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

July 2026

Lee Edition - Monthly

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(SEE PAGE 18)

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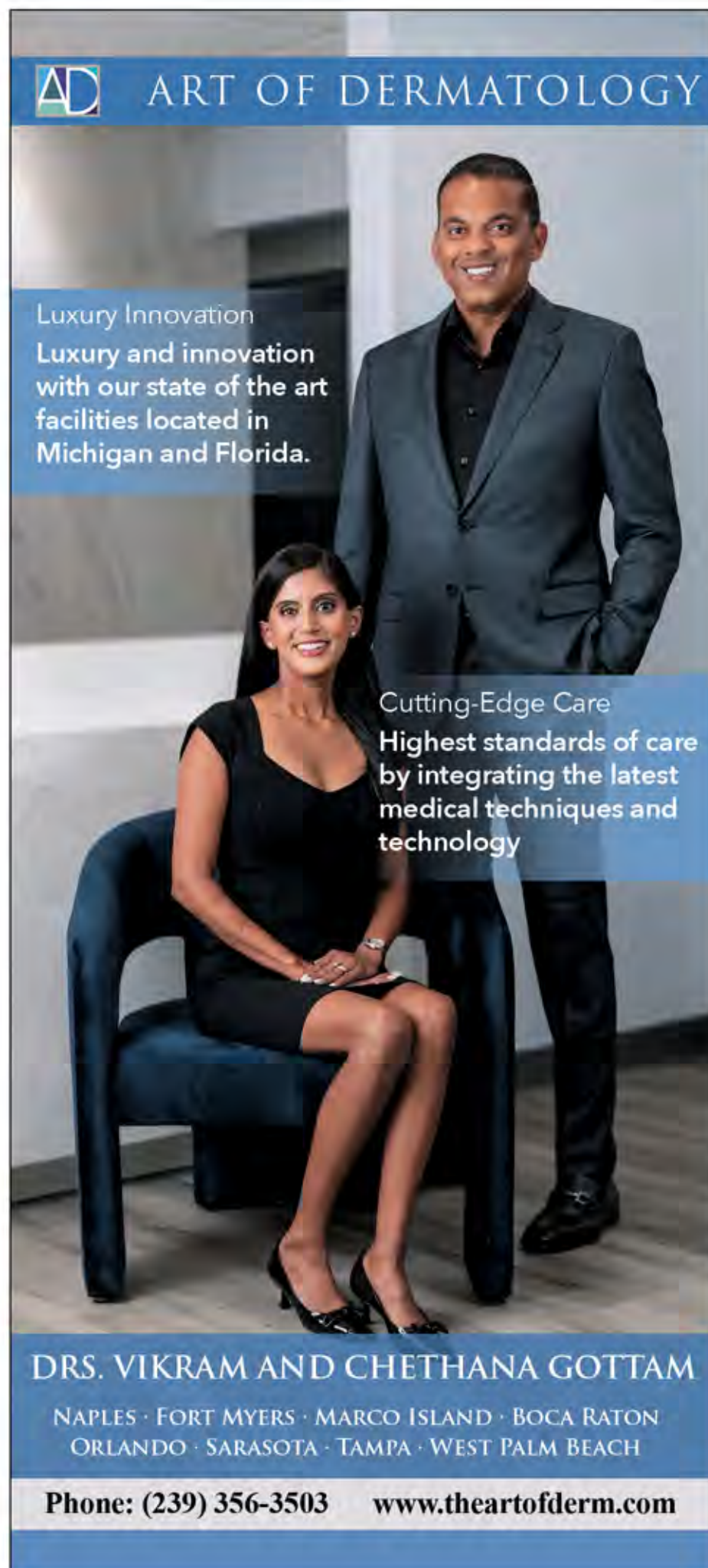
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# SEEING CLEARLY: WHAT SOUTHWEST FLORIDA RESIDENTS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT CATARACTS

If your vision has grown cloudy, colors seem faded, or night driving feels harder than it used to, you may be experiencing the early signs of a cataract. At Southwest Florida Eye Care, we see patients every week who didn't realize their blurry vision had a name and a solution. Understanding what cataracts are, who's at risk, and what steps to take can help you protect your sight for years to come.

## What Is a Cataract?

A cataract develops when the natural lens of the eye, normally clear, becomes clouded. This clouding happens gradually as proteins in the lens break down and clump together, scattering light instead of letting it pass through cleanly. The result is vision that looks hazy, blurry, or washed out—similar to looking through a foggy window.

