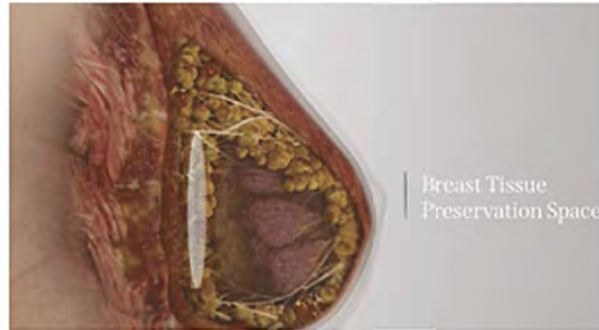
The technique prioritizes preserving the natural structures of the breast, including glandular tissue, nerves, and blood supply, which contributes to better healing, more natural movement, and a lower risk of certain complications. For women who want to enhance their figure while maintaining the integrity of their breast tissue, Preservé offers a compelling solution.

## Dr. Kiran Gill:

### An Exclusive Opportunity to Offer Preservé

Preservé was created and developed by Manuel Chacón, M.D., a world renowned plastic, reconstructive, and aesthetic surgeon who pioneered this advanced, minimally invasive breast surgery approach with a focus on preserving natural tissue and enhancing long-term breast health.

To offer Preservé, surgeons must complete specialized training through Motiva, the company behind the technique. Dr. Kiran Gill is one of only approximately 100 plastic surgeons in the entire country to perform Preservé breast augmentation. While all physicians undergo Motiva's rigorous training, Dr. Gill had the distinct privilege of training directly under Dr. Chacón himself, placing her among a very select group with firsthand experience from the pioneer of the technique. It is not a procedure available at every practice, and Dr. Gill was among a very select group to receive this opportunity.



Her ability to offer Preservé to her patients throughout Naples, Fort Myers and the broader Southwest Florida region, reflects her ongoing pursuit of the very best options available in plastic surgery, not just what is common, but what is truly exceptional.

## The Benefits of Preservé

Patients who choose Preservé breast augmentation at Naples Aesthetic Institute can expect a range of meaningful advantages over traditional approaches. Perhaps most striking is the recovery time. Preservé patients typically recover in roughly half the time of a traditional breast augmentation. For active women and young moms who simply cannot afford weeks of downtime, this is a significant advantage. Less time recovering means a faster return to the gym, to chasing after kids, to the lifestyle you have worked hard to maintain.

Because the technique minimizes trauma to the breast tissue, most patients experience reduced swelling and less discomfort in the days following surgery. Whether you are a fitness enthusiast, a busy professional, or a mother juggling a full schedule, the Preservé approach is designed to fit into your life, not put it on hold.

The results also tend to look and feel more natural immediately following surgery. By working carefully within the natural architecture of the breast, Dr. Gill is able to position implants in a way that moves and settles beautifully with the body. Patients frequently report that their results feel like a natural extension of themselves rather than an obvious surgical enhancement.

Preserving breast tissue also has long-term implications. Women who wish to breastfeed in the future, those concerned about sensation changes, or patients who want to minimize their risk of capsular contracture may find that Preservé aligns well with their personal health priorities. Every detail of the technique is designed with the patient's long-term wellbeing in mind.

## Who Is a Good Candidate?

Preservé breast augmentation is an excellent option for women who are in good overall health, have realistic expectations, and are seeking enhancement that looks and feels natural. It is particularly well-suited for active women and young moms who need a shorter, more manageable recovery. With downtime roughly half that of traditional breast augmentation, life does not have to be put on hold for long. It is also ideal for patients who prioritize a minimally invasive approach or have concerns about tissue disruption associated with traditional methods. During a personalized consultation at Naples Aesthetic Institute, Dr. Gill will evaluate your anatomy, discuss your goals, and help determine whether Preservé is the right fit for you.

## Experience the Difference at Naples Aesthetic Institute

Naples Aesthetic Institute has built a reputation for delivering exceptional results in a comfortable, patient-centered environment. Serving Naples, Fort Myers, and all of Southwest Florida, our practice combines advanced surgical expertise with a genuine commitment to each patient's unique vision. With Dr. Gill's rare access to the Preservé technique, patients in our region have an opportunity that few have access to anywhere in the country.

If you are considering breast augmentation and want to explore a smarter, gentler approach to enhancement, we invite you to schedule a consultation with Dr. Kiran Gill. Discover how Preservé can help you achieve the natural, beautiful results you have always envisioned, with the care and precision your body deserves.



**DR. KIRAN GILL**

**Naples Aesthetic Institute**

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# LEARN HOW YOU CAN FIND RELIEF FROM THE DEBILITATING PAIN OF PERIPHERAL NEUROPATHY WITHOUT ADDICTIVE DRUGS

By Richard Hiler, DABCN

Over 116 million people suffer from various types of chronic pain disorders, and 20 million of those individuals have peripheral neuropathy; that number is speculated to be much higher due to patients not getting a proper diagnosis. Peripheral nerves run from the spinal cord to the arms, hands, legs and feet.

**UNDERSTANDING PERIPHERAL NEUROPATHY**  
Peripheral Neuropathy is a complex condition, but nerve damage and signaling are the issue, finding the root cause is how a comprehensive plan is customized to regenerate a patients nerves, cells and tissues. Having high blood sugar levels, along with low blood oxygen supply, nutrient deficiency, high toxicity and inflammation damages the nerves throughout the body. This damage generally affects the long peripheral nerves that feed sensations to the legs, feet, and toes from the spinal cord, through communication with the brain. If your condition has progressed, you may feel nerve damage sensations in your upper extremities as well.

## PERIPHERAL NEUROPATHY SYMPTOMS

- Numbness
- Tingling
- Burning sensations
- Painful aching
- Joint inflammation
- Joint damage
- Balance issues
- Skin discoloration & texture changes
- Muscle cramps
- Feelings of stiffness
- Non-healing foot & ankle ulcers

## STOP MASKING SYMPTOMS AND PAIN

The most common treatment for nerve pain and numbness is to mask it with narcotic prescription pain medications. Narcotics like Opioids are highly addictive, and our state is currently leading the country in abusing the drug and overdose episodes.

**There are better alternatives to Peripheral Neuropathy that do not include addictive drugs.**



Physical medicine provides alternative therapeutic and rehabilitating procedures can significantly improve the condition, offer pain relief and limit drug dependency.

## FEEL AMAZING SPINE & JOINT INSTITUTE'S ALTERNATIVE CARE

- Red LED and Low Level Infrared Light Therapy help to heal and regenerate the small nerve endings that are damaged in peripheral neuropathy
- Gentle electrical stimulation therapy improves nerve function, reduces pain, and improves movement.
- Stem Cell Allografts Biologics
- Platelet Rich Plasma
- Spinal Decompression Therapy
- Ozone Therapy
- Peptide Therapy
- Therapeutic Shockwave/Soundwave
- Natural supplementation to regenerate myelin sheath

## WHAT KINDS OF EFFECTS CAN BE ACHIEVED THROUGH THE NEUROPATHY TREATMENT AT FEEL AMAZING SPINE & JOINT INSTITUTE?

Clinical studies show that 88% of the people who undergo the treatment experience excellent results with one or more of the following: Reduced pain and cramps, reduced tingling and numbness, ability to experience normal touch without pain, reduced cold or burning sensations, improved balance and coordination, lowered dependency on medications, improved sleep, reduced sensation of restlessness in

the legs. Several people also experience reduced local swelling and inflammation, increased range of motion, increased blood flow to the extremities, decreased tension, and decreased muscle spasm.

An important side benefit to the treatment is that it reduces the risk of falls significantly by improving balance and position awareness of the feet.

## FEEL AMAZING SPINE & JOINT INSTITUTE

We proudly serve the Naples area with comprehensive Chiropractic, Physical Medicine, and Regenerative Medicine services since 1998. Our office strives for excellence, and we are consistently furthering our education and techniques to improve the care you receive in our office. Whether you suffer from chronic pain, are recovering from an injury, or are seeking overall improved health and performance, we have the skills and experience to help you work toward your goals.

If you are looking for a chiropractor to treat bulging discs and/or herniations, neck or back pain, knee, shoulder or hip pain, sciatica, or neuropathy (numbness and/or burning and pain in feet and hands), you have found the right place for your health care needs.

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# TIMELESS RESULTS, THOUGHTFULLY DONE

## Transform Your Look with Cutting-Edge Regenerative Treatments for Beautiful, Natural Results

By Dr. Kenzi

**F**ebruary is Heart Health Month—and if you've been thinking about refining your look or simply feeling your best in your own skin, this is the perfect time to start. At Kenzi Medical Aesthetics Group, we take a thoughtful, natural approach to aesthetic care that's designed to enhance—not change—who you are.

### A Smarter Way to Approach Heart Health with Weight Loss

Forget quick fixes. Our physician-led weight loss programs focus on sustainable, long-term health. Depending on your goals, your personalized plan may include:

- Nutritional guidance tailored to your body and lifestyle
- Medical-grade supplements to support metabolism and energy
- Movement strategies that complement your treatment plan

Patients often report feeling more energized and balanced—confidence that goes far beyond swimsuit season.

### Refined, Natural Results with Injectables

For those moments when you're reconnecting with friends and family, injectables can offer a subtle refresh:

- Botox® and Dysport® for smoothing dynamic wrinkles
- Dermal fillers for restoring volume where it's naturally diminished
- Sculptra® stimulates natural collagen production, restoring facial structure and volume — and can even be used to lift and shape the buttocks.

We focus on precision, proportion, and maintaining the facial harmony that makes you, you.

### Skin Tightening That Works Beneath the Surface

Heat-based technologies like radiofrequency, ultrasound, and laser energy can stimulate deep



collagen production to tighten skin and refine texture. These are ideal for areas where skin has begun to lose firmness over time.

### Venus Bliss MAX: A Non-Invasive Way to Tackle Stubborn Fat

Venus Bliss MAX™ is an advanced three-in-one solution for body treatments. The workstation targets fat, muscle, and skin with three distinct technologies in an effective and comfortable manner, maximizing results and patient satisfaction by tailoring the right modality for each indication.

### Why Timing Matters

Many treatments—especially body contouring and skin regeneration—take a few weeks to show full results. Starting now gives your body time to respond naturally so you're glowing, confident, and photo-ready when it matters most.

### Let's Build Your Heart Health Treatment Plan

Whether you want to target one area or take a more comprehensive approach, our team will guide you through a custom treatment strategy. We combine science, artistry, and experience to help you look like the best version of yourself—refreshed, never overdone.

Book a consultation to learn more and explore what's possible..



DR. ALDENE MCKENZIE

### Providing A Healthy, Happy and Confident Lifestyle for All

I founded Kenzi Medical Aesthetics Group in 2017 with the goal of helping my clients live a life well lived through optimizing their spiritual, physical, and psychosocial wellbeing. Holistic medicine considers the whole person—meaning body, mind, spirit, and emotions—in the quest for optimal health. That's also my philosophy, as I'm passionate about helping my clients look beautiful and feel empowered and confident thanks to an array of state-of-the-art aesthetic services. From Botox and dermal fillers to fat-loss treatments and medical-grade chemical peels, I make sure that each treatment is tailored to meet my clients' beauty needs. With my caring and attentive approach towards patients, even injections turn into a pleasurable experience.

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# RESIDENTS AT THE CARLISLE NAPLES REAP HEALTH BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEERING

By Cassie Calwell

National Volunteer Month recognizes the many ways people give back to their communities. While volunteering is often associated with helping others, research shows it can also provide powerful health benefits for the giver.

Studies consistently link volunteerism with lower stress levels, improved emotional well-being and greater life satisfaction. Staying engaged in meaningful activities helps reduce feelings of isolation, stimulates the mind and even encourages physical movement, all important contributors to healthy aging.

For many older adults, retirement doesn't mean stepping away from purpose. It simply opens the door to new ways of contributing.

"Volunteering keeps you connected to the world around you," said Natalie Lewis, a resident at The Carlisle Naples, a luxury senior living rental community. She recently spearheaded an intergenerational board game event with students from Community School of Naples. The activity brought together residents and eighth graders for an afternoon of classic tabletop games, reminding participants that sometimes the simplest forms of connection can bridge generations. Lewis noted that the event was a chance to "throw it back to a time when games brought people together," while giving students and residents the opportunity to learn from one another.

Intergenerational activities like this are increasingly recognized as beneficial for both younger and older participants. For seniors, interactions with students can spark curiosity, stimulate memory and create a sense of shared purpose. For young people, the experience provides a valuable perspective and mentorship.

At The Carlisle Naples, residents find a variety of opportunities to stay engaged both within the community and beyond. According to Executive Director Amanda Ignasak, the longevity of the staff and residents has helped create strong relationships with organizations throughout the Naples area.



"Because so many of our team members and residents have been part of the Naples community for years, there is a wealth of connections that naturally open the door to volunteer opportunities," Ignasak said. "Those relationships allow residents to stay involved in meaningful ways and continue contributing to causes that matter to them."

Some residents volunteer by leading interest groups or facilitating classes for neighbors. Others lend a hand in the community library, organize social gatherings or visit friends in the assisted living neighborhood to provide companionship and support.

Giving back also extends beyond the community's walls. Residents regularly organize donation drives supporting local causes. Food drives and clothing collections help benefit organizations across the Naples area, while residents frequently rally together for charitable initiatives that reflect their shared values.

Sometimes volunteerism takes on a more creative form. Resident Sally Ray, for example, recently volunteered to design and create festive Derby hats for neighbors attending an upcoming Kentucky Derby viewing celebration.

These activities may appear simple, but their impact is meaningful. Purposeful engagement can strengthen emotional health, reduce stress and help older adults maintain a strong sense of identity and connection.

You don't have to commit hours every week to experience the benefits of volunteering. Small acts such as mentoring, organizing a donation drive, helping a neighbor or sharing a skill can provide the same sense of fulfillment. It also nourishes the mind, strengthens social bonds and contributes to healthier, more vibrant aging.

*Located at 6945 Carlisle Court in Naples, The Carlisle offers independent and assisted living lifestyles featuring spacious one-and two-bedroom residences, housekeeping, maintenance, transportation, all utilities except telephone, Zest wellness programming and elevated dining with daily, chef-prepared specials. The community is ECC licensed with an integrated health care clinic and rehabilitative therapies located onsite. The Carlisle Naples is accredited by the National Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF), an important distinction that provides residents with the assurance that the highest standards of quality care, services and safeguards are maintained. For more information about the community, please call 239-221-0017 or visit [www.TheCarlisleNaples.com](http://www.TheCarlisleNaples.com).*



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# THE ART OF AGING GRACEFULLY: WHY SKIN CHECKS MATTER AT ART OF DERMATOLOGY

**O**ur skin tells the story of our lives—every laugh line, sun-kissed moment, and year of experience. As we age, maintaining skin health becomes increasingly important, not just for aesthetics but for overall wellbeing. At Art of Dermatology, we believe that healthy aging skin begins with proactive care and regular professional assessment.

## Understanding Skin's Aging Process

Skin ages through two distinct processes: intrinsic aging (determined by genetics) and extrinsic aging (influenced by environmental factors). While we cannot control our genetic timeline, we can significantly impact how external factors affect our skin.

With age, our skin naturally produces less collagen and elastin, leading to thinner, less resilient skin. Cell turnover slows, and moisture retention diminishes. Meanwhile, years of sun exposure, pollution, and lifestyle choices accelerate these changes, potentially leading to premature aging and increased risk of skin conditions, including cancer.

## The Crucial Role of Regular Skin Checks

Regular dermatological examinations serve as the cornerstone of proactive skin health management. These checks provide much more than peace of mind—they can be lifesaving. Consider these compelling reasons to schedule regular visits to Art of Dermatology:

- **Early Detection of Skin Cancer:** With over one million Americans diagnosed with skin cancer annually, early detection dramatically improves treatment outcomes. Professional dermatologists can identify suspicious changes that might go unnoticed during self-examinations.
- **Personalized Aging Management:** Everyone's skin ages differently. Regular assessments allow dermatologists to craft personalized treatment plans that address your skin's unique needs, from addressing sun damage to managing age-related conditions like rosacea or seborrheic keratosis.
- **Tracking Changing Moles and Spots:** What appears as a harmless freckle today could develop concerning characteristics over time. Consistent monitoring creates a valuable baseline for detecting meaningful changes.



- **Expert Guidance on Products and Treatments:** The skincare industry overwhelms consumers with countless anti-aging products. Your dermatologist can recommend evidence-based solutions truly appropriate for your skin type and concerns.

## Healthy Habits for Aging Skin

Between professional visits to Art of Dermatology, maintaining these daily habits supports optimal skin health:

- **Sun Protection:** Apply broad-spectrum SPF 30+ sunscreen daily, regardless of weather conditions. Wear protective clothing and seek shade when possible.
- **Hydration:** Both internal hydration (drinking water) and external moisturizing help maintain skin's barrier function and elasticity.
- **Gentle Cleansing:** As skin becomes more delicate with age, harsh products can cause irritation. Opt for gentle, pH-balanced cleansers.
- **Antioxidant-Rich Diet:** Consuming foods high in vitamins C, E, and omega-3 fatty acids supports skin's natural repair processes.
- **Quality Sleep:** During deep sleep, skin undergoes essential regeneration and repair processes critical for healthy aging.

## The Art of Dermatology Difference

At Art of Dermatology, we combine medical expertise with aesthetic sensibility. Our comprehensive skin examinations include advanced technologies

for detecting subtle changes invisible to the naked eye. Our dermatologists take time to understand your concerns, family history, and lifestyle factors affecting your skin health.

Rather than simply treating visible problems, we partner with you in preventative care—identifying risk factors and potential issues before they manifest. This approach not only supports graceful aging but potentially prevents serious health complications.

Don't wait for visible problems to appear. Schedule your comprehensive skin check at Art of Dermatology today and take the first step toward lifetime skin health. Remember, healthy aging isn't about fighting time—it's about supporting your skin's natural processes with expert care and attention.

Your skin's journey deserves the art of professional dermatology.



Art of Dermatology is the premier choice for comprehensive **Dermatology, Surgical, and Aesthetic** services. We are dedicated to offering exceptional care for the diagnosis, treatment, and enhancement of your overall skin health.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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**JON R. BERLIE, M.D.**  
Laser Cataract & Premium  
Lens Replacement Surgeon

Dr. Berlie is a board-certified ophthalmologist who specializes in LASIK and premium lens cataract surgery. He has been serving the Naples community for over 20 years. Dr. Berlie achieves superior visual outcomes for his cataract patients by utilizing the latest lens technology combined with state of the art equipment. His expertise in this area has led the Center For Sight Naples office to be recognized as the "Best Eye Center" in Naples, FL for the past 15 years. In addition to laser cataract surgery, Dr. Berlie performs vision correction procedures including Epi-LASEK and Refractive Lens Exchange (RLE). He is also skilled in reconstructive and cosmetic eyelid surgery. He has been honored as one of America's "Top Doctors" by the prestigious Top Doctors list, published annually by Castle Connolly Medical, Ltd.