## Who Is at Risk?

Cataracts can affect almost anyone, but certain factors significantly increase the likelihood of developing them:

- **Age.** The leading risk factor, most cataracts develop slowly after age 60.
- **Sun exposure.** Southwest Florida's abundant sunshine is great for outdoor living, but years of UV exposure without eye protection can accelerate lens clouding.
- **Diabetes.** Elevated blood sugar is linked to earlier, faster-developing cataracts.
- **Smoking and excessive alcohol use.** Both increase oxidative stress in the eye, speeding lens deterioration.
- **Family history.** Genetics can influence how early cataracts appear.
- **Certain medications.** Long-term corticosteroid use is associated with increased risk.
- **Previous eye injury or surgery.** Trauma or prior procedures can make the lens more susceptible to clouding.

## Common Symptoms to Watch For

- Cloudy, blurry, or dim vision
- Increasing difficulty seeing at night or while driving after dark
- Sensitivity to light and glare, especially from headlights or sunlight

- Seeing halos around lights
- Frequent changes in eyeglass or contact lens prescription
- Fading or yellowing of colors
- Double vision in a single eye

If any of these symptoms sound familiar, it's worth scheduling an eye exam rather than waiting for things to worsen.

## What You Can Do

**1. Protect your eyes from UV light.** Wear sunglasses that block 100% of UVA and UVB rays whenever you're outdoors, a simple habit that's especially important living in a sun-rich climate like ours.

**2. Manage chronic health conditions.** Keeping diabetes and blood sugar levels under control can slow the progression of cataracts.

**3. Avoid smoking and limit alcohol.** Reducing these habits lowers oxidative damage to the eyes over time.

**4. Eat an eye-healthy diet.** Foods rich in antioxidants, leafy greens, citrus fruits, and omega-3 fatty acids, support overall eye health.

**5. Schedule regular eye exams.** Routine checkups allow our team to detect cataracts early, monitor their progression, and recommend the right time for treatment.

**6. Consider cataract surgery when needed.** Modern cataract surgery is a safe, highly effective outpatient procedure that removes the clouded lens and replaces it with a clear artificial one. Most patients notice dramatically improved vision within days.

## Trust Southwest Florida Eye Care With Your Vision

Cataracts are a normal part of aging for many people, but they don't have to interfere with your quality of life. Our experienced team is here to evaluate your eye health, answer your questions, and guide you toward the best treatment option if needed.

Don't wait until cloudy vision affects your daily life, schedule a comprehensive eye exam with Southwest Florida Eye Care today and take the next step toward clearer, brighter vision.



**Albert Smolyar M.D.**  
LASIK, CATARACT & LENS  
REPLACEMENT SURGEON

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

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

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



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# HEARING AND MEMORY LOSS ARE CONNECTED

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



## Hearing Loss Affects the Brain

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

## Brain Strain and Social Isolation

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

## Quantifying Hearing Loss's Impact

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

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

## Reducing the Risk of Dementia

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

## Other Effects on Health

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

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

## In Summary

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

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



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

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# 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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# STEP FORWARD WITH FREEDOM: Honoring Our Veterans as America Turns 250

By Dr. Joe Altepeter, DPM

**T**his 4th of July is not just another Independence Day; it is a monumental milestone in our nation's history. This year, as the fireworks light up the Southwest Florida sky, we are celebrating America's 250th Birthday. A quarter-millennium of freedom, resilience, and progress is a profound achievement—one that would have been entirely impossible without the selflessness, bravery, and sacrifice of our military veterans.

As we gather with family and friends for barbecues, parades, and celebrations across Fort Myers, my team and I at the Family Foot & Leg Center want to pause and extend our deepest gratitude to those who wore the uniform.

To us, saluting our veterans is not a once-a-year gesture. It is a daily privilege. We are incredibly proud of our close working relationship with the Lee County VA Healthcare Center, allowing us to serve as a trusted extension of care for our local heroes. Every day, we welcome veterans into our clinic, and it is our absolute honor to help them march forward without pain.

## The Unique Physical Toll of Military Service

Military service asks a great deal of the human body, and perhaps no part bears the brunt of that burden more than the feet and ankles. From basic training to active deployment, our service members endure grueling physical demands:

- Carrying packs weighing up to 100 pounds.
- Marching for miles over unforgiving, uneven terrain.
- Wearing heavy, rigid combat boots for hours or days on end.

These conditions create a perfect storm for chronic, long-term musculoskeletal issues. Many veterans return to civilian life carrying the silent, painful reminders of their service in their joints, tendons, and bones. Whether you served decades ago or recently transitioned out of active duty, the wear and tear on your feet can significantly impact your daily quality of life, mobility, and independence.

## Comprehensive Podiatric Care: From Common Ailments to Complex Reconstruction

At Family Foot & Leg Center, we believe that those who stood up for our country shouldn't have to live with foot pain. Our partnership with the Lee County VA Healthcare Center ensures that local veterans have access to a full spectrum of advanced podiatric care.

No matter how minor or complex the issue may seem, we treat every patient with the specialized attention they deserve. Our services include:

### 1. Everyday Ailments and Routine Care

Even small issues can cause major disruptions to your day. We frequently treat ingrown toenails, fungal infections, calluses, and warts. These conditions are highly treatable, and getting them resolved quickly can prevent more serious complications down the road.

### 2. Heel Pain and Plantar Fasciitis

Decades of hard impacts often lead to chronic heel pain. Plantar fasciitis—inflammation of the thick band of tissue supporting your arch—is one of the most common complaints we see in veterans. We offer advanced therapies to target the root cause of the pain, getting you back on your feet comfortably.

### 3. Custom Orthotics and Biomechanical Support

Proper alignment changes everything. We design and prescribe custom orthotics tailored precisely to the contours of your feet. These devices redistribute pressure, correct structural imbalances, and provide the shock absorption that standard, off-the-shelf insoles simply cannot replicate.

### 4. Advanced and Complex Foot & Ankle Reconstruction

For veterans dealing with severe arthritis, old sports or combat injuries, flatfoot deformities, or trauma, conservative treatments might not be enough. I specialize in complex foot and ankle reconstruction. Using state-of-the-art surgical techniques, we can rebuild damaged joints, stabilize fractures, and restore function to severely compromised limbs.

**Our Mission:** Whether it is a simple procedure to fix a painful ingrown nail or a major reconstructive surgery to restore your mobility, our goal remains the same: to deliver exceptional, compassionate care that honors your service.

## A Healthier Future for Southwest Florida's Veterans

As we look back on 250 years of American freedom, we also look forward to a healthier future for our community. Pain is not a natural consequence of aging, nor is it a debt you must continue to pay for your military service.

If you are a veteran experiencing foot or ankle discomfort, or if you are a loved one noticing that a veteran in your life is slowing down due to mobility issues, please know that help is right here in Fort Myers. Through our collaboration with the Lee County VA, navigating your care is seamless and straightforward.

Thank you to all who have served, and Happy 250th Birthday, America!

## Take the First Step Toward Relief

Don't let foot and ankle pain keep you on the sidelines during this historic Semiquincentennial celebration. Let us help you regain your stride.

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

### Joe Altepeter, DPM, AACFAS

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



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# MACULAR DEGENERATION

## "I Thought I'd Never Read Again."

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

### PATIENT SUCCESS STORY

**Have you been told, "There's nothing more that can be done for your macular degeneration?"**

For many people, those are some of the most discouraging words they will ever hear.

The gentleman pictured above heard something very similar.

Harold, an 85-year-old Southwest Florida resident, had gradually lost the ability to comfortably enjoy one of his favorite activities—reading. Like many people living with macular degeneration, he believed he had reached the end of his options.

When Harold came to my office, I asked him one simple question that I ask every patient.

**"What would you like to be able to do again?"**  
His answer came without hesitation.  
**"I'd like to read again."**

Rather than focusing only on an eye chart, we focused on Harold's goals.

After carefully evaluating his remaining vision, we prescribed a customized low vision reading device designed specifically for his visual needs. Just as importantly, Harold received individualized training so he could comfortably and confidently use the device in his everyday life.

Today, Harold is reading again.

For many people, that means much more than reading words on a page. It means enjoying a favorite novel, completing crossword puzzles, reading the morning newspaper, following church bulletins, managing personal mail, or simply regaining the independence that vision loss had taken away.

One of the greatest compliments I receive isn't about helping someone read smaller print.

It's hearing a patient say,  
**"I got my life back."**



*Harold, 85, using a customized low vision reading device during a follow-up visit. After evaluation and training, he returned to reading activities he thought were lost because of macular degeneration. Individual results vary based on diagnosis and remaining vision.*

### More Than Magnification

Many people believe that if regular glasses, injections, or surgery can no longer improve their vision, nothing else can be done.

Fortunately, that isn't always true.

Low Vision Rehabilitation doesn't focus on curing the eye disease—it focuses on helping people make the best possible use of the vision they still have.

Depending on a person's vision and goals, specialized reading devices, telescopes, electronic magnification systems, prism glasses, contrast-enhancing filters, and other customized technology may help patients return to activities they thought were lost forever.

But the technology is only part of the solution.

The real goal is helping people regain independence, confidence, and quality of life.

### What Would You Like To Do Again?

Every Low Vision evaluation begins with the same question.

- Read books or newspapers?
- Watch television more comfortably?
- Recognize the faces of family and friends?
- Sew, knit, or enjoy hobbies again?
- Read restaurant menus?
- Write checks or manage your mail?
- Attend church or sporting events with greater confidence?