Dr. Berlie completed his undergraduate training at the University of Victoria in British Columbia, Canada and the California State University of San Bernardino where he received the California State University of San Bernardino Research Scholarship Award. He then attended Creighton University School of Medicine in Omaha, Nebraska where he graduated Cum Laude, was elected as Class President, and received the Senior of the Year Award. He completed his internship in internal medicine also at Creighton University Medical Center.

Dr. Berlie continued his education at the University of Nebraska Medical Center where he completed his ophthalmology residency and received the awards of Chief Resident and the Resident of the Year Award. Dr. Berlie then went on to Saint Anthony Hospital in Oklahoma City to complete his fellowship training in Oculoplastic and Aesthetic Laser Surgery.



# Regenerative Frontier: MSC Exosomes Show Promise for Parkinson's and Beyond

By Derek P. Wimmer, PA-C

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

## Parkinson's Breakthrough: What Studies Reveal

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

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

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

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

## Expanding Horizons: Applications Beyond Parkinson's

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

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

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

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

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

## Holistic Health Applications

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

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

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

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

## Market Outlook and Challenges

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

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

## Conclusion

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

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

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# Holistic Answers to Commonly Asked Medical Questions

By Svetlana Kogan, MD, IFMCP

**Website question:** My allergies are worse than ever this month. What can I do for relief?

**Dr.Kogan answered:** Scientists are reporting that higher-than-average seasonal temperatures and heightened carbon dioxide levels are creating longer ragweed seasons and more concentrated pollen counts. In addition, the red tide is here in Naples on and off this fall, and as a result more people may be reporting allergic symptoms. To get immediate relief, try irrigating your nasal passages with saline. To do: mix 1/2 teaspoon of sea salt with a pint of lukewarm water and add to a Neti Pot. I like the one by Himalayan Institute available at my online link:  
<https://us.fullscript.com/welcome/skogan>

Tilt your head to one side, then pour a small amount of the solution into one nostril and let it drain out of the other nostril. Repeat the routine on the opposite side, and alternate for a total of three rinses on each side. This is best done in the morning and at night. The salt will act as a natural antibacterial agent, while the water will wash away any impurities and mucus. Another synergistic remedy for allergies is homeopathic sublingual tablets Allergy Relief by Hevert (available at the same online link as above). Use as directed on the box and enjoy allergy relief within an hour of the first dose.

Keep balancing and strengthening your immune system by eating healthy organic foods, and avoiding greasy fried fast foods. Hydrate, get good sleep, and decrease the amount of alcohol intake as it depresses your immune system and activates histamine release which is already at an all time high with allergies. Cardiovascular exercise and improved endurance also contribute to the decrease of incidence of allergic reactions. Think about it this way: if the body is strong and wholesome all around, it will have a better fighting chance when allergens surround it. This accounts for the fact that you can have two people of the same age, gender, and working conditions - and the one with better overall health will have a smaller chance of developing allergies.

**Website question:** My Mom has battled with osteoporosis for a long time, so I've always taken calcium and vitamin D supplements. But I read an article that said these supplements can actually have dangerous side effects. Could I possibly be taking too much calcium and vitamin D?

**Dr.Kogan answers:** Calcium and vitamin D are helpful for prevention of osteoporosis, but the dose depends on your age, medical history and current blood test levels. In some cases, excessive use of supplements can lead to dangerously high levels of calcium in the blood. This in turn, may trigger high blood pressure and kidney failure. Headlines on this subject stem from a report in the Journal of American Nephrology, which found that postmenopausal women, pregnant women, transplant recipients, and those on dialysis, are at the highest risk for this kind of overdose. If you have experienced abdominal pain, excessive thirst, constipation and muscle weakness, see your doctor right away.

Otherwise, rest assured that if you are eating a diet rich in calcium, you will likely have good preventive levels. Calcium rich foods are: yogurt, kefir, cheese, eggs, cruciferous vegetables such as kale, collard greens, and broccoli, spinach, okra, and sardines to mention a few. If you do not have any osteopenia (early osteoporosis) - chances are you currently do not even need to take any calcium pills - just eat calcium rich diet. In fact, multivitamins, joint-support supplements and many antacids can also contain calcium and contribute to excessive intake. As far as the vitamin D goes, it is extremely difficult to get it from the diet - only fatty fish flesh possesses some significant levels. So we truly have to manufacture it in our skin with the aid of the sun's ultraviolet light or take it as a supplement.

Due to our proximity to the equator here in Florida, it is easier to get enough sunlight to help manufacture that vitamin D all year round. If you are fair skinned - it is enough to spend 5-10 total daily minutes outside in the midday. If you are dark-skinned the time required in the sun doubles.



Because of the damaging effects of the midday sun-rays, this exposure may be too much for some people at risk for malignant melanoma. So you may want to just measure your vitamin D 25 (OH) levels with your doctor and if the levels are low - just take a daily supplement of vitamin D3 (the dose depends on your level of deficiency, age and needs - speak to your doc). Vitamin D blood levels should be especially carefully monitored in folks with heart failure, cancers, or hormonal diseases. Overall, I applaud your decision not to take supplements blindly. Everyone's circumstances and needs are different and it is good to team up with your medical doctor to figure out what is best for you.



**Svetlana Kogan, MD, IFMCP**  
The author of 'Diet Slove No More!', Svetlana Kogan, MD, IFMCP is a Board-Certified Internal Medicine, Holistic & Functional Medical Doctor with 25 years of experience. She has appeared as a health expert on prime-time TV and radio stations and has authored hundreds of holistic health articles for internet and print. She moved her Concierge Practice from Manhattan NYC to Naples in 2019. Her Functional Medicine Primary Care Practice is focused on prevention and holistic approach to illness, and longevity.

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# Venous Insufficiency:

## Understanding the Condition and Finding Relief

By Russell Becker, DO

If you frequently experience heavy, aching legs, swollen ankles, or unsightly varicose veins, you may be living with chronic venous insufficiency (CVI). This common yet often underdiagnosed vascular condition affects millions of Americans, reducing quality of life and, when left untreated, leading to serious complications. At Vascular Center of Naples, our dedicated team of vascular specialists provides comprehensive, compassionate care to help patients understand and manage venous insufficiency at every stage.

### What Is Venous Insufficiency?

Venous insufficiency occurs when the valves inside the veins of the legs stop functioning properly. Normally, these one-way valves open to allow blood to flow upward toward the heart and then close to prevent it from falling back down. When the valves become weak or damaged, blood pools in the lower legs, a process known as reflux. This buildup of pressure strains the vein walls, causing them to stretch and bulge, and over time results in the symptoms that many patients recognize as varicose veins or leg discomfort.

Venous insufficiency is not merely a cosmetic concern. It is a progressive circulatory disorder that can worsen significantly without treatment. The condition ranges from mild spider veins to advanced stages involving chronic skin changes and venous ulcers that are difficult to heal.

### Common Symptoms to Watch For

Because venous insufficiency develops gradually, symptoms can be easy to dismiss as normal signs of aging or fatigue. However, persistent or worsening symptoms should always be evaluated by a vascular specialist. The most common signs include aching, heaviness, or cramping in the legs, particularly after prolonged sitting or standing. Patients also often notice swelling around the ankles and feet that tends to worsen throughout the day. Varicose veins — twisted, rope-like veins visible just beneath the skin — are another hallmark sign. As the condition advances, some individuals develop skin discoloration or thickening around the lower legs and ankles, itching or irritation over affected veins, and in severe cases, open sores called venous ulcers that form near the ankles and are slow to heal.



### Who Is at Risk?

Several factors increase the likelihood of developing venous insufficiency. Age plays a significant role, as vein valves naturally weaken over time. A family history of varicose veins or venous disease raises risk considerably, suggesting a strong genetic component. Women are more frequently affected than men, in part due to hormonal changes associated with pregnancy and menopause. Pregnancy itself places increased pressure on leg veins, and multiple pregnancies can compound that effect over time. Occupations requiring long periods of sitting or standing — such as healthcare workers, teachers, and office professionals — also contribute to venous disease. Obesity, prior blood clots, and a sedentary lifestyle round out the most common risk factors.

### Diagnosis and Treatment at Vascular Center of Naples

At Vascular Center of Naples, diagnosis begins with a thorough medical history and physical examination. A duplex ultrasound — a non-invasive imaging study — is then used to map the venous system in detail, identifying any reflux or obstruction. This painless test gives our specialists a clear picture of how blood is flowing and where treatment is needed most.

Treatment plans are individualized based on the severity of the condition and the patient's goals. Conservative management, including compression stockings, leg elevation, and regular physical activity, is often the first line of treatment for mild cases. For patients with more significant venous disease, our team offers a range of minimally invasive procedures. Endovenous laser ablation and radiofrequency ablation use heat energy delivered through a thin catheter to close diseased veins with

minimal discomfort and a quick recovery. Sclerotherapy involves injecting a solution directly into affected veins, causing them to collapse and fade. Microphlebectomy is an option for removing larger surface varicosities through tiny incisions that require no stitches.

### Why Early Treatment Matters

Venous insufficiency is a progressive disease, and waiting too long to seek care can lead to complications that are far more difficult to treat. Chronic inflammation, skin breakdown, and non-healing ulcers can significantly impair mobility and independence. Early intervention not only relieves symptoms and improves appearance but also prevents the disease from advancing to these more serious stages.

### Schedule Your Evaluation Today

You do not have to live with the discomfort and worry that venous insufficiency brings. The experienced vascular team at Vascular Center of Naples is here to provide expert evaluation, accurate diagnosis, and effective treatment tailored to your needs. Whether you are just beginning to notice symptoms or have been struggling for years, we are committed to helping you regain healthy circulation and improve your quality of life. Contact us today at 239-431-5884 to schedule a consultation and take the first step toward healthier veins.

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



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# Inflammatory Lung Conditions and the Emerging Role of Stem Cell Exosomes

By Axel Ruiz, MD, DABFP, CWS

Inflammatory lung diseases such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), asthma, post-viral respiratory syndromes, pulmonary fibrosis, and environmental hypersensitivity pneumonitis pose ongoing challenges for patients and clinicians alike. Traditional treatments such as bronchodilators, corticosteroids, and biologic therapies are effective for managing symptoms and acute exacerbations, but many individuals continue to experience persistent inflammation and impaired lung function.

In recent years, researchers and clinicians have explored next-generation biologic approaches that aim to influence the underlying immune and tissue responses in the lung. One area of interest is stem cell-derived exosomes — microscopic vesicles released by stem cells that carry regulatory molecules involved in intercellular communication.

## What Are Exosomes?

Exosomes are tiny extracellular vesicles that carry microRNAs, growth factors, and signaling proteins between cells. Unlike living stem cells, they are not capable of replicating but can influence the behavior of other cells by modulating immune responses and tissue repair processes.

**Routes of Delivery: Systemic and Local Approaches**  
Two principal methods of administering exosome-based therapies are under investigation:

- **Intravenous delivery:** Introduces exosomes into the bloodstream, where they may interact with systemic immune pathways and support vascular and inflammatory regulation throughout the body.
- **Nebulized delivery:** Converts exosomes into an aerosol that can be inhaled directly into the airways, potentially enabling local interactions with airway epithelial cells and the surrounding immune environment.

## Inflammatory Lung Conditions of Interest

- **COPD:** COPD extends beyond airflow obstruction; it encompasses chronic inflammation, oxidative stress, and progressive structural changes in the lungs. Exosome-based approaches are being investigated for their capacity to influence immune signaling and support tissue homeostasis in this context.



- **Asthma:** Adult-onset and difficult-to-control asthma involve complex immune hypersensitivities. There is emerging interest in whether exosomes might help regulate aberrant immune signaling without broad suppression.
- **Post-Viral Lung Syndromes (Post COVID Syndrome):** Persistent respiratory symptoms following viral infections — including long-term post-viral inflammatory states — may be linked to ongoing immune activation even after the virus has cleared. Immune modulatory signals from exosomes are under study in this setting.
- **Pulmonary Fibrosis:** In fibrosis, chronic inflammation can lead to irreversible structural changes in lung tissue. Exosomes are not expected to reverse established fibrosis but may interact with inflammatory pathways associated with early or ongoing fibrotic processes.
- **Environmental Hypersensitivity Pneumonitis:** This immune-mediated inflammatory response to inhaled antigens highlights the need for environmental management. Biologic modulators like exosomes are being examined for their potential to support immune recalibration once triggers are removed.

## Scientific Context and Future Direction

It is important to emphasize that stem cell-derived exosomes are an area of scientific exploration, not established therapies. Rigorous clinical trials and regulatory evaluation are needed to clarify safety, efficacy, appropriate delivery methods, and long-term

outcomes. Current research draws from preclinical models and early clinical investigations demonstrating the biological activity of exosomes in immune regulation and tissue response.

As research continues, the concept of biological regulation — influencing how cells communicate and respond to stress and injury — may offer new avenues for understanding and potentially supporting lung health in inflammatory conditions.

## 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. Practices in Naples, Fort Myers and Lehigh Acres, FL. His commitment to ongoing learning and patient-centered treatment makes him an invaluable partner in your health journey.

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## WHEN VISION LOSS PROGRESSES: OPTIONS FOR MAINTAINING INDEPENDENCE AND QUALITY OF LIFE

How low vision rehabilitation helps people stay active, engaged, and independent—even when standard treatments are no longer enough

By Dr. Dennis Denick, OD, Dipl ABO, FIALVS - Founder, Low Vision of Southwest Florida

### Have You Been Told “There’s Nothing More That Can Be Done”?

If you have macular degeneration, geographic atrophy, diabetic retinopathy, glaucoma, or another eye condition—and glasses or surgery are no longer helping—you’re not alone.

Many patients feel frustrated or discouraged at this stage.

Low vision rehabilitation focuses on helping people make better use of the vision they still have. Using specialized devices and personalized training, many patients are able to return to activities that are important to them and maintain their independence.

### Vision Loss Affects More Than Just Eyesight

One of the first things many people notice is that reading becomes harder.

You may still be able to see the words—but they don’t come together as easily. Reading feels slower, more tiring, and less enjoyable. Even activities like crossword puzzles or watching television can become frustrating.

Over time, vision loss can lead to reduced independence, social withdrawal, and feelings of depression. Staying visually active—especially with reading—helps keep the mind engaged and supports emotional well-being.

### Vision Changes in Parkinson’s Disease

In recognition of Parkinson’s Awareness Month, it’s important to understand that vision problems are not always caused by eye disease alone.

Parkinson’s disease can affect how the eyes and brain work together. People may notice reduced contrast (things appear faded), difficulty tracking lines of text, decreased blinking leading to dry eyes, and problems judging distances.

These changes can make everyday activities—like reading, walking safely, or navigating new environments—more difficult, even if an eye chart still looks fairly good.

Simple strategies such as improved lighting, increased contrast, and appropriate magnification can make a meaningful difference. In some cases, working alongside occupational therapy can further improve daily function.



### A Fort Myers Success Story

Jane L., an 84-year-old Fort Myers resident who lives independently, began noticing worsening vision from macular degeneration. Even with new glasses, she continued to struggle.

She no longer felt safe driving and began avoiding trips to the grocery store and medical appointments. Over time, she became more isolated and discouraged, as she was no longer able to visit friends or maintain her usual routine.

After a low vision evaluation, she was prescribed a custom bioptic telescope to assist with distance vision. With proper fitting and training, she experienced significant improvement in her ability to see detail and road signs while driving.

“I can see detail and street signs so much better,” she reported.

She also noticed improved ability to recognize faces and watch television more comfortably.

For near tasks, a telemicroscope was prescribed to help with reading and cell phone use, allowing her to stay connected and manage daily activities more easily.

Jane reports feeling more confident, less isolated, and better able to maintain her independence.

*Individual results may vary based on diagnosis and remaining vision.*

### What Is Low Vision Care?

When glasses or surgery are no longer enough, low vision care focuses on improving how you use your remaining vision.

A key part of the evaluation is identifying your goals—whether it’s reading, watching television, recognizing faces, or continuing to drive or work. Solutions are customized based on your vision and your daily needs.

### Advanced Low Vision Technology Available in Southwest Florida

Today’s low vision tools go far beyond simple magnifiers.

Options may include bioptic telescopic glasses, reading microscopes, telemicroscopes, electronic magnification systems, prism side-vision awareness lenses, and contrast-enhancing filters.

With the right tools, many patients experience meaningful improvements in what they can see and do.

### A Team Approach to Better Vision

Low vision care works alongside your eye doctor’s medical treatment.

While your ophthalmologist and optometrist focus on preserving eye health and managing disease, low vision rehabilitation focuses on helping you function more comfortably and effectively in daily life.

In some cases, collaboration with other professionals—such as occupational therapists—can further enhance safety, confidence, and independence.

### Seeing Better. Living Better.

Vision loss can change how you see the world—but it doesn’t have to mean giving up the things you enjoy.

With the right evaluation, tools, and guidance, many people are able to stay active, independent, and engaged.

Early help is important, as changes in how you use your vision may not always show up on a standard eye chart.

**Schedule Your Comprehensive Low Vision Evaluation:  
Dr. Dennis Denick, OD, Dipl ABO, FIALVS**



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If you have been told “nothing more can be done,” a Low Vision evaluation may help you explore additional options.

Appointments are limited.



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## The Importance of Vascularization in Diabetic Wound Healing

Michael J. Petrocelli, D.P.M., F.A.C.F.A.S., C.W.S.P.  
Board Certified Ankle and Foot Surgeon and Board Certified Wound Care Specialist

**D**iabetes is a complicated condition to gain control of, but one of the most painful parts of this disease is the development of diabetic wounds. Often these wounds become “non-healing” due to the adverse effects of the systemic disorder.

Millions of people with diabetes will suffer from diabetic foot ulcers more than once in their lifetimes. Diabetes is a progressive disease that is many times, not taken seriously enough by people predisposed to the disorder.

High blood sugar damages various organs within the body, but also has a severely adverse effect on nerves. This nerve damage happens when the blood supply is limited. The small blood vessels, which supply blood and nutrients to the nerves becomes impaired. When the nerves are no longer fed nutrients, they either die, or their signals to the brain are ineffective. The lack of brain signaling from the nerve endings makes it difficult for a person to feel pain in their foot, so often injuries and these disorders are overlooked. This syndrome is called peripheral diabetic neuropathy.

Because of this nerve damage, people with diabetes are at a higher risk of developing foot ulcers. A foot wound may not sound overly alarming to most people, but foot ulcers can be life-threatening. These small sores go undetected due to the lack of feeling. If a patient delays treatment, foot ulcers can lead to amputation, strokes, heart attacks and severe infections that can spread throughout the entire body.

At Collier Podiatry, they make it a priority to provide advanced diabetic wound services. Collier Podiatry, is the practice of Dr. Petrocelli, a board-certified podiatrist who has been practicing since 1994. With over 20 years of experience, Dr. Petrocelli provides next-level care for diabetic patients with wounds and ulcers. He is board certified in wound healing and can treat any wound below the knee.



### Diabetic Wounds & Vascularization

If you have ulcers and lacerations that never fully heal, you might have a chronic wound. These are most often caused by diabetes mellitus, which causes blood vessels in the feet and hands to grow smaller. The restriction of blood flow damages nerve areas and reduces sensation.

Chronic wounds can also be caused by venous stasis, a condition of the veins in the lower legs, which also deprives your feet of adequate blood flow. With both conditions, when you bump or cut your foot or when you develop an ulcer, the lack of blood flow makes it difficult for the wound to heal.