Although many of my patients have macular degeneration, Low Vision Rehabilitation may also benefit people living with glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy, inherited retinal diseases, albinism, optic nerve disorders, stroke-related vision loss, and many other conditions that cannot be fully corrected with ordinary glasses.

If you've been told, **"There's nothing more that can be done,"** don't assume you've reached the end of your options.

While we cannot restore normal vision or cure every eye disease, we can often help people make better use of the vision they still have—allowing them to return to the activities that give life meaning and enjoyment.

**Sometimes improving vision isn't just about seeing better.**

**It's about living better.**



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

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# VOTE FOR FREEDOM WHY LEE COUNTY'S FUTURE STARTS AT THE PRIMARY

By Mercedes Price-Harry, Lee GOP Chair

**A**s Chair of the Lee County Republican Party, I'm reaching out to everyone, but particularly conservative-minded minority voters, independents, and women who may not have voted Republican in the past or who sometimes sit out elections. With critical races just months away, including local contests that directly shape life in Lee County, I invite you to register Republican before July 20th and join us with your vote in the August 18th primary. There, we will nominate principled, God-fearing, freedom-loving Republican candidates to carry our values into the November 3rd general election against Democrats.

What unites us goes far deeper than Party labels. Our shared love of God, family, and individual liberty creates common ground that can bring Americans together across backgrounds.

Local elections are where politics hits home hardest. Your school board determines the education your children receive. County commissioners set tax rates, maintain roads, ensure public safety, and guide responsible growth. These decisions affect your family's safety, your property values, and the future of our communities far more than debates in Washington. Strong, principled leadership at the local level is essential if our families are to thrive.

Consider the journey of our own Congressman, who first rose as a grassroots activist during the T.E.A. Party movement. His commitment to education led him to the Florida House for two terms, then to Congress, and now candidate for Governor. His story demonstrates that the Republican Party opens its doors to dedicated leaders from every background and demographic who are willing to put freedom and service to their community first. We are a Party that respects the values so many Americans hold dear; faith in God, strong families, and the desire to leave our children a better future. These beliefs are especially cherished in Black and Hispanic communities across the nation. While many Democrats downplay or undermine these foundations, Republicans actively defend them, even when it isn't popular to do so.

Freedom remains our highest priority. The painful lessons of the COVID-19 era made this crystal clear. Republican-led states, including Florida under Governor Ron DeSantis, a Republican, ejected extended lockdowns and government overreach. They protected jobs, kept businesses open when possible, trusted families to make responsible choices for themselves, and defended personal liberties. The results speak for themselves: Florida is thriving economically, our schools are open, and opportunity is expanding for everyone. Conservative Republican governance works.

Republicans are also firmly committed to keeping our communities safe. Secure borders, restored under Republican leadership, protect women, children, and families from the chaos and strain caused by open-border policies. Safe streets and secure neighborhoods are not partisan issues, they are basic duties of government that allow families to flourish.

If you share these priorities - freedom, faith, family, safety, and opportunity - I urge you to register as a Republican by July 20th so you can participate in the August 18th primary. You don't have to agree with us on every single issue. But when you compare Florida's success under Republican leadership with the struggles in many Democrat-led areas, the choice is clear.

Your vote matters. In strongly Republican Lee County, the winners of the August 18th primary will almost certainly prevail in November. That makes the August primary the most important election for determining our leadership.

Please visit [www.LeeGOP.org](http://www.LeeGOP.org) to learn more about our candidates. Register Republican by July 20th, vote on August 18th, and help us keep Lee County red. Together, we can continue building a Florida that works for every family, regardless of background.

When you vote Republican, you vote for freedom.



## Did you know...

- Republicans outnumber Democrats in Lee County 2:1
- The August 18th primary will likely determine the winner in the general election
- Many Lee County Republicans do not vote in the primary

The Ethical Campaign and Accountability Initiative

## Republican Candidate Debate

July 18th, 3-7 pm

Florida Southwestern College  
Room U102



[www.LeeGOP.org](http://www.LeeGOP.org)



# BEYOND PAIN RELIEF: How Stem Cell Therapy Is Changing Lives

By Derek P. Wimmer, PA-C

**F**or millions of people living with chronic pain, traditional treatment options often feel like a revolving door of temporary relief, invasive surgeries, and mounting frustration. Whether it's degenerative joint disease, sports injuries, or age-related wear and tear, conventional approaches frequently mask symptoms rather than address underlying tissue damage. Patients find themselves cycling through anti-inflammatory medications, cortisone injections, and physical therapy with diminishing returns. However, a transformative shift is occurring in orthopedic medicine, and Wimmer Regenerative Orthopedics stands at the forefront of this revolution through advanced stem cell therapy.

Stem cell therapy represents a paradigm shift from symptom management to actual tissue regeneration. Unlike pain medications that merely suppress discomfort or surgical interventions that remove or replace damaged tissue, regenerative medicine harnesses the body's innate healing capabilities. At Wimmer Regenerative Orthopedics, this cutting-edge approach offers patients a promising alternative that targets the root cause of their pain while promoting natural recovery and long-term wellness.

The science behind stem cell therapy is both elegant and powerful. Stem cells possess the remarkable ability to differentiate into various cell types, including cartilage, bone, and soft tissue. When strategically introduced into damaged areas, these cells can stimulate repair processes, reduce inflammation, and regenerate deteriorated structures. They also release growth factors and proteins that create an optimal healing environment within the affected tissue. For patients suffering from conditions like osteoarthritis, rotator cuff injuries, meniscus tears, tendinitis, or degenerative disc disease, this means potentially avoiding surgery while achieving meaningful, lasting relief.

What sets Wimmer Regenerative Orthopedics apart is their comprehensive, patient-centered approach to regenerative medicine. Rather than offering a one-size-fits-all solution, their team conducts thorough evaluations to determine each patient's candidacy for stem cell therapy. This personalized assessment considers the severity of tissue damage, overall health status, and individual treatment goals, ensuring that regenerative interventions are both appropriate and optimally effective.



The stem cell therapy process at Wimmer Regenerative Orthopedics is designed with patient comfort and safety as top priorities. Procedures are typically performed in an outpatient setting using minimally invasive techniques. We use umbilical cord-derived mesenchymal stem cells, which are processed to concentrate the regenerative components, and then precisely delivered to the affected area using advanced imaging guidance. This targeted approach maximizes therapeutic benefits while minimizing risks and recovery time.

Patients who undergo stem cell therapy at Wimmer Regenerative Orthopedics often report remarkable improvements in pain levels, mobility, and overall quality of life. Unlike surgical recovery that may require months of rehabilitation and carries risks of complications, many individuals return to daily activities within weeks. The regenerative effects continue developing over time, with some patients experiencing progressive improvement for six months or longer as new tissue forms and inflammation subsides. Many report being able to return to activities they had given up, from recreational sports to simple pleasures like gardening or playing with grandchildren.

Beyond pain relief, stem cell therapy offers the potential to slow or even reverse degenerative processes. For active individuals hoping to maintain their lifestyle or older adults seeking to preserve independence, this represents a game-changing opportunity. Rather than accepting progressive decline as inevitable or resigning themselves to joint replacement surgery, patients can take proactive steps toward genuine healing and tissue restoration. This is particularly significant for younger patients who want to delay or avoid artificial joint replacements that have limited lifespans.

The promise of regenerative medicine extends beyond current applications. As research advances and techniques become more refined, the scope of treatable conditions continues expanding. Wimmer Regenerative Orthopedics remains committed to staying at the cutting edge of these developments, ensuring their patients have access to the most innovative and evidence-based treatments available.

For those exhausted by ineffective pain management strategies or hoping to avoid invasive surgery, stem cell therapy at Wimmer Regenerative Orthopedics offers renewed hope. By combining advanced regenerative techniques with personalized care and deep clinical expertise, they're helping patients reclaim active, fulfilling lives free from chronic pain. In the evolving landscape of orthopedic medicine, this represents not just a treatment option, but a fundamental reimagining of what healing can be.

Contact Wimmer Regenerative Orthopedics today at 239-829-4300 to schedule your consultation and discover how regenerative medicine can transform your path to pain free living.

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# ALIGNMENT MATTERS: CLUB PILATES®

## Shrinking Fat, Protecting Muscle - A Pilates Informed Guide to GLP-1 Therapy

By Shannon Willits, NPCP, FAFS

Obesity rates across Southwest Florida mirror a troubling national pattern. Nearly four in ten American adults carry a clinical obesity diagnosis, and a significant portion live alongside at least one related chronic condition — type 2 diabetes, hypertension, metabolic syndrome, or cardiovascular disease. For decades, managing these overlapping conditions meant navigating a complicated landscape of medications, dietary counseling, and lifestyle modification, often with results that were modest and short-lived. That landscape has shifted considerably, thanks to a class of medications known as GLP-1 receptor agonists.

Names like semaglutide (Ozempic, Wegovy) and tirzepatide (Mounjaro, Zepbound) have become part of everyday conversation. But the full clinical picture of what these medications do — and the equally important role that structured movement must play alongside them — is one that many patients are only beginning to understand.