In the endothelial layer of the dermis, vascularization must take place in order to heal the wound. The neovascularization or also known as angiogenesis is when new microvessels, fibroblast, and collagen begin to proliferate and form along with an increase in oxygen uptake and micronutrients to help grow new tissue, and to build a strong vascular blood flow to supply the proper nutrients to the dermal layers.

Along with Collier Podiatry’s advanced wound healing protocols, Dr. Petrocelli often works directly with vascular surgeons to find ways to restore blood flow to the affected area so that the wound can finally heal.

Collier Podiatry maps out your treatment plan by taking a meticulous culture of your chronic wound, which assists them in deciphering and implementing the best strategy for your diabetic wound care and prescribing the correct medications for your particular case. Collier Podiatry does all of this with the goal of ridding you of your painful chronic wounds once and for all.

### Wound Care Treatment:

- Antibiotics
- Grafts
- Hyperbaric oxygen treatments
- Saline debridement
- Surgery
- Therapeutic footwear
- Wound care
- Vascular Treatment

People with diabetes are encouraged to do self-checks on their feet daily. As soon as you notice any redness or wounds, it is imperative to see your podiatrist.

The caring supportive staff at Collier Podiatry is available to answer your questions and make your appointment. Please visit their website at [www.collierpodiatry.com](http://www.collierpodiatry.com), or call them direct at (239) 775-0019.



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Michael J. Petrocelli  
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# LADIES, DON'T LEAVE YOUR PELVIS IN JUST ANYONE'S HANDS

By Joseph Gauta, MD, FACOG

**Y**our pelvic health is one of the most intimate and vital aspects of your overall well-being — yet it's one of the most overlooked. Millions of women silently endure symptoms that disrupt their daily lives, from unexpected leaks to persistent pelvic pain, assuming these issues are simply a normal part of aging, childbirth, or hormonal changes. The truth is, these conditions are not something you simply have to live with. And more importantly, the specialist you choose to treat them matters enormously.

## Know When to See a Urogynecologist

Not every physician is trained to manage the complex landscape of female pelvic health. If you are experiencing any of the following conditions, it is time to seek the care of a **Urogynecologist** — a specialist with advanced training in both gynecology and urology, specifically focused on disorders of the female pelvic floor:

- **Pelvic organ prolapse** — when pelvic organs such as the bladder, uterus, or rectum drop from their normal position
- **Urinary incontinence** — involuntary leakage of urine during activity, sneezing, or urgency
- **Fecal incontinence** — difficulty controlling bowel movements
- **Frequent urinary tract infections (UTIs)** — recurring infections that suggest an underlying structural or functional issue
- **Chronic pelvic pain** — persistent discomfort that affects quality of life and daily function
- **Complex female pelvic disorders** — conditions that require specialized diagnostic tools and expertise to properly evaluate and treat

These are not problems to brush aside or manage alone. A Urogynecologist brings a level of precision and subspecialty expertise that general practitioners or even OB-GYNs may not be equipped to offer for these specific conditions.

## The Florida Bladder Institute: Advanced Care for Women

At the Florida Bladder Institute, women with pelvic floor disorders have access to some of the most advanced diagnostic and treatment tools available in modern medicine. Whether your condition can be



managed conservatively or requires surgical intervention, the Institute offers a full spectrum of care tailored to your individual needs.

From non-surgical options such as pelvic floor physical therapy, behavioral modifications, pessary fittings, and minimally invasive procedures, to advanced surgical techniques, the Florida Bladder Institute is equipped to guide you through every step of your treatment journey. The goal is always to restore your comfort, confidence, and quality of life using the most effective and least invasive approach possible.

## Surgery Doesn't Have to Mean a Hospital Stay

Many women assume that if surgery is necessary, a hospital admission is unavoidable. That assumption could not be further from the truth — and clinging to it may actually put your health at greater risk.

Hospital-acquired infections (HAIs) are a serious and well-documented concern. Each year, patients undergoing in-hospital procedures face exposure to resistant bacteria and pathogens that simply do not exist at the same levels in outpatient surgical centers. For women already managing pelvic health challenges, an avoidable infection can significantly complicate recovery.

Dr. Gauta at the Florida Bladder Institute performs all of his surgeries on an outpatient basis, meaning you can receive expert surgical care and return home the same day — without an overnight hospital stay. His team also utilizes a dedicated home health care team to support your recovery in the comfort and safety of your own environment, where the risk of infection is dramatically lower.

## A Smarter Choice for Your Wallet, Too

Beyond safety, choosing a surgery center over a hospital setting can result in substantial cost savings for patients. Hospital overhead, facility fees, and administrative costs consistently drive up the price

of procedures performed in traditional hospital settings. Outpatient surgery centers operate with greater efficiency, and those savings are passed directly to you.

For women who are navigating both a health challenge and financial concerns, this distinction matters. High-quality, specialized pelvic care should not come with an overwhelming price tag.

## Take Control of Your Pelvic Health

Your pelvic floor supports your bladder, bowel, and reproductive organs. It plays a role in nearly every movement you make and every function your body performs. When something goes wrong in this region, it affects everything — your confidence, your comfort, your relationships, and your freedom.

You deserve a specialist who understands that. Don't settle for generalized care when subspecialty expertise is available. Don't accept unnecessary hospital risk when safe, effective outpatient options exist. And don't let cost be a barrier when smarter, more affordable paths to healing are within reach.

The Florida Bladder Institute is here to help you reclaim your life — because your pelvis deserves to be in expert hands.

To learn more about your pelvic health please go to our website at [www.FloridaBladderInstitute.com](http://www.FloridaBladderInstitute.com).  
**Call 239-449-7979**



Joseph Gauta, MD



Gabrielle Wright PA-C

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# REBOOT YOUR BRAIN:

## How Exomind™ Helps You Sleep Better and Stress Less

By Dr. Waldo Amadeo

### Why We Lose Sleep as We Age

If you've noticed that sleep doesn't come as easily as it used to — you're not alone. More than half of adults over 50 report regular trouble falling or staying asleep. Changes in hormones, medications, and stress levels all affect how well the brain regulates rest. As we age, our natural melatonin production decreases, and the parts of the brain that control our sleep-wake rhythm begin to slow down.

The result? Restless nights, groggy mornings, and the frustrating feeling that no amount of coffee can fix. But poor sleep doesn't just leave us tired — it affects nearly every system in the body. Chronic sleep deprivation has been linked to weight gain, slower metabolism, depression, reduced cognitive function, and even accelerated aging.

### The Brain's Role in Rest

Most people think of sleep as a physical process — but it's actually governed by the brain. Deep sleep and stress recovery depend on balanced communication between key brain regions like the prefrontal cortex and limbic system. When those areas are overstimulated — often by stress, anxiety, or chronic tension — the brain can't "shut off," even when the body is exhausted.

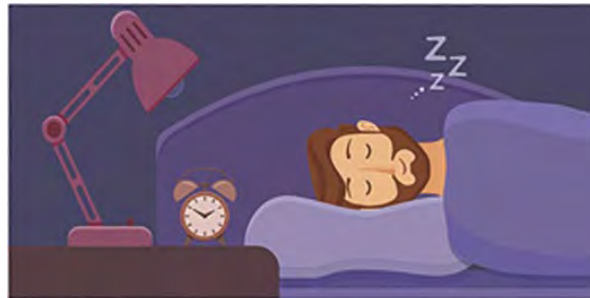
That's why traditional sleep aids often fall short. Pills may temporarily force the body into rest, but they don't correct the underlying brain imbalance that's keeping you awake.

### Meet Exomind™: A Brain Reset for Restful Sleep

At Heal Thy Self Institute, we've introduced a breakthrough technology called Exomind™, designed to naturally retrain the brain's sleep regulation systems.

Exomind™ uses gentle, targeted magnetic stimulation — known as ExoTMS™ — to activate areas of the brain responsible for mood, stress, and circadian rhythm. The treatment is completely non-invasive, drug-free, and FDA-cleared. Sessions are simple, relaxing, and take less than 30 minutes.

By helping the brain rebalance its natural communication patterns, Exomind™ encourages deeper, more restorative sleep — without the side effects or dependency risks of medication.



**"Your body heals when you rest. Exomind™ helps your brain remember how."**

### The Science Behind the Results

In a recent Exomind™ study on Sleep and Stress, patients reported remarkable improvements after just a few sessions:

- 88% experienced better sleep quality and longer sleep duration.
- 71% reported lower stress levels (measured by the PSS-10 stress index).
- Participants noted both easier sleep onset and fewer nighttime awakenings.

These results echo broader research in neuroscience. A 2016 review in *NeuroRehabilitation* found that Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (TMS) — the foundation for Exomind™ — can safely modulate brain circuits involved in recovery, focus, and mood regulation. By improving how the brain communicates with itself, Exomind™ helps restore balance where it matters most — inside the mind.

### Why Sleep Is the Ultimate Anti-Aging Tool

When we sleep, our body doesn't just rest — it repairs. Deep sleep promotes tissue recovery, regulates metabolism, balances hormones, and sharpens memory. When we don't get enough, inflammation rises, cortisol (the stress hormone) stays elevated, and the aging process accelerates.

That's why restoring healthy sleep isn't a luxury — it's essential to longevity.

At Heal Thy Self Institute, Exomind™ therapy fits seamlessly into our whole-body wellness approach. By combining brain-based treatments like Exomind™ with other restorative technologies, we help our patients build energy, calm, and control — from the inside out.

### Real Results, Real People

Our patients often describe their first few Exomind™ sessions as a mental "reset."

- One veteran who struggled with anxiety and chronic insomnia reported his *first full night of sleep in over a decade* after completing a short series of treatments.
- Another patient shared that her energy and mood improved once her sleep returned to normal — saying, "I finally feel like myself again."

Stories like these are why Exomind™ has quickly become one of our most transformative tools for mental and physical wellness.

### Take the First Step Toward Better Sleep

If you've tried everything — new pillows, sleep supplements, meditation apps — and still wake up tired, it might be time to look deeper. The issue may not be your body — it may be your brain's ability to find balance.

At Heal Thy Self Institute, we help patients renew their energy, restore radiance, and defy aging — naturally. Our Exomind™ sessions are customized to support your goals, whether that's better sleep, sharper focus, or reduced stress.

### About the Author

Dr. Waldo Amadeo is a chiropractic physician with advanced training in functional neurology and integrative brain-based care. In his practice, Heal Thyself Institute in Naples, Florida, he specializes in complex neurological conditions, brain injury recovery, and nervous system regulation. His approach integrates structural rehabilitation, neuromodulation, and metabolic strategies to support long-term neurological resilience.



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# The Hidden Stress of Hearing Loss

By Dr. Ava Rhodes, Au.D

**S**tress is a part of everyday life. Work, relationships, and health concerns can all contribute to rising stress levels. But one often-overlooked cause of stress is hearing loss.

Hearing is essential for communication, and when it declines, everyday interactions become more difficult. Struggling to understand speech, missing important details, and feeling isolated can all lead to increased anxiety, frustration, and even physical health problems.

April is Stress Awareness Month, a time to recognize the impact stress has on our well-being. Understanding the link between hearing loss and stress is an important step toward improving overall health and quality of life.

## How Hearing Loss Contributes to Stress

Hearing loss develops gradually, and many people don't realize how much effort they're putting into listening until fatigue sets in. This phenomenon, known as listening fatigue, occurs because the brain works harder to fill in the gaps when hearing isn't clear.

The result? Mental exhaustion, frustration, and heightened stress levels—all of which can take a serious toll on overall well-being.

## Social Anxiety and Isolation

One of the most common effects of hearing loss is social anxiety. When people struggle to hear conversations, they often feel embarrassed asking others to repeat themselves. Instead of participating in discussions, they may choose to withdraw from social situations altogether.

This avoidance can lead to loneliness and isolation, both of which have been linked to increased stress and depression. A study from the *National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders* (NIDCD) found that older adults with hearing loss are more likely to experience depression than those with normal hearing (NIDCD, 2021).

## Workplace Stress and Cognitive Overload

Hearing loss doesn't just affect social life—it can also impact job performance. Employees who struggle to hear clearly may experience chronic stress due to misunderstandings, difficulty following conversations, and decreased productivity.

According to a study by the Better Hearing Institute, people with untreated hearing loss can earn up to \$30,000 less per year than those who treat their hearing loss due to reduced workplace effectiveness (*Better Hearing Institute, 2011*). The fear of missing important details or appearing less competent can create ongoing anxiety.

Additionally, untreated hearing loss increases cognitive load, meaning the brain has to work harder to process sound. This extra strain can lead to memory issues, difficulty concentrating, and mental fatigue, making daily tasks even more stressful.

## The Physical Toll of Stress and Hearing Loss

Stress doesn't just affect emotions—it also has a direct impact on physical health. When the brain is constantly under pressure to interpret unclear sounds, the body responds by releasing cortisol, the primary stress hormone.

Over time, elevated cortisol levels can contribute to:

- High blood pressure
- Increased risk of heart disease
- Weakened immune function
- Poor sleep quality

A study published in *JAMA Otolaryngology* found that untreated hearing loss is associated with a 21% increased risk of developing chronic stress-related conditions, including high blood pressure and heart disease (Contrera et al., 2017).

## Hearing Loss, Stress, and Cognitive Decline

One of the most concerning links between hearing loss and stress is its effect on brain health. Research from Johns Hopkins University found that even mild hearing loss doubles the risk of dementia, while moderate to severe hearing loss increases the risk up to five times (Lin et al., 2011).

When hearing loss goes untreated, the brain receives less auditory stimulation, which can lead to cognitive decline. Combined with stress and social withdrawal, this creates a dangerous cycle that accelerates memory loss and mental decline.

## Reducing Stress Through Better Hearing

The good news is that treating hearing loss can significantly reduce stress and improve quality of life. Modern hearing aids enhance clarity, reduce background noise, and help people engage more comfortably in conversations.

Here's how improving hearing health leads to less stress:

1. **Effortless Communication** – Conversations become easier, reducing frustration and fatigue.
2. **Increased Social Confidence** – People feel more comfortable engaging in social settings and reconnecting with loved ones.
3. **Lower Cognitive Load** – The brain no longer has to work overtime to interpret sounds, improving mental clarity.
4. **Better Sleep and Relaxation** – Less daily stress leads to improved sleep quality and overall well-being.
5. **Improved Workplace Performance** – Clearer hearing means better communication, leading to less anxiety at work.

## Take Action for a Stress-Free Life

If you've noticed increased stress, frustration, or fatigue due to hearing difficulties, now is the time to take action. A comprehensive hearing evaluation can determine the best solution to help you hear clearly, feel less stressed, and improve your overall health.

At AudioNova/Decibels Audiology, we specialize in helping people reconnect with the world through expert audiology care. Our team of Doctors of Audiology provides personalized solutions using the latest hearing technology.

This Stress Awareness Month, take a step toward a healthier, more stress-free life. A simple hearing test could be the key to reducing stress, improving brain health, and bringing joy back to everyday interactions.

**Schedule a free hearing test today and take control of your stress and hearing health.**

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# CONTINUUM SURGERY CENTER OF NAPLES:

## Your Preferred Multi-Specialty Ambulatory Surgery Center Evolving Hospital-Based Care for Your Advantage

Naples, Florida, has welcomed a transformative addition to its healthcare landscape: Continuum Surgery Center of Naples. This state-of-the-art, multi-specialty ambulatory surgery center (ASC) is redefining the standard of surgical care by offering patients the expertise of a hospital in a more personalized, efficient, and patient-centered environment. Guided by a commitment to excellence, Continuum Surgery Center is not just an alternative to hospital-based procedures — it is an evolution of them.

### A New Era in Outpatient Surgical Care

Traditional hospital settings, while comprehensive, can often mean lengthy wait times, impersonal experiences, and higher out-of-pocket costs. Continuum Surgery Center of Naples addresses these challenges head-on. As a private concierge ambulatory surgery center, Continuum delivers the surgical precision and advanced technology of a hospital with the intimacy and attentiveness of a boutique practice. From the moment patients walk through the doors, every detail — from the welcoming environment to the streamlined scheduling — is designed with their comfort and safety at the forefront.

What truly sets Continuum apart is its mission to evolve hospital-based care for the patient's advantage. This means more coordinated communication, shorter wait times, a dedicated surgical team, and a recovery experience that feels genuinely supported. Patients are not just cases — they are individuals receiving distinguished care at every step of their surgical journey.

### Comprehensive Specialty Services

Continuum Surgery Center of Naples proudly offers a diverse range of surgical specialties under one roof, making it a true one-stop destination for complex and routine surgical needs alike.

### Pain Management

Our pain management specialists utilize advanced interventional techniques to help patients find lasting relief from chronic pain conditions. Through minimally invasive procedures including nerve blocks, joint injections, and spinal cord stimulation, the program focuses on improving quality of life while reducing dependence on medications.



### Interventional Spine

For patients suffering from spine-related conditions, the interventional spine program offers sophisticated treatment options that can alleviate pain and restore function without the need for traditional open surgery. This approach means faster recovery times and less disruption to daily life.

### Podiatry

From complex foot and ankle reconstructions to routine podiatric procedures, the podiatry services at Continuum address a wide spectrum of lower extremity conditions with precision and compassionate care. The team brings board-certified expertise to every case, surgical or conservative.

### Plastic & Cosmetic Surgery

The plastic and cosmetic surgery team combines artistic sensibility with advanced medical expertise, helping patients achieve their aesthetic goals in a safe, professional environment. Whether undergoing facial rejuvenation, body contouring, or reconstructive procedures, patients benefit from world-class surgeons in an intimate setting.

### Otolaryngology (ENT)

The ear, nose, and throat specialists at Continuum provide surgical solutions for conditions affecting these delicate areas. From sinus procedures and tonsillectomies to advanced head and neck cases, the ENT program utilizes the latest techniques for optimal patient outcomes.

### Breast Surgical Oncology

Continuum offers specialized breast cancer surgery with a focus on comprehensive, compassionate care. Patients have access to expert oncological procedures in an advanced surgical setting, supported by a team committed to guiding them through one of life's most challenging medical experiences.

### Meet Our Distinguished Surgical Team

Continuum Surgery Center of Naples is proud to feature an elite group of surgeons who have been approved and granted surgical privileges at our facility. Each physician brings exceptional training, board certification, and a passion for patient-centered care.

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# Discover Your *Fountain of Youth* with the *European Liquid Facelift* through the Art and Science of Facial Rejuvenation

By: Alina Stanciu, MD, FACS, FAAO, FASRS - Founder & Medical Director, Naples Eye & Aesthetics Institute and MediFace Spa

In the world of facial rejuvenation, surgical facelifts once stood as the only path to reverse aging. But for many patients, surgery feels too invasive, the downtime is too long, and the results are not only dramatic but can be less than the patient's expectations. Dr. Alina Stanciu, a Board-Certified Eye Physician, Surgeon, and Cosmetic Surgeon recognized the need for a gentler, more refined approach to facial rejuvenation – one that enhances your natural beauty rather than altering it with no downtime and better results.

This insight led to the creation of **The European Liquid Facelift**, an innovative, non-surgical procedure developed exclusively by Dr. Stanciu to lift, contour, and rejuvenate the face with precision and artistry.