**The Metabolic Environment These Medications Target**  
To appreciate why GLP-1 medications have generated such clinical enthusiasm, it helps to understand what they are designed to address. Obesity is not simply a matter of excess weight — it drives chronic, low-grade systemic inflammation. Inflammation plays a central role in insulin resistance, which underpins type 2 diabetes, metabolic syndrome, and a cascade of downstream complications, including cardiovascular disease and fatty liver disease.

Insulin resistance creates a self-reinforcing cycle: visceral fat — the kind stored around the organs — secretes pro-inflammatory signals that further impair blood glucose regulation. Left unaddressed, this accelerates arterial damage, stresses the kidneys, and elevates the risk of major cardiac events. For many patients in this cycle, lifestyle modification alone rarely breaks it quickly enough to prevent end-organ consequences.

### What GLP-1 Agonists Actually Do

Glucagon-like peptide-1 (GLP-1) is a naturally occurring gut hormone released in response to eating. It stimulates insulin secretion relative to blood glucose levels, suppresses glucagon release, and signals the brain toward satiety. In people with metabolic dysfunction, this system is often blunted. GLP-1 receptor agonists pharmacologically amplify and extend these effects.

The benefits reach well beyond weight loss. Research published in *Cell Reports Medicine* found that GLP-1 medications improve outcomes across multiple chronic conditions — cardiovascular disease, chronic kidney disease, metabolic liver disease, and sleep apnea — through anti-inflammatory and metabolic pathways that are, in some cases, at least partially independent of the degree of weight loss achieved. These agents bind to receptors found not only in the pancreas, but in cardiomyocytes, vascular endothelial cells, the kidneys, and the central nervous system, producing a broadly systemic effect that targets root-level inflammation.

### The Muscle Problem: Where the Conversation Must Not Stop

This is where prescriptions alone fall critically short — and where movement becomes non-negotiable. As effective as GLP-1 medications are at driving fat loss, they do not discriminate perfectly between fat and lean tissue. When caloric intake drops substantially, as it typically does with appetite suppression, the body will trim lean mass alongside adipose tissue unless given a clear physiological reason not to. Research analyzing data from more than 800,000 individuals confirmed that while fat mass loss significantly exceeded muscle loss, the reduction in lean tissue is real — with roughly one-quarter of total weight lost coming from lean mass in some patient populations.

This matters far beyond appearance. Skeletal muscle is the body's primary site of glucose uptake and a major regulator of resting metabolism. Meaningful muscle loss can reduce insulin sensitivity, slow metabolic rate, and — particularly in adults over 50 — accelerate the onset of sarcopenic obesity, a condition where low muscle mass coexists with high body fat. Sarcopenic obesity carries independent cardiovascular and functional risks that are considerably harder to reverse than prevent.

### The Pilates Principle: Control, Load, and Intentional Resistance

This is precisely where Pilates methodology enters the conversation. Joseph Pilates built his system on a foundational principle that medicine is now quantifying: the body performs optimally when deep stabilizing muscles are recruited first, movement is controlled through its full range, and resistance is applied with intention rather than momentum. For patients on GLP-1 therapy, this translates directly.

The Reformer, the Cadillac, and resistance-based mat work provide the mechanical loading stimulus that tells the body to protect lean tissue during caloric deficit. The spring-based resistance system inherent to classical Pilates apparatus allows progressive overload without the compressive joint forces that often make conventional weight training inaccessible to deconditioned or post-injury populations — exactly the population most likely to be managing obesity and metabolic disease. Pilates-based training also prioritizes the posterior chain and deep core musculature, both of which are disproportionately weakened in individuals with chronic metabolic conditions and sedentary histories.

Research supports this integration. A 2022 meta-analysis found that resistance training during weight loss helped individuals preserve—or even increase—lean mass while simultaneously reducing fat mass. Additional studies have demonstrated that patients who maintained a structured exercise program during GLP-1 treatment retained significantly more of their results after discontinuing medication, a critical consideration for long-term weight management and metabolic health.

As promising as GLP-1 medications have proven to be, the ultimate goal is not simply weight loss. The goal is preserving the strength, mobility, metabolic health, and independence that allow people to live well for decades to come. Lower numbers on a scale may improve health risks, but maintaining muscle mass is what allows individuals to continue climbing stairs, carrying groceries, playing with grandchildren, recovering from illness, and remaining active as they age.

The most successful outcomes occur when medication and movement are viewed as partners rather than competitors. GLP-1 therapy can help quiet the inflammatory and metabolic processes that make weight loss difficult. Pilates provides the strength, stability, and functional movement necessary to build a healthier body during that process. Together, they create an approach that addresses not only how much weight is lost, but also the quality of the life that follows.