### A New Era in Facial Rejuvenation

Unlike traditional facelifts, which rely on incisions and skin tightening, the European Liquid Facelift uses strategic injections of advanced dermal fillers such as Sculptra, diluted Radiesse and other dermal fillers integrated into her procedures. The specialized treatments restore lost volume, redefine facial structure, and smooth fine lines while increasing collagen stimulation. This sculpting technique is Dr. Stanciu's own development and performed by her only. Her advanced techniques are designed to lift the mid face, contour the jawline, and refresh the eyes – without surgery, anesthesia, or extended recovery time. The main goal is a natural, youthful result.

What creates this unique youthful look lies in Dr. Stanciu's study of balancing your own anatomy, with carefully applied aesthetics, and artful restraint. Drawing from her medical training and decades of surgical experience, Dr. Stanciu approaches each patient's face as a unique canvas in which she masterfully and artfully improves your youthful look. *"My goal is to restore the natural harmony of the face, not to change it," she explains. "Patients should look rested, youthful, and refreshed – not done, puffy, pulled or tightened."*



Before After

### The Science Behind the Technique

Dr. Stanciu's method combines multi-layered filler placement with advanced techniques to achieve natural lift and contour while minimizing bruising and swelling. The procedure typically takes less than an hour, with visible results immediately after treatment and continued improvement over the following weeks.

**The European Liquid Facelift is often enhanced with the anti-aging face and eye cream, Bella Piel MD, exclusively developed by Dr. Stanciu.** The Bella Piel MD cream promotes post-procedure healing, reflecting her holistic commitment to patient's overall wellness. Significant results have been experienced by patients using her proprietary medical grade skincare line.

This along with bio-stimulatory fillers promote collagen production for longer-lasting rejuvenation. Each treatment plan is personalized, targeting areas where aging has caused volume loss or skin & muscles laxity. The result is a youthful, sculpted appearance with no surgery required. You can stay forever young with slight touch-ups designed to enhance your natural youthful appearance! No surgery required!

### A Surgeon's Precision Meets an Artist's Eye

Dr. Stanciu's expertise in oculo-facial surgery provides her with unparalleled knowledge of facial anatomy, muscle structure, and tissue behavior.

This background allows her to perform cosmetic procedures with the same precision she applies in delicate eye surgeries. With over 20 years of experience, she has earned a reputation for delivering results that are both scientifically advanced and aesthetically refined.

Patients often describe their results as transformative yet completely natural. "Friends tell me I look refreshed, but they can't tell what I've done," one patient shares. "That's how I know it's perfect."

### Experience Matters

Practicing in Naples and Bonita Springs for two decades, Dr. Stanciu leads the Naples Eye & Aesthetics Institute and Mediface Spa, where she and her team specialize in advanced aesthetic and ophthalmologic care. Her boutique-style practice allows for individualized attention and continuity of care – every patient receives treatment directly from Dr. Stanciu herself.

### Where Medicine Meets Art

At its core, the European Liquid Facelift embodies Dr. Stanciu's philosophy: to treat every patient as she would a loved one – with precision, compassion, and artistry.

**To learn more about The European Liquid Facelift and how to maintain your youthful appearance, schedule your consultation today!**

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# MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER: April Is Parkinson's Awareness Month

By Cory Lamar, MD - Board-Certified in Clinical Neurophysiology and Epilepsy

Every April, the medical community, patients, caregivers, and advocates come together to shine a light on Parkinson's disease — one of the most common neurological disorders in the world. At Advanced Neurology Specialists, we believe that awareness is the first step toward better outcomes. This month gives us a powerful opportunity to educate our community, recognize the remarkable courage of those living with Parkinson's every day, and reinforce an essential truth: no one faces this journey alone. Together, we can create a stronger, more informed community for patients and families alike.

## What Is Parkinson's Disease?

Parkinson's disease is a progressive neurological disorder that primarily affects movement. It develops when nerve cells in the brain, particularly in a region called the substantia nigra, begin to deteriorate and produce less dopamine — a chemical messenger that plays a critical role in coordinating smooth, controlled movement. As dopamine levels decline, the brain's ability to regulate movement becomes impaired.

In the United States alone, approximately one million people are currently living with Parkinson's disease, and nearly 90,000 new diagnoses are made each year. It affects people of all backgrounds, though it is more common in individuals over the age of 60 and slightly more prevalent in men than women.

## Recognizing the Signs

Early detection of Parkinson's disease can make a meaningful difference in how effectively it is managed. While each person's experience with the disease is unique, there are several hallmark signs to be aware of. The most recognized symptom is a resting tremor — a rhythmic shaking, often starting in one hand or fingers. Other key motor symptoms include muscle rigidity, slowed movement (bradykinesia), and postural instability, which can increase the risk of falls.

However, Parkinson's is not solely a movement disorder. Non-motor symptoms are equally important and often appear before motor issues emerge. These can include changes in handwriting (becoming smaller or cramped), reduced sense of smell, sleep



sleep disturbances, constipation, soft or muffled speech, and mood changes such as depression or anxiety. If you or someone you love is experiencing any of these symptoms, consulting a neurologist is an important next step.

## Treatment and Living Well with Parkinson's

While there is currently no cure for Parkinson's disease, significant advances in treatment have helped many people maintain a high quality of life for years after diagnosis. At Advanced Neurology Specialists, our team takes a comprehensive, personalized approach to care. Treatment plans may include medications such as levodopa and dopamine agonists, which help replenish or mimic the effects of dopamine in the brain. For some patients, surgical interventions like deep brain stimulation (DBS) can provide significant symptom relief.

Beyond medication, lifestyle plays a vital role in managing Parkinson's. Regular physical exercise has been shown to slow disease progression and improve motor function. Activities such as walking, cycling, swimming, yoga, and even boxing programs designed for Parkinson's patients can dramatically improve balance, strength, and coordination. Occupational therapy, speech therapy, and nutritional guidance are also valuable components of a well-rounded care plan.

## The Role of Caregivers and Community Support

Behind every person living with Parkinson's is often a devoted caregiver — a spouse, sibling, child, or close friend who provides daily support, encouragement, and love. Parkinson's Awareness Month is also

a time to honor these unsung heroes. Caregiving can be physically and emotionally demanding, which is why accessing support resources, caregiver education, and respite care is just as important as patient care itself.

Community support groups, both in-person and online, provide a valuable space for patients and caregivers to share experiences, exchange practical advice, and find comfort in knowing they are not alone. Organizations such as the Parkinson's Foundation and the Michael J. Fox Foundation continue to fund cutting-edge research and provide educational resources for patients and families nationwide.

## Our Commitment to You

At Advanced Neurology Specialists, our mission is to provide expert, compassionate neurological care to every patient who walks through our doors. Whether you have recently been diagnosed, have been managing Parkinson's for years, or simply have concerns about symptoms you've noticed, our team is here to help. We combine the latest evidence-based treatments with personalized attention to help our patients live as fully and independently as possible.

This April, we encourage everyone to wear gray — the color of Parkinson's awareness — to spread the word, support a loved one, and join us in moving forward together. Attend a local awareness event, share educational resources on social media, or simply check in on someone in your life who is navigating this condition. If you have questions about Parkinson's disease or would like to schedule an appointment, please contact our office at 239-667-5878. Together, we can make a difference.



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# Struggling to Walk?

## Understanding Spinal Stenosis and New Treatments

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

**S**pinal stenosis is a condition characterized by the narrowing of the spinal canal, which can compress the spinal cord and nerves, leading to pain, weakness, and mobility issues. This condition primarily affects older adults, as it is often caused by degenerative changes in the spine, though it can also result from congenital factors, trauma, or other spinal disorders. As the spinal canal narrows, pressure on the nerve roots and spinal cord increases, leading to symptoms that can range from mild discomfort to severe impairment.

### Symptoms, Causes, and Diagnosis

Spinal stenosis symptoms vary depending on the location of the narrowing. When it occurs in the cervical spine (neck), individuals may experience neck pain, numbness, tingling, or weakness in the arms and hands. In more severe cases, spinal cord compression can cause balance difficulties and problems with fine motor skills. Lumbar spinal stenosis, which affects the lower back, is more common and typically leads to lower back pain, leg pain, and difficulty walking. Many patients find relief when bending forward or sitting, as these positions reduce nerve pressure.

The primary cause of spinal stenosis is age-related degeneration. Over time, spinal discs lose water content and become less flexible, leading to bulging or herniation. The facet joints can develop arthritis, forming bone spurs that encroach upon the spinal canal. Ligaments may also thicken and contribute to the narrowing. Less commonly, congenital factors, tumors, traumatic injuries, or conditions such as Paget's disease can cause spinal stenosis.

Diagnosis typically involves a medical history review, physical examination, and imaging studies. X-rays, MRIs, and CT scans help confirm the diagnosis by providing detailed views of the spine and revealing nerve compression. MRI is especially useful for visualizing soft tissue changes, while CT scans may be used when MRI is not an option.

### Conservative Treatment Options

Treatment depends on symptom severity. For mild to moderate cases, conservative management is the first approach. Physical therapy strengthens spinal-supporting muscles, improves flexibility, and enhances



posture. Core stability exercises help reduce nerve pressure. Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) like ibuprofen or naproxen can relieve pain, while muscle relaxants or neuropathic pain medications like gabapentin may address nerve discomfort.

### Interventional Pain Management

When conservative measures are insufficient, interventional treatments may be considered. Epidural steroid injections reduce inflammation and pain by delivering corticosteroids into the epidural space. While they do not cure spinal stenosis, they provide temporary relief and improve function. Radiofrequency ablation is another option that uses heat to target and disable pain-transmitting nerves.

### Surgical Treatment Options

Severe symptoms that significantly impact daily life may require surgery. The most common procedure is laminectomy, which removes part of the vertebra to create space for the spinal cord and nerves. This procedure is highly effective in relieving symptoms and improving mobility. In cases of spinal instability, spinal fusion may be performed alongside laminectomy, connecting vertebrae with bone grafts or implants for stability. Though fusion limits flexibility, it prevents further degeneration and movement-related pain.

### Minimally Invasive Surgical Options

Minimally invasive spine surgery techniques offer faster recovery and reduced post-operative discomfort. These procedures use small incisions and specialized instruments to remove bone spurs or thickened ligaments, relieving nerve pressure while minimizing tissue disruption. This results in less blood loss, shorter hospital stays, and quicker rehabilitation.

Robotic-guided surgery has further advanced minimally invasive spine procedures by increasing precision and reducing risks. Using advanced imaging and real-time navigation, robotic systems assist surgeons in placing implants and performing decompression procedures with extreme accuracy. This technology minimizes tissue damage, improves surgical outcomes, and accelerates recovery. Many patients undergoing robotic-assisted spine surgery experience less post-operative pain and a quicker return to daily activities compared to traditional methods.

### Recovery and Lifestyle Modifications

Recovery varies based on the procedure performed and the patient's overall health. Physical therapy is often recommended post-surgery to restore strength and mobility. Patients are encouraged to engage in low-impact activities such as walking or swimming to promote healing and prevent stiffness. Maintaining a healthy weight, practicing good posture, and staying active can help prevent symptom recurrence.

### Conclusion

Spinal stenosis can significantly impact quality of life, but various treatment options are available to alleviate symptoms and restore mobility. Conservative approaches such as physical therapy, medications, and lifestyle modifications help many patients manage symptoms effectively. For severe cases, interventional treatments and surgery provide long-term relief. If you are experiencing persistent back pain, leg pain, or difficulty walking, seeking expert evaluation is essential. The neurosurgeons at Apex Brain & Spine specialize in advanced treatment options tailored to each patient's needs. Contact Apex Brain & Spine today to schedule a consultation and explore the best solutions for your spinal health.



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# NEW HOPE FOR BACK PAIN

## An Interview with Dr. Michael Shaffer

**Health and Wellness Magazine:** Dr. Shaffer, thank you for taking the time to talk with us today. You've been treating patients with chronic pain conditions for more than four decades. For the last few years, you have been combining non-surgical spinal decompression with the M7 MLS Therapy Laser. Can you explain how these therapies work together?



**Dr. Michael Shaffer:** Absolutely. Many patients come to our office with back pain, neck pain, or nerve-related symptoms caused by disc problems or inflammation around the spine. Non-surgical spinal decompression has been one of the most effective conservative therapies we offer for disc conditions. By combining it with the M7 MLS Therapy Laser, we're able to address both the mechanical pressure within the spine and the inflammation surrounding the tissues. This combination allows us to support the body's natural healing process while improving patient comfort.

**Health and Wellness Magazine:** For readers who may not be familiar with spinal decompression therapy, how does it work?

**Dr. Michael Shaffer:** Non-surgical spinal decompression is a computer-guided treatment designed to gently stretch the spine. This controlled stretching creates negative pressure within the spinal discs. When that pressure is reduced, bulging or herniated disc material may retract slightly, which can reduce pressure on nearby nerves. Improved circulation to the disc can also support healing. Patients with conditions such as herniated discs, degenerative disc disease, or sciatica may benefit from decompression therapy because it targets the underlying cause of the pain rather than simply masking symptoms.



**Health and Wellness Magazine:** And where does the M7 MLS Therapy Laser fit into that treatment approach?

**Dr. Michael Shaffer:** The M7 laser adds a powerful anti-inflammatory component. It uses specific wavelengths of light energy to penetrate deep into tissues and stimulate cellular activity. This helps increase circulation, reduce inflammation, and accelerate tissue repair. When spinal discs and surrounding tissues are inflamed, patients often experience significant discomfort. The laser helps calm that inflammatory response, which can enhance the results of spinal decompression therapy.

**Health and Wellness Magazine:** The M7 laser includes a robotic system. How does that technology benefit patient care?

**Dr. Michael Shaffer:** The robotic arm allows the laser to deliver treatment with a high level of precision and consistency. The system is programmed with multiple treatment protocols so we can customize therapy based on each patient's condition. With 50 watts of peak power, the laser can penetrate deeper tissues while maintaining safety. The robotic delivery ensures uniform coverage during treatment, which helps improve accuracy compared to manual application.

**Health and Wellness Magazine:** What types of conditions do you commonly treat using this combination of therapies?

**Dr. Michael Shaffer:** Many of our patients are dealing with chronic back or neck pain related to disc injuries or nerve compression. Herniated discs, degenerative disc disease, and sciatica are some of the most common conditions treated with spinal decompression. When we incorporate MLS laser therapy, we can also address the surrounding inflammation and soft-tissue involvement. In addition, the laser therapy itself can help with arthritis, tendonitis, sprains, strains, sports injuries, and certain nerve-related conditions. Together, these therapies allow us to treat a broad range of musculoskeletal problems.

**Health and Wellness Magazine:** Many people worry that spinal pain will eventually require surgery. How do these treatments provide an alternative?



**Dr. Michael Shaffer:** Both therapies are non-invasive, which means there are no incisions, anesthesia, or surgical recovery involved. For properly selected patients, spinal decompression combined with laser therapy can reduce pressure on nerves, improve mobility, and decrease inflammation. Our goal is always to explore conservative treatment options first whenever possible. Of course, every patient's condition is unique, so a thorough evaluation is essential before determining the most appropriate treatment plan.

**Health and Wellness Magazine:** What kind of feedback have you received from patients since introducing the M7 laser?

**Dr. Michael Shaffer:** The response has been very positive. Many patients report gradual reductions in pain and improvements in flexibility and mobility as treatment progresses. Because both therapies focus on supporting the body's healing mechanisms, the goal is long-term improvement rather than temporary relief.

**Health and Wellness Magazine:** With more than 45 years in practice, what motivates you to continue incorporating new technologies into your clinic?

**Dr. Michael Shaffer:** My goal has always been to provide the best possible care for my patients. Advances in conservative treatments allow us to address complex spinal conditions more effectively than ever before. By combining proven therapies like spinal decompression with technologies such as the M7 MLS Therapy Laser, we can offer patients a comprehensive approach that targets both structural and inflammatory causes of pain.

Dr. Shaffer has been serving Collier County since 1981. He specializes in spinal care, non-surgical spinal decompression, chronic and acute musculoskeletal conditions, injury, and rehabilitation.

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# Step Into Spring: Celebrate National Foot Health Awareness Month

**A**pril is here, and with it comes National Foot Health Awareness Month, a reminder that the foundation of your body deserves attention. Your feet carry you through every step of life, yet they're often the last thing on your mind until discomfort strikes. This spring, it's time to give your feet the care—and support—they truly deserve.

## Everyday Steps Toward Healthy Feet

Healthy feet start with small, simple habits. Wash them daily, keep nails trimmed, and moisturize to avoid cracks and dryness. Choose shoes that support your arches and rotate them to give both your feet and your footwear a break. Socks matter too: moisture-wicking pairs prevent friction and fungal infections, especially as temperatures rise.

Movement is essential. Stretch your calves, wiggle your toes, roll your feet over a tennis ball, or take short walking breaks during the day. These little practices improve circulation, release tension, and help prevent common foot problems.

But sometimes, even with the best habits, aches linger, and not just in your feet, but in your knees, hips, and back. That's where arch support comes in.

## Why Good Feet Is Different

Not all arch supports are created equal. The Good Feet Store offers something different: our 3-Step Arch Support System, designed to build a strong, stable foundation. Unlike off-the-shelf inserts, our arch supports are:

- Semi-rigid and structured, not soft and collapsible
- Made from a proprietary, medical-grade polymer blend
- Designed for long-term biomechanical support
- Personally fitted as part of a multi-stage system
- Backed by a lifetime warranty

This isn't a quick fix or a one-size-fits-all product; it's a foundation built for your unique feet. When your foundation is properly supported:

- Movement feels more stable
- Stress is better distributed
- The kinetic chain functions more efficiently

We don't sell alignment. We sell support that holds. Alignment happens because of it.



## A Foundation That Supports Your Whole Body

Generic inserts may give temporary relief, but they often collapse under pressure. Good Feet arch supports, with their semi-rigid structure, provide lasting support that lets your feet function naturally. This stability carries up through your knees, hips, and back, easing aches and making daily movement more comfortable.

The 3-Step Arch Support System ensures that each support is personally fitted and integrated into your life. From your first step into the store to your first walk with your new supports, the experience is personal, human, and focused on results that last. When your feet are properly supported, simple things like walking around the office, running errands, or enjoying a spring hike feel easier. Your posture improves naturally, your body functions more efficiently, and your aches begin to ease.

## This April, Put Your Feet First

National Foot Health Awareness Month is the perfect excuse to prioritize your foundation.

Combine daily foot care, gentle movement, and custom arch supports from Good Feet, and you're giving your body the stability it needs to thrive.

Your feet carry you everywhere. Give them the care, support, and attention they deserve. With Good Feet, you're not just supporting your arches, you're supporting your whole body, naturally, efficiently, and for the long haul.

This spring, step into comfort, step into confidence, and step into life with feet that are truly ready to carry you forward.

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# ARE YOU OR SOMEONE YOU LOVE SUFFERING FROM LONG COVID OR POTS?

Brain Rejuvenation Clinic of Naples

**L**ong COVID and Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome (POTS) are increasingly understood as complex conditions involving Autonomic Nervous System dysfunction, chronic inflammation, mitochondrial impairment, and reduced oxygen delivery at the cellular level. These conditions reflect a body "stuck" in a low-energy, dysregulated state, where healing mechanisms are impaired rather than absent.