### Shannon Willits, Master Pilates Educator

Shannon Willits is a Master Pilates Educator with more than 25 years of experience in functional movement, rehabilitation-informed training, and athletic performance. As the owner of seven growing Club Pilates studios in Lee County, Florida, she has become one of the region's leading voices in Pilates education, mentoring and certifying aspiring instructors through comprehensive training programs rooted in movement science.

Shannon is STOTT Pilates certified, a Fellow of Applied Functional Science (FAFS), a Functional Golf Specialist, and a certified Gyrotonic® instructor. She is also an approved NPCP CEC Provider and the creator of the Pilates for Rotational Sports workshop, which blends performance training, injury prevention, and functional movement education for both athletes and instructors.

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# CAREGIVER BURDEN IN ALZHEIMER'S TRIALS: Measuring an Overlooked Outcome

In Alzheimer's disease, decline rarely belongs to one person alone. It changes the household. A spouse becomes a medication manager. An adult child becomes a scheduler, advocate, driver, financial monitor, and emotional anchor. The work is intimate, constant, and often invisible.

That invisibility is beginning to matter scientifically.

For decades, Alzheimer's clinical trials have focused on cognition, function, safety, and, more recently, biomarkers such as amyloid and tau. These measures remain essential. But researchers are increasingly recognizing that the value of a treatment cannot be understood fully unless it also considers the person providing daily care.

The Alzheimer's Association's 2026 Alzheimer's Disease Facts and Figures report estimates that more than 7 million Americans are living with Alzheimer's disease, with nearly 13 million unpaid caregivers providing support. That scale makes caregiver burden more than a private hardship. It's a public health outcome.

Most Alzheimer's trials already rely on caregivers. A knowledgeable study partner often helps report changes in memory, judgment, daily function, medication use, and safety. The Clinical Dementia Rating—Sum of Boxes, or CDR-SB, one of the field's most widely used tools, incorporates information from both the patient and a reliable informant, often a spouse, adult child, or close care partner.

But caregiver input about the patient is not the same as measuring caregiver burden.

A caregiver may be asked whether a loved one is forgetting appointments, while no one asks whether the caregiver is sleeping, missing work, feeling isolated, or grieving the gradual loss of the relationship as it once was. That distinction matters. Caregivers have long served as observers in Alzheimer's research. Only more recently have they begun to be treated as people with measurable outcomes of their own.

A 2021 review of dementia drug trials found that very few studies measured how treatment affected caregivers. When they did, researchers most often used the Zarit Burden Interview, a questionnaire



that asks about the emotional, physical, and social strain of caregiving. Some studies also measured how distressed caregivers felt by dementia-related behavior changes, such as agitation, anxiety, or sleep disruption.

Caregiver burden is not a vague or sentimental concept. It is measurable. It includes emotional strain, social restriction, physical fatigue, financial pressure, anxiety, role changes, and grief.

August is *National Grief Awareness Month* and it offers a timely reminder that dementia caregiving often includes grief before death. The Alzheimer's Association describes grief and loss as common experiences for caregivers, sometimes beginning at diagnosis and recurring as the disease changes personality, independence, and shared roles. The Family Caregiver Alliance, drawing on the work of family therapist and researcher Pauline Boss, describes dementia caregiving through the lens of "ambiguous loss" — or the painful experience of someone being physically present but psychologically changed.

This grief is not incidental. Research in dementia caregiving has linked anticipatory grief with psychological distress, including depressive symptoms. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration's patient-focused drug development efforts have also emphasized the importance of systematically collecting patient and caregiver input when evaluating medical products.

One notable example came from the phase 3 Clarity AD trial of lecanemab in early Alzheimer's disease. In exploratory quality-of-life analyses published in *The Journal of Prevention of Alzheimer's Disease*, investigators reported that lecanemab was associated with less increase in care partner burden over 18 months compared with placebo, as measured by the Zarit Burden Interview.

That finding should be interpreted carefully. Not every treatment that slows decline will reduce caregiver burden. Some therapies may ease disease-related burden while adding treatment-related burden through infusions, monitoring, travel, cost, or anxiety about side effects. Future trials will need to distinguish among disease burden, caregiving workload, emotional burden, treatment burden, and the positive dimensions of caregiving, such as purpose, closeness, and love.

Clinicians do not need to wait for trial design to evolve. A brief caregiver check-in can be as important as a medication review: Are you sleeping? How many hours of care are you providing? Are you missing your own medical appointments? Because making a clinical trial more patient-centric means equipping and empowering the caregiver to remain healthy, supported, and able to sustain care.