At Brain Rejuvenation Clinic of Naples, we offer effective and non-invasive modalities which help in treating the symptoms of Long Covid / POTS. These are some of the modalities we offer:

- PEMF Therapy
- Molecular Hydrogen Inhalation
- Ultra Sonic Vibration
- Photo biomodulation
- Hyperbaric Chamber
- Nano- supplement Protocol

## PEMF- Pulsed Electromagnetic Field



Several therapies aim to support the body and restore balance. Pulsed Electromagnetic Field (PEMF) therapy may help improve blood flow, reduce inflammation, and support how cells communicate and produce energy. Hydrogen inhalation therapy works as a gentle but potent antioxidant, helping to reduce harmful oxidative stress without interfering with normal healing processes.

## Ultrasonic Vibration Device



Sonic or Vibrational therapies, including sound wave stimulation, may help regulate the Autonomic Nervous System by activating the Parasympathetic response, which is often suppressed in POTS. Meanwhile, Photo-Biomodulation (red and near infrared light therapy) directly supports mitochondrial function by stimulating cytochrome c oxidase, leading to increased ATP (energy) production and improved tissue repair.

## Hyperbaric Chamber



Among these approaches, Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy (HBOT) shows the strongest clinical promise. By delivering oxygen under pressure, HBOT enhances oxygen availability in tissues, reduces inflammation, and improves neurological and cognitive symptoms.

## Photo-Biomodulation



These therapies reflect a broader naturopathic strategy: restoring energy production, improving circulation, reducing inflammation, and rebalancing the nervous system to support the body's innate healing capacity. At Brain Rejuvenation Clinic of Naples, we create a protocol that is tailored to your specific needs. Reach out for more information!



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## POWERS OF ATTORNEY: SIMPLE TO ESTABLISH – POTENTIAL DIFFICULTIES WITHOUT THE NEED FOR A THOUGHTFUL POWER OF ATTORNEY

By Ryan G. Welker

**C**reating a Power of Attorney is among the most straightforward steps in estate planning, yet its absence at a critical moment can lead to significant complications. With a properly prepared power of attorney, you can appoint a trusted individual—your “agent”—to handle your financial and legal affairs if you become unable to do so yourself. While the process itself may seem simple, this document is an indispensable component of a comprehensive estate plan and carries far more weight than many realize.

Many people mistakenly think estate planning only concerns what happens after death, focusing on documents like wills and trusts. However, a well-rounded plan also addresses unexpected events during your lifetime—such as illness, injury, or cognitive decline—that could leave you unable to manage your own affairs. In these situations, a power of attorney ensures that everyday life can continue with minimal disruption.

Without a power of attorney, your loved ones may be forced to initiate a court-supervised guardianship. This means going to court, securing medical evaluations, and having a judge determine whether you are legally incapacitated. The process can be time-consuming, costly, and emotionally taxing for families—and, importantly, it leaves the choice of your guardian in the hands of the court rather than your own.

By contrast, a power of attorney allows you to proactively select your agent and define the scope of their authority. In many cases, this proactive step eliminates the need for guardianship altogether, giving you greater control over who will manage your affairs if the need arises.

Despite their relative simplicity, powers of attorney should be executed with care. The powers you grant can be broad—your agent may access your bank accounts, sign contracts, oversee investments, or even handle real estate transactions, depending on what you authorize. It's crucial to be thoughtful about both whom you appoint and exactly what powers you grant.

Avoid the temptation to use a “cookie-cutter” or one-size-fits-all power of attorney. Each person's financial situation, family relationships, and goals are unique. Some may want their agent to have wide-ranging authority, while others may wish to limit their agent's powers to specific tasks. Your power of attorney should be customized to fit your needs, not simply copied from a generic template.

Florida law highlights certain especially sensitive powers—often called “hot powers”—that must be explicitly stated and separately initialed by the person granting them in order to be effective. These may include the authority to create or amend trusts, make gifts, change beneficiary designations, or waive survivorship rights. Because these powers can have a major impact on your estate and assets, Florida requires you to specifically acknowledge and approve each one. Agents are bound to comply strictly with the terms and limits set forth in the power of attorney, underscoring the need for careful drafting and consideration.

To reinforce the importance of these authorities, Florida mandates that each must be individually initialed by the person granting the power. This requirement is more than just a procedural step—it ensures you fully understand the significance of what you're authorizing.

In my practice, I emphasize this point with my clients. Before reviewing these powers, I often advise clients to “put the pen down” so we can thoroughly discuss each authority. The goal is to prevent casual or uninformed initialing of provisions that deserve careful thought. Sometimes, half-jokingly but seriously enough, I suggest clients toss their pens aside to avoid accidental initials. Only after we've discussed the implications do we consider which powers should be granted.

This level of caution is warranted because these authorities can profoundly affect your finances and estate plan. For instance, granting broad gifting authority without careful consideration could lead to unintended large asset transfers or significantly alter your intended estate plan. The law's deliberate steps exist for good reason—these decisions should never be rushed.

If you have a power of attorney from another state, it's important to note that while Florida generally recognizes documents validly executed elsewhere, practical complications may arise. Financial institutions and other organizations sometimes hesitate to accept older or out-of-state documents and may require additional paperwork or proprietary forms, even if the law says otherwise. If you've recently moved to Florida, it's wise to review and update your power of attorney to ensure it meets Florida's requirements.

Proper execution is essential. In Florida, powers of attorney must be signed with the same formalities as other important estate planning documents—usually

in the presence of two witnesses and a notary. These formalities help confirm the document's validity and protect against fraud or undue influence.

Ultimately, a power of attorney is one of the most valuable tools in your estate planning arsenal. While it's easy to create, not having one can lead to court involvement, delays, and unnecessary stress for your loved ones.

Remember, estate planning is about preparing for life—not just for what happens after death. By thoughtfully preparing a power of attorney, you ensure that if the unexpected occurs, someone you trust can step in and manage your affairs smoothly. Taking the powers you grant seriously is not just prudent—it's essential to safeguarding your interests and those of your family.

Finally, keep in mind that appointing an agent under a power of attorney does not limit your own authority; you are only defining what the agent can do, not restricting your own actions while you have capacity. You retain the right to change any aspect of your power of attorney at any time, including the powers granted, the agents named, and the order of succession, as long as you have capacity.

While you're considering these matters, also think about designating a health care surrogate—the person you trust to help make medical decisions on your behalf. Without this simple document, a guardianship might be necessary if you lose capacity and haven't made your wishes known in advance.

**Attorney Ryan G. Welker** is an Associate at Woodward, Pires and Lombardo, P.C., a full-service law firm. He practices in Estate Planning, Estate Administration (including trust and probate administration), and guardianship matters. Mr. Welker is admitted to practice law in Florida and Ohio.



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# Reclaim Your Calm: A Complete Guide to Stress Management with TheDRIPBaR

**S**tress has become one of the defining health challenges of modern life. From relentless deadlines and financial pressure to constant digital overload, the body's stress response is frequently activated — often without any real chance to recover. Over time, chronic stress erodes physical health, mental clarity, and emotional resilience. The good news is that effective, targeted relief is available. At TheDRIPBaR, we offer a suite of science-backed treatments designed to target stress at every level, helping you move from survival mode back to feeling like yourself again.

## What Chronic Stress Does to Your Body

When you're stressed, your body releases cortisol and adrenaline, triggering the "fight-or-flight" response. In short bursts, this is protective and necessary. But when stress becomes chronic, elevated cortisol disrupts sleep, weakens immunity, impairs digestion, and drives systemic inflammation throughout the body. Anxiety symptoms often compound the problem, creating a feedback loop that feels impossible to escape. The longer it goes unaddressed, the harder it becomes to break the cycle. Effective relief means addressing multiple systems at once — and that's exactly what TheDRIPBaR's protocols are designed to do.

## IV Soother Drip: Calm Delivered to Your Cells

Chronic stress rapidly depletes the key nutrients your nervous system depends on — magnesium, B vitamins, vitamin C, and electrolytes. When these run low, anxiety increases, energy crashes, and the body struggles to regulate itself. TheDRIPBaR's IV Soother Drip is specifically formulated to replenish these nutrients directly into the bloodstream at near-100% bioavailability, completely bypassing the absorption limitations of oral supplements.

The result is a calmer nervous system, reduced inflammation, and better adrenal support. Many clients report noticeable mental clarity and a deep sense of relaxation within hours of their session — a genuine reset that goes beyond anything a pill or powder can deliver on its own.

## Peptides: Semax/Selank Blend for Anxiety and Stress

For targeted neurological support, TheDRIPBaR offers the Semax/Selank peptide blend — a cutting-edge approach to managing anxiety and stress at the brain chemistry level.



**Semax** regulates the stress response by modulating brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF), supporting cognitive function and helping the brain recover from stressors more efficiently. **Selank** is an anxiolytic peptide that influences GABA receptors and modulates serotonin and dopamine activity — similar to how many anxiety medications work, but without the dependency risk or unwanted side effects.

Together, this blend sharpens cognitive resilience while quieting the anxiety response. For those dealing with persistent stress, mental fog, or anxiety that interferes with daily function, this peptide protocol can be genuinely life-changing.

## Infrared Sauna and Halotherapy: Decompress from the Outside In

Heat therapy has been used for centuries to promote relaxation and healing, and modern science continues to validate its benefits. TheDRIPBaR's Infrared Sauna uses infrared light to penetrate deeply into the body's tissues — going far beyond what a traditional sauna can offer. It promotes endorphin release, lowers cortisol, eases muscle tension, and improves circulation. Regular sessions are associated with better sleep quality and reduced symptoms of anxiety and depression, two of the first casualties of long-term stress.

Paired with the sauna is Halotherapy — dry salt therapy. Breathing pharmaceutical-grade salt aerosol reduces airway inflammation and activates the parasympathetic nervous system, your body's

natural "rest-and-digest" mode. The serene, meditative environment encourages slow, restorative breathing — one of the most evidence-supported stress reduction practices available. Clients consistently describe the combined infrared and salt experience as deeply grounding and profoundly restorative.

## A Holistic Path to Lasting Relief

TheDRIPBaR's protocols — the IV Soother Drip, Semax/Selank peptide blend, Infrared Sauna, and Halotherapy — each target a different dimension of the stress response. Together, they form a comprehensive approach that addresses nutrient depletion, neurochemical imbalance, physical tension, and inflammation all at once.

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# APRIL IS PARKINSON'S AWARENESS MONTH

By Kathy V. Verdes, APRN, A-GNP-C

**A**pril marks a pivotal moment in the fight against Parkinson's disease, as it's globally recognized as Parkinson's Awareness Month. This month serves as a beacon of hope, shedding light on the realities faced by millions worldwide grappling with this neurodegenerative disorder. Through education, advocacy, and support, Parkinson's Awareness Month aims to dispel myths, raise awareness, and inspire action. Here are key facts and insights to deepen our understanding of Parkinson's disease and the significance of April as its dedicated awareness month.

## The Origins of Parkinson's Awareness Month

Established in April 1997 by the Parkinson's Disease Foundation (PDF), now merged with the Parkinson's Foundation, Parkinson's Awareness Month aims to honor the birth month of Dr. James Parkinson. Dr. Parkinson's seminal work, "An Essay on the Shaking Palsy," published in 1817, was the first detailed description of the disease, laying the foundation for future research and understanding.

## Understanding Parkinson's Disease

Parkinson's disease is a progressive neurodegenerative disorder that affects movement, primarily due to the loss of dopamine-producing brain cells. Common symptoms include tremors, bradykinesia (slowed movements), rigidity, and impaired balance. However, Parkinson's can also manifest with non-motor symptoms such as cognitive impairment, depression, and sleep disturbances.

## Global Impact and Prevalence

Parkinson's disease affects people of all races and ethnicities, with over 10 million individuals worldwide living with the condition. As the global population ages, the prevalence of Parkinson's is expected to rise significantly, making awareness and early intervention crucial.

## Advancements in Research and Treatment

Over the years, significant progress has been made in understanding Parkinson's disease, leading to advancements in treatment and management strategies. From medication and deep brain stimulation to promising research in neuroprotection and disease-modifying therapies, ongoing efforts offer hope for improved quality of life and ultimately, a cure.



## Challenges and Stigma

Despite progress, Parkinson's disease continues to pose significant challenges, both for those living with the condition and their caregivers. Stigma and misconceptions surrounding Parkinson's can lead to social isolation and barriers to accessing support and resources. Parkinson's Awareness Month aims to challenge these stereotypes and foster greater understanding and empathy.

## Empowering Advocacy and Support

Parkinson's organizations and advocacy groups play a crucial role in providing support, resources, and a unified voice for the Parkinson's community. From fundraising events and awareness campaigns to educational initiatives and support groups, these organizations empower individuals to navigate their Parkinson's journey with dignity and resilience.

## The Power of Community

Parkinson's Awareness Month serves as a rallying point for the global Parkinson's community, bringing together individuals, families, caregivers, healthcare professionals, researchers, and advocates. Through shared experiences and collective action, this community drives positive change, raises funds for research, and amplifies the voices of those affected by Parkinson's.

## The Importance of Early Detection and Intervention

Early diagnosis and intervention are key to managing Parkinson's disease effectively. Recognizing the early signs and symptoms, seeking medical evaluation, and accessing specialized care can help individuals optimize their treatment plan and maintain independence for as long as possible.

## Inspiring Stories of Hope and Resilience

Amidst the challenges posed by Parkinson's disease, stories of hope, resilience, and triumph abound. From individuals courageously navigating their Parkinson's journey to researchers tirelessly working towards a cure, Parkinson's Awareness Month celebrates the strength and resilience of the human spirit.

## Joining the Movement

As April unfolds, let us join hands in solidarity with the Parkinson's community. Whether through raising awareness, participating in fundraising events, or advocating for policy change, each of us has the power to make a difference in the fight against Parkinson's disease.

In conclusion, Parkinson's Awareness Month in April serves as a poignant reminder of the impact of Parkinson's disease on individuals, families, and communities worldwide. By raising awareness, dispelling myths, fostering empathy, and promoting advocacy, we can collectively strive towards a future free from the burden of Parkinson's. Let us stand together, united in our pursuit of a world where Parkinson's disease is no longer a source of fear or uncertainty, but rather a chapter in the history of medical triumphs.

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## KATHY VERDES APRN, A-GNP-C

Kathy earned her Master's in Nursing Degree from Kaplan University in 2017. Kathy is certified by the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners (AANP) as an Adult-Gerontology Primary Care Nurse Practitioner (A-GNP-C). Prior to her Advanced Practice Registered Nurse Degree (APRN), Kathy managed a weight loss clinic for over 6 years right here in Naples. Kathy has since then managed acute and chronic care illnesses in different settings, and she genuinely enjoys spending time with her patients.



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# PICKLEBALL

By Robert Swift, D.O.

Board Certified Orthopedic Surgery and Sports Medicine



**P**ickleball is a recreational sport that is gaining in popularity and has become one of the fastest growing sports in America. The sport is easy to learn, promotes competitiveness and socialization, and is a great form of low impact exercise.

The game was developed in 1965 by a former Washington state congressman, Joel Pritchard. He and a friend were looking to play badminton, but unable to find a full set of rackets they improvised, playing with wooden ping-pong paddles and a perforated plastic ball. With this collection of equipment, they played on an asphalt surface using a badminton net adjusted to a height like that of tennis. The friends eventually developed a permanent set of rules. Their intention was to develop a sport the entire family could enjoy together. Within two years, the first permanent court was constructed next door to Joel Pritchard's home. Within a few more years, a corporation was developed to protect the sport. Since its inception, the game has continued to grow, and is now played in all 50 states.

The game was named after the Pritchards' dog, Pickles. In the early development of the game, there no official name assigned to it. As the game progressed, an official name was needed, and "Pickleball" was it.

Pickleball is currently the fastest growing sport in the US. The Sports & Fitness Industry Association (SFIA) estimated that in 2017 there were over 2.8 million Pickleball players in the U.S., which was an increase of 12.3% from the previous year. Further details from the 2016 SFIA report included that over 1.5 million people were 'casual' participants (play one to seven times per year), and that 930,000 were 'core' participants (play eight or more times per year). Further breakdown of participation rates by age showed that 'core' participants tend to be older, with 75% of core participants being age 55 or older, and 42% of all players over 65 considered to be core participants. Along with fitness benefits of the sport, many older adults enjoy playing Pickleball because it promotes competitiveness and socialization.

## Associated Injuries

A recent literature search did not reveal any published research describing specific injuries related to Pickleball. However, there is published research on injuries associated with other racket sports. In tennis, a similar style racket sport played on a similar surface, the most common injuries are sprains/strains of the lower extremity, followed by sprains/strains of the upper extremity and injuries of the trunk and low back. Given the underhand nature of the game play of Pickleball, one would expect a lower occurrence of shoulder

injuries than in tennis where overhand serving is a major component of the sport. However, there is still a risk for a variety of other upper extremity injuries in Pickleball.

## Acute Injuries

Acute traumatic injuries in Pickleball can result from falls, secondary to a sudden turning or pivoting movement. Sprains of the ankle joint, particularly with inversion, are very common in tennis and the mechanism for this injury would be similar for Pickleball. Depending on the severity of the sprain, this injury could result in significantly impaired movement or inability to bear weight. If weight bearing is painful, initial treatment may initially include crutches (if needed), or immobilization with an ankle brace. Further treatment consisting of relative rest, icing, compression, and elevation (RICE) are generally useful in the treatment of sprains of the ankle and other joints. Depending on severity, ankle sprains can take several weeks to resolve, but patients can generally resume their previous level of play if proper steps are taken during the healing process. Return to sport participation for this and other injuries is often expedited by physical therapy.

Other injuries that can arise near the ankle can involve the Achilles tendon. These can include an Achilles strain, which can present as pain anywhere along the tendon, from the musculotendinous component at the lower calf muscle, to the body of the tendon, to its insertion at the calcaneus. Treatment of Achilles tendon strains typically consists of relative rest, focused stretching of the tendon, and eccentric loading exercises. This injury can take weeks to fully heal. A much less common but more severe injury, Achilles tendon rupture, can occur with forceful movement of the ankle, usually an abrupt plantarflexion. This injury usually results in severe pain in the posterior ankle and an inability to bear weight or actively plantarflex the foot. This type of injury will often require surgical repair and should be evaluated promptly for optimal long term outcome.

Knee injuries are also common in racket sports such as tennis, and likely to affect Pickleball players as well. These can range from acute sprains of the knee to meniscal and ligamentous injuries. A sprain of the knee can affect the collateral ligaments, caused by rapid starting/stopping and sudden turning or pivoting movements. A sprain will often result in pain with weight bearing, usually worse with lateral movement. Acute injuries of the meniscus can include tears, which can present with the same mechanism as a ligament sprain, but often will result in the inability to

bear weight, decreased range of motion, and significant swelling. Treatment of these injuries can range from initial non-weight bearing, to bracing, to physical therapy, or even potential surgical repair. Any knee injury that results in pain with weight bearing, decreased range of motion, or significant swelling should prompt immediate evaluation by a physician.

Muscle groups in the lower extremity that can be acutely strained include the hamstring muscles, quadriceps, hip flexors and adductors, and calf. Many strains can involve partial tearing of the muscle body or tendon. These injuries can present as pain in the muscle with stretching or muscle contraction. Mild sprains usually respond to RICE treatment, and participants can usually return to their activity in a matter of a few weeks. More severe muscle strains or tears may have more severe pain, associated swelling or bruising of the muscle, and tend to take longer to recover. As stated above, many of these injuries will respond well to physical therapy, and this can often help to assist players to return to their previous level of competing and can often address other potential biomechanical inefficiencies that can be future injury risks.

For the upper extremity, the wrist is a common site of tennis injury, and Pickleball players are at risk as well. Falls onto an outstretched hand are a common mechanism for wrist sprains and can also result in a fracture. The elbow and shoulder can also be injured by falls. Minor bruising to the upper extremity may be initially treated with RICE, but an injury to the upper extremity that causes significant swelling, bruising, or limited range of motion should prompt a player to be evaluated.

Pickle ball can be a great way to enjoy the beautiful weather and there are many courts in the SWFL area. The benefits of exercise, and socialization out way the risks of injury. Even when we are at our most competitive, it is important to remember to play it safe, give up the point. That way you can always come back to the court to play again.

Always stretch and warm up gently before competitive play. Make sure you are getting your physical once a year to understand and appreciate your health. Drink plenty of water and the occasional sports drink. Wear appropriate gear, and footwear.

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# The Relationship Between Hormones and Mental Health

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

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

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

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

## HORMONES AFFECTING MENTAL HEALTH

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

### Cortisol

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

#### Actions controlled by cortisol include:

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

### Estrogen

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

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



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

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

### Progesterone

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

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

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

### DHEA

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

### T3 and T4

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

### Melatonin

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

## How Hormones Affect Mental Health

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

## HORMONES CAN AFFECT MENTAL HEALTH IN THE FOLLOWING WAYS:

### Increases Mood Disorders

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

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

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

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

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

### Impacts Sleep

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

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

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

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

#### **Causes Mood Swings**

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

#### **Lowers Self Esteem**

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

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

#### **Increases Stress**

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

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

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

#### **Affects Fertility**

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

### **WHAT YOU CAN DO TO IMPROVE YOUR MENTAL HEALTH**

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

#### **Exercise Regularly**

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

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

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

#### **Improve Sleep Hygiene**

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

#### **Some ways to improve sleep hygiene include:**

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

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

#### **Correct Imbalanced Hormones**

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

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

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

### **Receive Help for Your Mental Health Struggle**

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

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

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

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# Stress Management

By Neetu Malhotra, MD

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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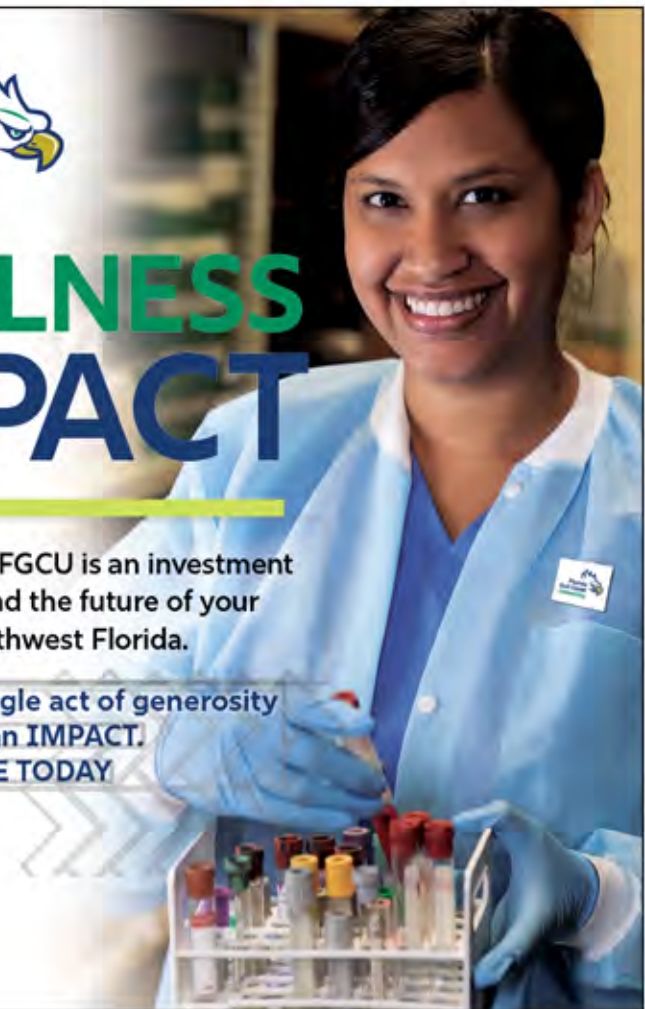
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# STRESS BUSTERS: Focus on Mindfulness, Emotion Regulation, Distress Tolerance, Self-Compassion

By Rick Weber

**T**he word “stress” has a negative connotation. But stress can be good—to a certain point.

Stress motivates us to take action and perform at an optimal level. As the Yerkes-Dodson law dictates, performance increases with physiological or mental arousal. Moderate stress is ideal for peak performance. If we don’t have enough stress present, we may be less likely to take action or be a little too comfortable. If we have too much stress present, we may be more likely to become overwhelmed and anxious—and our performance declines.

“Developing habits to manage stress takes time and experimentation to see what works best for you,” says Dr. Allison Jedinak, PsyD, Senior Director of the Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) unit in Florida Gulf Coast University’s Marieb College of Health and Human Services.

“You may also find you need different tools in different environments. When we approach change, we may become discouraged when we don’t see immediate results. Change is difficult! We tend to engage in familiar patterns as a comfort even if these patterns are dysfunctional or unhelpful. Progress will not likely be linear. Consider what you can do to become 1% better each day. (Check out *Atomic Habits* by James Clear for more on becoming 1% better every day!) Focus on tried-and-true strategies for general health and stress management, including proper sleep, nutrition and physical movement.”

April is Stress Awareness Month, and that is one of CAPS’ main jobs on campus for FGCU students. Incorporating techniques from person-centered, cognitive-behavioral and dialectical behavior therapies, Jedinak specializes in working with college students and has experience treating anxiety, depression and relational concerns.

But many of the practices being utilized with her students for their successful academic journeys could also be applied to everybody’s lives.

“An important first step in developing emotional and relational intelligence is awareness,” she says. “Can you name what you are feeling in the moment? What might this emotion signal to you? If you are feeling angry, reflect on what may be happening for you on a deeper level.”

“For example, if someone cuts you off in traffic, you may feel angry and frustrated. This may connect to deeper values related to fairness, or past experiences of being ignored or dismissed. In relationships, consider what makes you engage versus retreat. What relationship conditions make you more likely to communicate openly and honestly? Thriving relationships tend to involve emotional safety, active listening and presence, ability to resolve conflict, reliability, empathy and validation.”

There are many approaches to therapy. One modality, used in college counseling centers, is Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), developed by Dr. Marsha Linehan. We can learn about ways to manage stress through:

- **Mindfulness.** “According to DBT, mindfulness is intentionally living in awareness of the present moment and not judging or rejecting the present moment. To increase your ability to be in the moment, consider grounding yourself using the five senses. What can you see, feel, hear, smell and taste?”

- **Emotion regulation.** “Emotion regulation is understanding, managing and reducing the intensity of overwhelming emotions to improve resilience. Be aware of emotion myths such as: emotions are bad/weak and should be avoided; there is a ‘right’ way to feel in a given situation; and being emotional means being out of control. To manage emotions, which can lead to increased stress, check the facts. Emotions are set off by our thoughts and interpretations of events instead of the events themselves.

How to check the facts:

1. What is the emotion I want to change?
2. What is the event prompting my emotion?
3. What are my interpretations, thoughts and assumptions about the event?
4. Am I assuming a threat?
5. What’s the catastrophe?
6. Does my emotion and/or its intensity fit the actual facts?

- **Distress tolerance.** “At times, we may need to rapidly shift our emotions from a heightened or crisis state to function in a present moment. TIPP skills from DBT may help: temperature change, intense exercise, paced breathing and progressive muscle relaxation. To engage in temperature change, use cold water or ice packs on your face/eyes for 20-30 seconds to trigger the dive reflex, which instantly lowers heart rate and brings calm. An example of intense exercise is to do jumping jacks to dissipate adrenaline and stress. Paced breathing activates our parasympathetic nervous system. Consider the 4-7-8 method or box breathing methods.

- **4-7-8:** inhaling through the nose for four seconds, holding the breath for seven seconds and exhaling fully through the mouth for eight seconds, repeated four times to reduce stress, anxiety and aid sleep.

- **Box breathing:** inhaling, holding the breath, exhaling and holding again, typically for four seconds each, creating a 16-second cycle.

- **Self-compassion.** Self-compassion is the act of being kind to oneself. It is a muscle we must exercise. Self-talk tends to be critical and may connect to messages that were communicated about us or our performance from our parents, teachers, coaches, bosses, etc. Self-compassion involves three components, self-kindness, acknowledging common humanity and mindfulness. Put self-compassion into action by using kind and comforting words toward oneself when struggling, recognize that failure is a part of being human, balance perspective instead of over-identifying problems and proactively comfort and soothe yourself.” She recommends checking out more information about self-compassion, including resources for practice, on Dr. Kristin Neff’s website ([self-compassion.org](http://self-compassion.org)).

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# PEAK ALLERGY SEASON IN FLORIDA:

## Surviving the Spring Pollen Storm

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

### Why April and May Is Florida's Allergy Peak

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

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

### Signs You're Experiencing Seasonal Allergies

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

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

### Effective Strategies to Combat April Allergies

#### AT HOME

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

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

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

#### PERSONAL HABITS

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

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

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

#### MEDICAL INTERVENTIONS

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

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

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

#### Long-term Solutions

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

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



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

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



**Kathleen Rocuant, Au.D FAAA** received her Doctorate from the Arizona School of Health Sciences and is Board Certified by the American Board of Audiology. She specializes in Hearing Evaluations, Hearing Aids and Hearing Solutions. She is a Fellow American Academy of Audiology and a member of the American Academy of Audiology and the Florida Academy of Audiology.



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# Supporting Safety and Specialized Lymphedema Care Across Southwest Florida

By James Ferrara, OTR/L, CLWT, and Lexie Lundquist, OTD, OTR/L, CLWT

As people experience changes in routines — whether due to travel, visitors, shifting home layouts, or fluctuations in daily activity — mobility and balance needs naturally shift as well. These transitions can impact confidence, safety, and independence within the home. Mobile Rehab & Lymphatics supports patients through these changes by delivering mobile outpatient occupational and physical therapy services directly where they live. This approach removes barriers to care, strengthens functional ability, and ensures therapy aligns with each patient's real environment and daily demands.

Mobile Rehab & Lymphatics specializes in two primary areas: fall prevention with integrated neurological rehabilitation, and evidence-based lymphedema care through Complete Decongestive Therapy (CDT). By combining accessibility with clinical expertise, the team helps patients maintain independence and improve their quality of life.

## Fall Prevention & Neurological Rehabilitation: Promoting Safety in the Home

Small adjustments in daily life — hosting visitors, moving furniture, increased errands, or new patterns in activity — can all impact balance, endurance, and the way a person moves through their home. As a provider of mobile outpatient OT and PT services, Mobile Rehab & Lymphatics offers practical, personalized fall-prevention therapy designed to reduce risk and enhance confidence.

Our fall-prevention services include:

- Home safety and environmental assessments
- Balance and gait retraining
- Strengthening and functional mobility programs
- Transfer training for home and community mobility
- Footwear and assistive device recommendations
- Pacing and energy-conservation strategies for busy days

Because therapy is provided in the home, recommendations are specific to the patient's personal environment—not a simulated clinic layout. This allows therapists to address real fall risks and make immediate, applicable changes to support safety.

## Neurological Rehabilitation Integrated Into Fall Prevention

Many individuals navigating changes in balance may also be managing neurological or sensory conditions. Mobile Rehab & Lymphatics incorporates evidence-based neurological rehabilitation into fall-prevention plans to strengthen underlying systems related to balance, coordination, and mobility.

Our occupational and physical therapists provide specialized treatment for individuals with:

- Stroke
- Parkinson's disease
- Multiple sclerosis
- Neuropathy
- Vestibular and balance disorders

Intervention focuses on neuroplasticity-based exercise, proprioceptive training, postural control, dynamic and static balance activities, and task-specific mobility work. By combining neurological rehabilitation with fall-prevention strategies, patients receive a well-rounded, functional approach to safety that supports long-term independence.

## Specialized Lymphedema Management Through Complete Decongestive Therapy (CDT)

In addition to fall-prevention and neurological rehabilitation, Mobile Rehab & Lymphatics provides gold-standard lymphedema treatment through Complete Decongestive Therapy (CDT). Variations in routine, travel, dietary patterns, or daily activity can all influence swelling, making consistent, structured care especially important.

CDT includes:

- Manual Lymphatic Drainage (MLD)
- Compression bandaging
- Therapeutic exercise designed to support lymphatic flow
- Skin care and infection prevention

Each therapy plan is individualized to the patient's medical background—whether swelling is related to oncology treatment, vascular issues, surgery, or hereditary causes. By offering mobile outpatient OT and PT directly in the home, therapists can tailor education and treatment to the patient's actual lifestyle, helping them maintain comfort and stability.

## Compression Garment Support, Simplified Through our DME Services

Ongoing compression is essential for maintaining CDT results, and many patients need assistance navigating garment choices, sizing, and usage. Mobile Rehab & Lymphatics provides in-home garment measuring, ordering, and training, ensuring a seamless process and improving long-term adherence.

Patients receive hands-on support with:

- Selecting appropriate day and night garments
- Donning and doffing techniques
- Assessing garment comfort and effectiveness
- Understanding wear schedules and garment care

For many individuals, the period before Medicare deductibles reset at the start of the year is an ideal time to update their compression garments—a process our therapists are fully prepared to assist with.

## Clinician-Led, Patient-Focused Therapy Across Southwest Florida

Mobile Rehab & Lymphatics proudly provides mobile outpatient occupational and physical therapy to patients in Naples, Fort Myers, Bonita Springs, and Cape Coral. Co-Owners James Ferrara, OTR/L, CLWT, and Lexie Lundquist, OTD, OTR/L, CLWT, bring advanced clinical expertise and a commitment to improving accessibility for individuals who benefit most from in-home care. Their approach emphasizes education, independence, and personalized treatment, allowing patients to move more confidently and comfortably through the spaces where they live.

## Helping Patients Stay Safe, Supported, and Independent

Whether the focus is preventing falls, improving neurological function, managing swelling, or strengthening mobility, Mobile Rehab & Lymphatics provides skilled therapy at home—where it is most effective and meaningful.

By offering specialized fall prevention, neurological therapy, and lymphedema management through a mobile outpatient model, the practice continues to elevate the standard of care across Southwest Florida.

## We're Growing!

Mobile Rehab & Lymphatics is seeking an additional Physical Therapist (PT) to join our expanding mobile outpatient team! Referrals and inquiries are welcome.



Jim Ferrara



Lexie Lundquist

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# Hold that Diet Coke....

By Jerry and Lisa Meloche, Pharm.D., Owners, Compounding Pharmacists

**A**rtificial sweeteners have become widely used in modern diets, particularly among individuals attempting to reduce calorie intake or manage blood glucose levels. Products labeled “diet,” “sugar-free,” or “low-calorie” often contain these substitutes. While these compounds have long been considered helpful alternatives to traditional sugar, emerging research suggests that frequent consumption may have unintended effects on long-term brain health. Recent findings have raised concerns that heavy intake of certain artificial sweeteners may be associated with faster cognitive aging and measurable declines in memory and thinking ability.

A large observational study published in the neurology journal *Neurology* followed 12,772 adults with an average age of 52 for approximately eight years. Participants completed detailed dietary questionnaires and underwent repeated cognitive testing throughout the study period. Researchers evaluated several commonly used artificial sweeteners, including aspartame, saccharin, acesulfame-potassium, erythritol, xylitol, and sorbitol. These substances are frequently found in diet sodas, flavored waters, sugar-free yogurts, energy drinks, and many processed snack foods.

The findings showed a measurable association between higher consumption of artificial sweeteners and accelerated cognitive decline. Individuals who consumed the highest amounts of these sweeteners experienced a 62 percent faster decline in overall memory and thinking skills compared with those who consumed the least. Researchers calculated that the difference in cognitive performance was equivalent to approximately 1.6 additional years of brain aging.

The study also demonstrated that even moderate intake levels were associated with measurable changes. Participants in the middle consumption group experienced a 35 percent faster decline in cognitive function compared with those in the lowest consumption group. Cognitive testing evaluated several aspects of brain performance, including verbal fluency, working memory, processing speed, and word recall.

Age appeared to influence the strength of this association. The relationship between artificial sweetener intake and cognitive decline was most pronounced



among adults younger than 60 years of age. Researchers noted that this may be due to the difficulty of detecting subtle differences in cognitive change among older adults, where rates of decline can vary widely.

Individuals with diabetes showed an even stronger association between sweetener consumption and cognitive decline. This observation is important because people with diabetes are more likely to rely on sugar substitutes to help control blood glucose levels. Although the study controlled for multiple health variables—including age, sex, hypertension, and cardiovascular disease—the authors emphasized that the research demonstrates an association rather than direct causation.

Scientists are continuing to investigate potential biological mechanisms that might explain the connection between artificial sweeteners and brain health. Several hypotheses have been proposed. Some researchers believe these compounds may disrupt the gut microbiome, which plays a role in metabolic regulation and neurological signaling through the gut-brain axis. Others suggest artificial sweeteners may contribute to oxidative stress or low-grade inflammation, processes that are known to influence neurodegenerative disease and cognitive decline.

Another possible explanation involves metabolic signaling. Artificial sweeteners provide intense sweetness without calories, which may confuse the body’s normal regulatory systems for appetite, glucose metabolism, and insulin response. Over time, this mismatch between taste perception and metabolic response may influence brain pathways involved in memory and learning. Continued research is needed to clarify these mechanisms and determine the long-term clinical implications.

For individuals seeking alternatives, several **natural sweeteners** may provide options when used in moderation. **Honey**, for example, contains small amounts of antioxidants and trace nutrients. **Maple syrup** provides minerals such as manganese and zinc. **Coconut sugar** has a lower glycemic index than refined sugar and contains small amounts of potassium and iron. Whole fruit or fruit purées can also provide sweetness along with fiber, vitamins, and phytonutrients that support metabolic health.

Another emerging option is **monk fruit** extract, a plant-derived sweetener that contains compounds called mogrosides, which provide sweetness without significantly affecting blood glucose levels. **Stevia**, derived from the leaves of the *Stevia rebaudiana* plant, has also been widely studied as a non-caloric sweetener derived from natural sources. These alternatives may offer options for individuals seeking to reduce both refined sugar and artificial sweeteners in their diet.

Dietary habits play an important role in long-term brain health. Research increasingly demonstrates that patterns emphasizing whole foods—such as vegetables, fruits, lean proteins, whole grains, and healthy fats—are associated with better cognitive outcomes across the lifespan. Reducing highly processed foods and sweetened beverages may help support metabolic health, cardiovascular health, and cognitive function.

Because nutrition needs and medical conditions vary from person to person, individuals should discuss dietary choices with a qualified healthcare provider. A medical professional can evaluate personal health history, medications, and metabolic conditions to determine the most appropriate approach to sugar and sweetener consumption. Evidence-based guidance from a healthcare provider can help patients make informed decisions that support both brain health and overall wellness.

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# Can EBOO Ozone Therapy Enhance Your Testosterone Replacement Therapy Results?

By Dr. Viviana Cuberos

**M**any men on Testosterone Replacement Therapy (TRT) do everything right — consistent dosing, regular bloodwork, proper diet — yet still feel like they are leaving results on the table. One emerging question in men's health circles is whether EBOO (Extracorporeal Blood Oxygenation and Ozonation) therapy can help close that gap. The short answer, when used under qualified medical supervision, is yes.

## Understanding the Connection Between Ozone Therapy and TRT

Testosterone replacement therapy works by restoring hormone levels that the body no longer produces in adequate amounts. Common symptoms of low testosterone — fatigue, reduced muscle mass, low libido, difficulty concentrating, and mood changes — often improve significantly once levels are optimized. However, how well the body actually uses and responds to those restored hormones depends heavily on the health of its supporting systems: circulation, oxygen delivery, inflammation levels, and detoxification capacity.

This is precisely where EBOO therapy may play a meaningful supporting role. EBOO is an advanced form of ozone therapy that circulates blood through a specialized medical device, exposing it to a controlled mixture of oxygen and ozone before returning it to the body. The process is designed to enhance the very physiological systems that TRT depends on to deliver optimal results.



## How EBOO Therapy May Support TRT

Four key mechanisms make EBOO therapy a compelling complement to testosterone replacement:

- **Improved Oxygen Delivery:** Testosterone and muscle function both rely on efficient oxygen transport. EBOO therapy supports red blood cell health and circulation, which can enhance energy production, muscle recovery, and even neurological function — all areas men on TRT are trying to optimize.
- **Better Circulation:** Hormones travel through the bloodstream. If vascular health is compromised, TRT benefits such as improved sexual health and vitality may be blunted. EBOO therapy supports blood flow and vascular integrity, helping testosterone reach its targets more effectively.
- **Reduced Chronic Inflammation:** Inflammation is a silent disruptor of hormonal balance. By supporting the body's natural anti-inflammatory pathways, ozone therapy may help create a more favorable hormonal environment, improving metabolic health and workout recovery.

- **Detoxification Support:** When the liver, kidneys, and lymphatic system are burdened, hormone regulation suffers. EBOO therapy may support these detox pathways, helping men feel more energized and hormonally balanced throughout their TRT protocol.

## An Integrative Approach to Men's Health

The most effective men's wellness programs today do not treat hormones in isolation. At clinics like Orchidia Medical Group in Naples, FL, practitioners combine testosterone replacement therapy with complementary treatments like EBOO ozone therapy, nutritional guidance, and lifestyle strategies. Rather than simply topping off hormone levels, this integrative model focuses on improving the entire physiological environment — so that every treatment works harder.

For men in their 30s, 40s, 50s, and beyond who are searching for ozone therapy Naples FL, the goal is consistent: more energy, sharper focus, stronger performance, and lasting vitality. EBOO ozone therapy does not replace TRT, but when paired with it under physician supervision, it may be exactly the missing piece that helps men get the full benefit of their hormone optimization program.

If you are experiencing symptoms of low testosterone or want to explore how EBOO therapy benefits might complement your current treatment, schedule a consultation with a qualified provider today. Your path to better energy, hormonal balance, and long-term vitality may be closer than you think.



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# Types of Senior Living Options in SWFL

By Bruce Rosenblatt, CDP - Owner/Senior Housing Expert

**S**outhwest Florida — is one of the most popular retirement destinations in the United States. With warm weather, beautiful Gulf Coast beaches, and a wide range of senior-focused communities, SWFL offers living options to fit nearly every lifestyle, care need, and budget.

## Independent Living Communities

**Best for:** Active seniors who want a maintenance-free lifestyle without daily care support.

- Private apartments or villas
- Restaurant-style dining
- Housekeeping and maintenance services
- Fitness centers and pools
- Social activities and clubs
- Scheduled transportation

This option is ideal for retirees who want to downsize while staying active and engaged.

## Assisted Living Facilities (ALFs)

**Best for:** Seniors who need help with daily activities but do not require intensive medical care.

Assisted living facilities provide housing, meals, and personal care support. Residents typically receive assistance with:

- Bathing and dressing
- Medication management
- Mobility support
- Meals and nutrition
- Housekeeping and laundry

Assisted living provides a balance between independence and support.

## Memory Care Communities

**Best for:** Seniors living with Alzheimer's disease or other forms of dementia.

Memory care communities are specially designed to support residents with cognitive decline. They offer:

- Secure, monitored environments
- Structured daily routines
- Dementia-trained staff
- Cognitive therapies and enrichment activities
- Higher staff-to-resident ratios

These communities prioritize safety while helping residents maintain dignity and quality of life.



## Continuing Care Retirement Communities (CCRCs)

**Best for:** Seniors who want long-term security with multiple levels of care in one location.

Continuing Care Retirement Communities (also called Life Plan Communities) offer a continuum of care:

- Independent living
- Assisted living
- Memory care
- Skilled nursing

Residents can transition between care levels as their needs change — without relocating to a different community. This option provides peace of mind and long-term stability.

## Skilled Nursing Facilities (SNF)

**Best for:** Seniors requiring 24/7 medical supervision or rehabilitation.

Skilled nursing facilities provide a higher level of medical care than assisted living. Services typically include:

- 24-hour nursing care
- Physical, occupational, and speech therapy
- Post-surgical rehabilitation
- Chronic illness management

Some seniors enter skilled nursing temporarily after a hospital stay, while others require long-term care.

## 55+ Active Adult Communities

**Best for:** Healthy, independent retirees seeking an age-restricted neighborhood.

55+ communities are not licensed care facilities. Instead, they are residential neighborhoods designed exclusively for adults over 55. These communities often include:

- Clubhouses
- Fitness centers
- Golf courses
- Community events
- HOA-managed maintenance

Homeowners live independently, and healthcare services are arranged separately if needed.

## Choosing the Right Senior Living Option in SWFL

When evaluating senior living options, families should consider:

- Current health needs
- Anticipated future care needs
- Budget and financial planning
- Location preferences (proximity to family, beach, medical centers)
- Lifestyle and social opportunities

Southwest Florida offers everything from luxury waterfront retirement communities to smaller, intimate care homes. The key is to match the level of support with personal preferences and long-term goals.

The senior living landscape in Southwest Florida is diverse, flexible, and designed to support aging with dignity and independence. There is a solution tailored to nearly every need.

Careful research, community tours, and professional guidance can help families make confident, informed decisions about the next chapter of life.

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# EYES ON THE ROAD:

## April Is National Distracted Driving Awareness Month

Every April, communities across the United States pause to reflect on one of the most preventable causes of traffic fatalities: distracted driving. National Distracted Driving Awareness Month serves as a powerful reminder that the simple act of keeping your eyes on the road — and your mind on driving — can save lives. Here at Southwest Florida's Health & Wellness Magazine, we believe that safety is the foundation of a healthy life, and that starts long before you reach the gym or the doctor's office. It starts the moment you get behind the wheel.

### What Is Distracted Driving?

Distracted driving is any activity that diverts your attention from the primary task of driving. There are three main types of distractions: visual (taking your eyes off the road), manual (taking your hands off the wheel), and cognitive (taking your mind off driving). Texting while driving is particularly dangerous because it involves all three types simultaneously.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), thousands of people are killed and hundreds of thousands are injured in distraction-related crashes every year in the United States. In the time it takes to glance at a text message — roughly five seconds — a vehicle traveling at 55 mph covers the length of an entire football field. That is five seconds of driving completely blind.

### Distractions Come in Many Forms

Most people think of cell phones when they hear "distracted driving," and while phones are among the most common culprits, they are far from the

only ones. Eating and drinking behind the wheel, adjusting the radio or GPS, reaching for items in the back seat, grooming, and even engaging in emotionally charged conversations with passengers can all pull a driver's focus away from the road.

Here in Southwest Florida, our beautiful scenery — from the sparkling Gulf waters to the stunning sunsets along Tamiami Trail — can itself become a distraction. Tourists and longtime residents alike have been known to take their eyes off the road to take in the view. While our surroundings are breathtaking, they deserve to be appreciated safely, not from behind a moving steering wheel.

### Protecting Yourself and Others

The good news is that distracted driving is entirely preventable. Small, intentional habits can make a tremendous difference in road safety for you, your family, and your neighbors:

- **Silence your phone** before you start driving, or use a hands-free setting to reduce the urge to check notifications.
- **Set your GPS** before you pull out of the driveway so you are not fumbling with directions mid-route.
- **Pull over safely** if you need to make a call, send a message, or handle something urgent.
- **Avoid multitasking** — finishing your coffee or breakfast before you leave home takes only a few minutes and eliminates a major distraction.
- **Lead by example.** If you have children or young drivers in the household, model the behavior you want them to carry into adulthood.



### A Wellness Issue, Not Just a Traffic Issue

At Southwest Florida's Health & Wellness Magazine, we see road safety as an essential pillar of community health. The physical and emotional toll of traffic accidents extends far beyond the individuals directly involved. Families are devastated. Communities grieve. Recovery from serious injuries is often long, costly, and life-altering.

Choosing to drive without distractions is one of the most meaningful wellness decisions you can make each day. It protects your body, supports your mental peace, and contributes to a safer environment for everyone sharing our roads — whether they are walking, cycling, or driving alongside you.

### Our Commitment to You

This April, we encourage every reader in Southwest Florida to take the No Phone Zone pledge and commit to distraction-free driving. Share the message with friends, post a reminder on your social media, and start a conversation with your family at the dinner table. Awareness begins with each of us.

Drive safely, Southwest Florida. Your wellness — and the wellness of those around you — depends on it.

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# In-Home Care Aides Benefit Alzheimer's Patients and their Family Caregivers

**H**ome health care providers play a vital role in improving the quality of life for individuals with Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia who are aging at home. Their services encompass a wide range of support, including assistance with daily activities, medication management, emotional support, and engaging in meaningful activities. By addressing the unique needs of both individuals with Alzheimer's and their family caregivers, home health aides can significantly enhance the well-being of those affected by the disease.

## 1. Assistance with Activities of Daily Living:

Alzheimer's and dementia often impair individuals' ability to perform routine tasks such as bathing, dressing, and meal preparation. Home health aides are trained to provide hands-on assistance with these activities, helping individuals maintain their dignity and independence while ensuring their safety. According to the Alzheimer's Association, approximately 70% of people with dementia receive care at home, highlighting the crucial role of home health aides in supporting these individuals with daily tasks.

## 2. Medication Management:

Proper medication management is essential for individuals with Alzheimer's and dementia to maintain their health and manage symptoms effectively. Home health aides can help ensure that medications are taken as prescribed, reducing the risk of medication errors and complications. According to a study published in the Journal of Applied Gerontology, home health care services have been shown to improve medication adherence among older adults, including those with dementia.

## 3. Emotional Support and Companionship:

Alzheimer's and dementia can be isolating conditions, leading to feelings of loneliness and depression among affected individuals. Home health aides provide much-needed companionship and emotional support, engaging clients in conversation, reminiscing, and stimulating activities. Research published in the Journal of the American Geriatrics Society has shown that social interaction and emotional support from caregivers can improve the quality of life and well-being of individuals with dementia.



## 4. Engagement in Meaningful Activities:

Keeping individuals with Alzheimer's and dementia engaged in stimulating activities is essential for maintaining cognitive function and reducing behavioral symptoms such as agitation and aggression. Home health aides can plan and facilitate activities tailored to the individual's interests and abilities, such as music therapy, art projects, and gentle exercise. According to a study published in the Journal of Clinical Nursing, engagement in meaningful activities has been associated with improved mood and cognitive function in individuals with dementia.

## 5. Respite Care for Family Caregivers:

Caring for a loved one with Alzheimer's or dementia can be physically and emotionally demanding, leading to caregiver stress and burnout. Home health aides offer respite care services, allowing family caregivers to take a much-needed break from their caregiving responsibilities. Research from the Alzheimer's Association indicates that family caregivers who utilize respite care services report reduced stress levels and increased satisfaction with their caregiving role.

Whitsyms home health aides play a critical role in improving the quality of life for individuals with Alzheimer's and dementia aging at home. Their support encompasses assistance with daily activities, medication management, emotional support, and engagement in meaningful activities. By addressing the unique needs of both individuals with dementia and their family caregivers, home health aides contribute to enhancing the overall well-being of those affected by the disease.

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- Live In & 24 Hour Care
- Personal Care
- Post-Operative Care
- Respite Care
- Skilled Nursing

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# BROKEN BOTTLES, BROKEN BONDS: How Alcohol Abuse Fractures Relationships

By Richard J. Capiola, MD

**A**lcohol consumption is deeply woven into the social fabric of many cultures, often associated with celebration, relaxation, and connection. However, when drinking crosses into abuse or dependency, it can transform from a social lubricant into a powerful relationship solvent. During Alcohol Awareness Month, it's crucial to examine how problematic drinking behaviors can damage the connections we value most.

The ripple effects of alcohol abuse extend far beyond the individual, creating waves that crash against partners, children, parents, friends, and colleagues. These relationships often bear the heaviest burden when drinking becomes excessive or compulsive.

Trust, the foundation of any healthy relationship, is frequently the first casualty. Broken promises about cutting back, hidden bottles, financial secrets, and alcohol-influenced behaviors create fractures in relationships that become increasingly difficult to repair. Partners of those struggling with alcohol often report living in a state of constant vigilance and uncertainty, never knowing which version of their loved one will walk through the door.

Communication patterns deteriorate when alcohol becomes a third party in a relationship. Meaningful conversations are postponed until the person is sober, only to be forgotten entirely.



Arguments become more frequent, often escalating in intensity and occasionally turning volatile. The emotional distance grows as genuine connection becomes increasingly rare.

Children in households affected by alcohol abuse face unique challenges. They may take on inappropriate responsibilities, becoming caretakers for parents who should be caring for them. The unpredictability of a parent's behavior can create lasting anxiety and trust issues that follow children into adulthood. Research shows that children of parents with alcohol use disorders have higher risks of developing substance use problems themselves, perpetuating an intergenerational cycle.

Financially, alcohol abuse can strain household resources, with money diverted from necessities to sustain drinking habits. These economic pressures further intensify relationship tensions, creating a downward spiral of conflict and resentment.

Social isolation frequently accompanies advanced alcohol problems. Friends and family may withdraw after repeated disappointments or uncomfortable encounters. The individual drinking problematically might also withdraw from social connections that don't support their drinking habits, further narrowing their support network when they need it most.

Yet, amid these sobering realities, there is hope. Recovery is possible, and relationships can heal. Professional support through therapy, support groups like Al-Anon for family members, and alcohol treatment programs provide pathways toward healthier relationships. Many families report that navigating recovery together, while challenging, ultimately strengthened their bonds through improved communication, honesty, and mutual support.

This Alcohol Awareness Month, it's important to recognize that addressing alcohol problems isn't just about individual health—it's about preserving the connections that give our lives meaning. By understanding how alcohol abuse impacts relationships, we can better support those affected and promote healthier patterns of connection and communication.

If you or someone you love is struggling with alcohol, remember that reaching out for help isn't a sign of weakness but rather an act of courage and love—both for yourself and for those who matter most in your life. Dr. Richard Capiola, MD, is a board-certified psychiatrist with specialty certifications in addiction and forensic psychiatry and over 31 years of experience in the medical field. He graduated from Tulane University School of Medicine in 1990. Be sure to call ahead with Dr. Capiola to book an appointment.

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Dr Capiola's mission is to focus on the strengths inherent in all of us to help overcome any problems and life stresses that make us feel stuck and limited. He combines psychotherapy and medication management into all patient visits.



# Health Insurance

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

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

**D**o not talk to someone you have not given permission to call. Ask them for their **National Producer Number** and report them to Medicare for an unsolicited call.

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

One of the biggest changes for 2026 related to Medicare Part D Prescriptions whether withing a Part C Advantage plan or a stand-alone Part D drug Plan. Your yearly Part D out-of-pocket costs will be capped at \$2,100 in 2026. You must buy medications using your plan and the medication must be **in formulary** to go toward the cap. You will also have a payment option to pay out-pocket costs in monthly amounts over the plan year, instead of paying when you receive the medications. This is done through the insurance company that you purchased your plan.

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



There are a lot of things you need to know. Again, work with an agent you can trust! **Especially important:** when you **move** you need to know your options. Can you keep the same plan? Do you need to make a change and what does that look like?

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**Travel Insurance –** Did you know that most health insurance does NOT cover you outside of the country and that includes a cruise, in international waters (4 miles out). Travel insurance is not just about trip cancelation but most importantly what if you got sick or had an accident on your trip. Medical Trip insurance is very important and most of the time not very costly when you are out way the benefits.

**Life Insurance –** You are never too young to have life insurance, and many types offer living benefits. As an example, I purchase life insurance for my grandchildren almost as soon as they are born. Their policy continues to build cash value that they can use during their lives, for education, wedding or even a 1st home purchase. The younger you are the lower the cost. There are many types of life insurance, and it is important to understand the differences between them. You also have payment options, such as 10-Pay, this type of policy you can pay the premium in full in 10 years, there are other terms available as well.

**Long Term Care Insurance –** Overall, 48.7% of older adults with ADL difficulties (or an estimated 3 million persons aged 70 and older) reported needing some sort of personal assistance with one or more ADLs, and, of those individuals with need, 20.7% (or an estimated 629,000 persons) had an unmet need. Long Term Care Insurance helps pay for in-home or facility-based needs, such as assistance with acts of daily living or help with paying for a facility. Start shopping for this insurance in your 40's, but it's never too late to try. Your overall health will pay a major roll in the cost of the plan's premium. The sooner than later for affordability. You have payment options such as a single payment, 10-Pay where the premium is paid-in-full in 10 years. You also get a discount with most companies doing a joint policy with your spouse. Remember Medicare is NOT meant for Nursing Home Care/Skilled Nursing.

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# UNDERSTANDING THE ANNUAL CHECK-UP PANEL

**W**hen it comes to taking control of your health, prevention and regular monitoring are key. The Annual Check-up Panel at Any Lab Test Now offers a comprehensive screening solution that provides valuable insights into your overall health status without requiring a doctor's prescription or insurance approval.

The Annual Check-up Panel is designed to evaluate multiple aspects of your health through a single blood draw. This convenient testing package includes essential markers that healthcare professionals typically review during yearly physical examinations. The panel analyzes various components of your blood to assess organ function, detect potential health issues, and establish baseline measurements for future comparison.

One of the primary components of the panel is the Complete Blood Count (CBC), which examines red and white blood cells, platelets, and hemoglobin levels. This provides crucial information about your immune system function, oxygen-carrying capacity, and ability to fight infections. The CBC can also help identify conditions such as anemia, infections, or blood disorders.

The Comprehensive Metabolic Panel (CMP) is another vital element of the annual check-up. This portion evaluates liver and kidney function, electrolyte and fluid balance, and blood sugar levels. By measuring proteins, enzymes, and minerals in your

blood, the CMP can reveal potential issues with major organ systems before symptoms become apparent.

Lipid profile testing is included to assess cardiovascular health by measuring cholesterol levels – both the "good" HDL and "bad" LDL cholesterol – as well as triglycerides. These results help evaluate your risk for heart disease and stroke, enabling early intervention through lifestyle changes or medical treatment if necessary.

The panel also includes thyroid function tests, which measure hormones that regulate metabolism, energy levels, and various bodily functions. Thyroid disorders are common but often go undiagnosed without proper screening.

Any Lab Test Now makes the testing process straightforward and accessible. Appointments are typically not required, and results are usually available within 24-72 hours. The company's certified laboratories maintain high standards of accuracy and confidentiality, ensuring reliable results you can trust.

Once you receive your results, you can share them with your healthcare provider for interpretation and guidance. This proactive approach to health monitoring can lead to earlier detection of potential health issues, more informed discussions with your doctor, and better-managed healthcare decisions.

The Annual Check-up Panel is particularly valuable for individuals who:

- Want to establish baseline health measurements
- Need regular monitoring of existing conditions
- Are interested in preventive healthcare
- Have family histories of specific health conditions
- Wish to track the effectiveness of lifestyle changes or treatments

Regular annual check-ups through comprehensive testing can help identify potential health concerns before they become serious issues. By providing a detailed snapshot of your health status, the Annual Check-up Panel at Any Lab Test Now serves as a fundamental tool in maintaining and optimizing your well-being through informed, proactive healthcare management.

Any Lab Test Now Naples is staffed by certified technicians who can properly collect samples for blood tests, urine tests, saliva tests, hair tests and more. They are knowledgeable about all the tests offered and can help customers select the right screening for their needs. Test results are typically available within 24-48 hours.

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# Rebuilding Stronger Bones:

## Dr. Krystyna Shepetiuk's Revolutionary Approach to Osteoporosis

**O**steoporosis, often called the "silent disease," affects millions worldwide as bones gradually become brittle and fragile.

This degenerative condition typically progresses without symptoms until a fracture occurs – commonly in the hip, spine, or wrist. While conventional medicine has long considered osteoporosis an inevitable part of aging, Dr. Krystyna Shepetiuk is pioneering a different approach that not only halts bone loss but actively reverses it.

Dr. Shepetiuk's methodology stands apart from traditional treatments that primarily focus on medication alone. Her comprehensive program begins with advanced diagnostics that go beyond standard DEXA scans to assess bone quality and identify individual risk factors. This detailed analysis allows her to create truly personalized intervention plans tailored to each patient's unique biochemistry and lifestyle.

"Osteoporosis isn't simply a calcium deficiency," explains Dr. Shepetiuk. "It's a complex condition influenced by hormones, inflammation, gut health, and even stress levels. Effective treatment requires addressing all these factors simultaneously."

The science-backed solutions in Dr. Shepetiuk's protocol incorporate several key elements. Nutritional optimization forms the foundation, with customized dietary recommendations that balance bone-building minerals and reduce inflammatory foods that contribute to bone loss. Her approach often includes targeted supplementation, but always personalized to address specific deficiencies rather than following a one-size-fits-all formula.

Movement is another crucial component of Dr. Shepetiuk's program. She prescribes specific weight-bearing and resistance exercises designed to stimulate osteoblast activity – the cells responsible for building new bone tissue. These exercises are carefully selected based on the patient's current bone density, fitness level, and fracture risk.

What truly sets Dr. Shepetiuk apart is her integration of cutting-edge research on bone metabolism. Her protocol addresses often-overlooked factors like sleep quality, stress management, and gut microbiome health – all scientifically proven to impact bone remodeling processes.



Dr. Shepetiuk's approach also emphasizes hormone balance, particularly for postmenopausal women who face accelerated bone loss due to declining estrogen levels. Rather than automatically prescribing hormone replacement therapy, she first conducts comprehensive testing to identify specific imbalances. This allows for more targeted interventions, which might include bioidentical hormones, herbal support, or lifestyle modifications to naturally optimize hormone production.

Environmental factors play a role in her protocol as well. Dr. Shepetiuk educates patients about reducing exposure to toxins that can interfere with bone metabolism, while encouraging vitamin D synthesis through appropriate sun exposure and specific supplementation when necessary.

The results speak for themselves. Many of Dr. Shepetiuk's patients have experienced significant improvements in bone density scores, some achieving increases of 3-5% annually – outcomes rarely seen with conventional approaches.

"I was told I would need to accept progressive bone loss as part of aging," shares one patient. "After two years with Dr. Shepetiuk, my bone density has increased by 8%, and I feel stronger than I have in decades."

Another patient reports, "The comprehensive approach made all the difference. Previous doctors only offered medication without addressing my vitamin deficiencies or teaching me the right exercises. Dr. Shepetiuk's program gave me back my confidence and freedom."

For those struggling with osteoporosis or looking to prevent it, Dr. Shepetiuk's approach offers hope beyond medication management. By addressing the root causes of bone deterioration through personalized, science-backed solutions, she's helping patients rebuild stronger bones and regain confidence in their body's natural healing abilities.

Her work demonstrates that osteoporosis need not be an inevitable consequence of aging, but rather a condition that can be effectively managed and even reversed with the right comprehensive care.

### Functional and Integrative Medicine with Dr. Krystyna Shepetiuk

Are you concerned about osteoporosis and looking for a natural, medication-free approach to restoring your bone health?

Dr. Krystyna Shepetiuk specializes in reversing bone loss and strengthening your bones using personalized, science-backed solutions. Her expertise ensures each client receives a custom plan tailored to their unique needs, helping you regain confidence in your health.

#### Services include:

- ✓ REMS Bone Health Diagnostics
- ✓ Personalized Functional Medicine Consultations
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- ✓ Holistic Anti-Aging Strategies for long-term resilience

#### Why Choose Us?

- ✓ **Advanced Bone Diagnostics:** The REMS Bone Health Scan provides the most accurate, radiation-free assessment of your bone density and quality.
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# Easter and Springtime Hazards for Dogs and Cats

**W**hen it is time for spring cleaning, you often stow away your winter decor, perhaps dig out your Easter or springtime decorations, and transform your home for the season. If you have a cat or dog in the house, you might want to steer clear of seasonal items that might pose potential threats to your pet's health. Prevent a trip to the emergency vet by pet-proofing your spring-spiffy house.

## Easter Grass

Cats love anything that moves. Easter grass moves easily in a room with a breeze or draft, makes interesting sounds, and, for some cats, it is simply irresistible and must be eaten.

Stringy things like Easter grass or tinsel at Christmas, pose a deadly threat if ingested. Veterinarians consider Easter grass a linear foreign body. Signs that your pet has this problem, aside from the material being visible from the mouth or anus, are vomiting, straining to defecate, and a painful abdomen.

Trying to pull out visible grass strings is not recommended. Pulling the strand can cause more damage if the piece is long and trapped far inside the body. Call your veterinarian if you suspect that your cat has sampled the Easter grass. While linear foreign bodies are more common in cats, dogs may also ingest non-food material, and the same concerns apply here.



## Chocolate

Chocolate is typically more of a dog hazard, as many dogs have a sweet tooth, a great nose, and the determination to find chocolate—hidden or not. More often than not, your dog will find Reese's Peanut Butter Cups or Hershey's Kisses in eggs hidden in your backyard Easter hunt before your kids, so, keep them away.

The toxic components in chocolate are theobromine and caffeine, and the level of toxicity is based on the type and quantity of chocolate consumed as well as the size of your pet.

Different types of chocolate have different amounts of theobromine and caffeine; dark chocolate contains the highest concentrations and white "chocolate" contains the least. Early clinical signs are vomiting, diarrhea, and trembling.

The toxicity level for either a dog or cat is the same depending on weight, however, dogs are more so in danger than cats since dogs are drawn to sweets meanwhile cats are not. A cat may try some chocolate but is less likely to continue eating it.

## Xylitol

If you're baking a cake for Easter beware of xylitol. It's an artificial sweetener used in home baking and found in many products including some sugar-free gums and diet foods. It can also be found in some Easter eggs. Dogs are extremely sensitive to xylitol and even small amounts can cause toxicity. Early symptoms of xylitol poisoning include lethargy, vomiting and loss of coordination. Seizures and even death may occur. Assistance dog Ginny made a remarkable recovery after eating a toxic amount of xylitol.

## Spring flowers and plants

Spring flowers and plants can be found in many homes and gardens around Easter. Unfortunately, several are poisonous to dogs, with the bulbs posing the biggest risk. Daffodil, lily and spring crocus bulbs are all highly toxic. Symptoms of plant or bulb poisoning can include vomiting, upset stomach and heart and kidney problems.

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

By Cynthia Perthuis, CDP, CADDCT, CSA

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

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

#### • Cognitive Decline

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

#### • Environmental Changes

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

#### • Loss of Independence

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

#### • Communication Difficulties

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

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

#### • Establish a Calm and Familiar Environment

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

#### • Practice Effective Communication

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

#### • Engage in Meaningful Activities

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

#### How Caregiver Anxiety Affects Your Loved One:

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

#### • Emotional Contagion

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

#### • Reduced Quality of Care

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



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

#### Managing Caregiver Anxiety

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

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



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# Your Clean Home is Our Business



Did you know that a cleaning service company can do so much more than keep your home clean? Did you know that a service like this can actually help to reduce the amount of stress that you are suffering from? Let me explain. Cleaning takes a lot out of you. I mean, even the slightest clean to your home can take a lot of effort.

This is just going to add more stress onto you. Things become extra bad if you have had a pretty stressful day as it is. You just don't want to clean. If you don't clean the problem becomes much worse. You see, studies have shown time and time again that living in an unclean environment can actually lead to all sorts of stress and health concerns, anxiety attacks and high blood pressure which can lead to heart issues. Being unable to clean this environment how you want to is just going to make things a lot worse.

Don't sell yourself short, your time is extremely valuable. Need a dollar value? Just calculate how much you make per hour, and multiply it by the amount of time it will take to clean your place, and then multiply that by the value you place on spending that time with your family. Chances are it's much less expensive to hire a house cleaning company, than to do it yourself.

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**Less Stress:** a healthy organized home can reduce stress levels and ensure you're feeling your best even when not at home.

**Healthy Lifestyle:** airborne pollutants and allergens can irritate our immune systems and trigger respiratory issues such as asthma.

**Have Friends & Family Over:** a clean home is an inviting home. Don't stress about having people over because of the clutter in your home. Stay on top of it with Maid Pro's cleaning services and spend more quality time with those you love.

When you are surrounded by a mess, the hormone Cortisol is released into your system. This is a stress causing hormone that can speed up aging and increase your chances for heart disease. When your messy home is cleaned up, endorphins are released. This makes you feel great.

There are plenty of reasons to choose, and love, Maid Pro. Maybe it's because they work with you to build a cleaning plan, tailored to your needs and budget. Or because their cleaning staff are expertly trained to provide the highest quality clean. It could be because they allow you to choose when and how often they clean so that they fit perfectly into your life and schedule. No matter the reason, at the end of the day cleaning is their passion and it's what they bring to each and every home they touch.

February is dedicated to raising awareness about heart disease and increasing knowledge about prevention. Eliminate stress and worry from your life where and when you can. Your heart will thank you. Maid Pro can help reduce that unwanted stress and keep your home clean and beautiful which will allow you more quality time with your family and loved ones.



A clean house is also beneficial towards our general health. When our houses are not maintained and cleaned often, the germs, and bacteria, if not taken care of properly, can accumulate to the point that they create sickness. Our body's natural immune systems can only tolerate so much. If we let the germs and bacteria get out of hand, then not only our health, but our family's health will be at risk. When we take care of and maintain a clean home it will ensure long term good health for your family to enjoy for years to come.

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## Are You Practicing Mindful Wealth?

Courtesy of Nina Azwoir, First Vice President, Investments

If the past few months have given you more time for introspection, use it to improve your financial plan in a big-picture way. Even for the privileged among us who still have our jobs, are not on the front lines with the pandemic, and have not had anyone close to us felled by COVID-19, the current crisis has brought hardships big and small.

Parents have confronted the daily struggle of trying to do their jobs while also home-schooling. Adult children have not been able to visit their elderly parents. Graduations, weddings, and even funerals have been put on hold or “Zoomified.” Yet as difficult as it has been, there have been a few silver linings too, especially for those of us lucky enough to not be touched directly by the crisis. One of the most valuable is that pressing pause on our usual routines has given many of us the opportunity to take a step back, get out of our ruts, and take stock. What do we really value? What do we really miss? What can we not wait to do when this is all over? What “necessity” of our past lives, whether the daily purchased latte or frequent meals in restaurants, are we finding that we are quite happily doing without?

Travel may be someone’s greatest longing, while others miss cooking and entertaining big groups of family and friends. Talking about how the pandemic has changed our thinking on a topic, or made us want to do more of something else, can help us feel like we are using the present situation productively. The current sense of isolation will not be for naught, because it is shaping how we intend to use our lives in the future, when we once again have a full set of choices before us.

### Are You Allocating Your Time and Money with Your Intentions?

It can be argued that now is a good time to put a fresh set of eyes on your financial plan, taking a similarly expansive view of it that you might not have been able to do when you were busy and mired in your day-to-day activities. Too often, one expert opined, financial plans (and planners) move straight to the “solution” phase, without stopping to ask some basic questions about what someone is trying to achieve and what their real problems are.

*“Much of the scientific research about spending and happiness points to a clear connection between spending on experiences versus things.”*

What will constitute “success” for you over the next few years, not just in financial terms, but in life terms, too? Are you allocating your time and money in line with your intentions, what you find fulfilling, and what brings you joy? These questions are incredibly personal; no one else can answer them for you.

Whether you are well into retirement or early in your career, it can be easy to backburner questions like these and move straight to logistics, determining your asset allocation and minimizing taxes, for example. Those are all worthy pursuits, but if you find yourself with a bit of extra time to think a bit more broadly and introspectively about your financial plan, here are some of the key questions to ask yourself.

### What Expenditures Bring You Happiness?

As most investors know, the biggest determinant of whether you achieve financial success is how much you spend versus how much you save. But as important as it is to make sure your intake exceeds your outgo, budgeting can seem like sheer drudgery. Here is a different way to think about budgeting. Simply begin to take note of how various discretionary expenditures make you feel. It can be incredibly illuminating. Much of the scientific research about spending and happiness points to a clear connection between spending on experiences versus things. Many would also argue that many of life’s most memorable experiences cost very little.

### How Are You Allocating Your Precious Resources?

Investors should strive to make smart allocations of financial capital across opportunity sets, not just saving versus spending but also debt pay down versus investing in the market, how much to allocate to retirement savings versus college, and so on. These are crucial topics worthy of significant analysis and introspection. Ultimately, the right answers are a matter of math (expected return on “investment”) and personal preference.

Many of us pay much less attention to how we allocate an even more scarce resource, our time, even though that allocation will ultimately have an even greater impact on whether we feel like we have met our goals. Of course, some of our time expenditures are pre-ordained, the time we spend working or caring for children, for example. Even within those allocations it seems worthwhile to be more mindful, to help ensure that your allocation of time in a given day, week, or year aligns with your goals and vision for that period. An audit of how you are allocating your time currently is a good starting point. Technology tools can help you determine how much time you waste (uh, spend) on social media and other activities that could be detracting from your productivity and happiness.

### What Is Your Definition of “Enough”?

Many of us are operating with an incredibly vague notion of how much we really need to save in order to achieve our financial goals and find security. Even financial planners might rely on rules of thumb when setting your retirement savings target. For example, they might assume that you will need 80% of your working income in retirement and extrapolate the rest of your plan from there.

As humans, we often have a natural tendency to reach for more more more, regardless of whether that “more” is actually bringing more happiness and security. Trying to keep up with the people around us, in terms of possessions and outward signs of success, can get exhausting and may not get us any closer to our life’s goals. That is why, in this period of limited activity, spending, and social contact, it is worthwhile to think through your own definition of enough, both now and for the future.

### What Do You Want Your Legacy to Be?

When taking a strictly financial and estate-planning perspective, leaving a “legacy” is one of those topics that can seem overly narrow. It is about leaving assets behind for children, grandchildren, and other loved ones, as well as charity if we so choose. It is about making sure we do not burden the people we care about. Those are crucial considerations and they are why everyone needs an estate plan that includes wills, powers of attorney, and beneficiary designations, among other key documents.

While you are at it, why not think big picture about your legacy, too? What do you hope people will say about you after you are gone? What life philosophy or pieces of wisdom do you hope that your loved ones will always associate with you? If you find yourself with a bit of extra time for introspection, write down a few ideas along these lines. And no, you are not too young to start thinking about this. You can find templates for creating a “personal legacy” online, but some good advice is not to overthink it. Balance more serious ideas with more lighthearted ones. We all have credos that we live by; make sure your loved ones know yours.

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## FINDING A HEALTHY TEMPO FOR LIFE

By Pastor Tim Neptune

In today's fast-paced world, everyone seems constantly busy and exhausted. Technology, meant to simplify life, has only accelerated our schedules, allowing us to pack even more into each day. We are not only busy—we are tired.

Many can relate to Job's ancient words: "I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, but only turmoil" (Job 3:26). What many of us need to do is discover a sustainable rhythm for life. It is time to step off the merry-go-round of overcommitment and find a pace we can maintain for the long haul.

Jesus' words to the Pharisees in Matthew 23:25-26 remind us that internal health matters as much as external appearance. We spend hours perfecting our looks—clothes, hair, makeup, workouts—yet often neglect the soul and spirit that define who we are. Just as musicians use a metronome to set the proper tempo, our lives need a balanced rhythm. Living life at full throttle leads to burnout; our bodies require rest.

The story of Martha and Mary in Luke 10:38-42 illustrates this truth perfectly. As Jesus visited their home, Martha hurried about with preparations while Mary sat at the Lord's feet, listening. Frustrated, Martha complained that her sister had left her to do all the work alone. Jesus replied gently, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."



Martha was doing good things—serving and hosting—but at the wrong time. In the presence of Jesus, the most important priority was sitting and listening to Him. This encounter was the last time Jesus would visit their home on earth. Sometimes we must choose between two good options, and the better choice is the one that draws us closer to God.

An unhealthy pace affects more than our bodies. It drains us mentally, emotionally, and spiritually, making it difficult to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30). Solomon warned, "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it" (Proverbs 4:23).

Who is setting the tempo of your life? Cultural expectations, family pressures, and personal ambitions can push us into unsustainable rhythms. If you find yourself feeling overwhelmed, stressed, or exhausted, ask yourself: What is truly important now? Eliminate non-essentials and focus on what matters most.

If we lose our "why," we eventually lose our way. Busyness can lead to barrenness, leaving us empty inside. The invitation is to slow down, guard our internal life, and choose the better part—like Mary did.

Take a moment to ponder whether your current pace is healthy and sustainable. Put away distractions, especially phones, and make the most of precious moments with family. Technology is useful, but it should never replace real connection. Finding a healthy tempo allows us to endure for the long haul and experience the full life Jesus offers.

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