To make it easy to get a memory screen, the Neuropsychiatric Research Center of Southwest Florida (NPRC) offers free memory screens at our office. To schedule your free memory screen, contact us at 239-939-7777. Please bring a list of your current medications to your appointment. The screening and all services provided at our center are at no cost to you and we do not ask for any insurance information. At the Neuropsychiatric Research center there are many cutting edge clinical studies that are focused on addressing memory issues. Take charge of your brain health and schedule your free memory screen today! #Memoriesmatter



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

# PROTECT YOUR SKIN THIS SUMMER: ART OF DERMATOLOGY WANTS YOU TO TAKE CAUTION

**J**uly marks UV Safety Month, a crucial time when Art of Dermatology reminds patients and the community about the importance of taking caution and protecting their skin from harmful ultraviolet radiation. As summer temperatures soar and outdoor activities beckon, exercising caution with your skin should be your top priority.

July marks UV Safety Month, a crucial time when Art of Dermatology reminds patients and the community about the importance of protecting their skin from harmful ultraviolet radiation. As summer temperatures soar and outdoor activities beckon, taking care of your skin should be your top priority.

## Understanding UV Radiation Risks

Ultraviolet radiation from the sun poses significant risks to your skin health year-round, but summer's intense rays make protection even more critical. UV exposure is the leading cause of skin cancer, including melanoma, basal cell carcinoma, and squamous cell carcinoma. Additionally, prolonged sun exposure accelerates skin aging, causing wrinkles, age spots, and loss of skin elasticity.

## Art of Dermatology's Summer Protection Strategy

At Art of Dermatology, we believe prevention is the best medicine. Our comprehensive approach to UV safety includes education, early detection, and personalized protection plans for each patient's unique skin type and lifestyle.

## ESSENTIAL SUN PROTECTION TIPS:

- **Sunscreen Selection and Application** - Choose broad-spectrum sunscreen with SPF 30 or higher. Apply generously 15-30 minutes before sun exposure, and reapply every two hours or immediately after swimming or sweating. Don't forget often-missed areas like ears, feet, and lips.
- **Seek Shade Strategically** - UV rays are strongest between 10 AM and 4 PM. Plan outdoor activities during early morning or late afternoon hours when possible. When shade isn't available, create your own with umbrellas, wide-brimmed hats, or UV-protective clothing.
- **Protective Clothing Matters** - Invest in UPF-rated clothing, sunglasses with 100% UV protection, and



wide-brimmed hats that shade your face, neck, and ears. Dark, tightly woven fabrics offer better protection than light, loose weaves.

## YEAR-ROUND VIGILANCE

UV Safety Month serves as an important reminder, but skin protection shouldn't end when summer does. UV rays reflect off snow, sand, and water, making protection necessary during all seasons and weather conditions.

## Professional Skin Examinations

Regular dermatological check-ups are essential for early detection of skin changes or potential cancers. Art of Dermatology recommends annual skin examinations for most adults, with more frequent visits for those with risk factors such as fair skin, family history of skin cancer, or numerous moles.

## Take Action Today

This UV Safety Month, commit to making sun protection a daily habit. Schedule your annual skin examination with Art of Dermatology, update your sunscreen supply, and invest in quality protective clothing and accessories.

Your skin is your body's largest organ and deserves the best care possible. By following these guidelines and partnering with Art of Dermatology, you can enjoy summer activities while keeping your skin healthy for years to come. Remember: today's sun protection is tomorrow's healthy skin.

## 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. Call Art of Dermatology today for more information.



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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# THE FUTURE OF MEDICINE IS PERSONAL: Why Patients Must Become Active Participants in Their Health

By Dr. Doreen DeStefano, DNP, APRN, NHD

**F**or decades, healthcare has largely focused on diagnosing disease and treating symptoms. While modern medicine has achieved remarkable advances in emergency care, surgery, and life-saving interventions, many patients continue to ask an important question:

"Why did this happen to me in the first place?"

That question has shaped my entire career.

As the founder of Root Causes Holistic Health & Medicine in Southwest Florida, I have spent years helping patients look beyond symptoms and diagnoses to identify the underlying factors that contribute to chronic illness. Whether someone is facing cancer, autoimmune disease, chronic fatigue, hormone imbalance, Lyme disease, long COVID, or unexplained health challenges, the body is constantly providing clues. Our job is to learn how to listen.

This philosophy has become the foundation of my upcoming book, *Biohacking Cancer*, which will be released later this month. The book explores a new way of thinking about health and disease—one that focuses on understanding and optimizing the body's internal environment rather than simply reacting to illness after it develops.

I am also honored to be featured in the upcoming television series *America's Best Doctors*, which highlights physicians and healthcare professionals who are helping shape the future of medicine through innovation, patient advocacy, and individualized care. The series will showcase doctors who are challenging conventional thinking and bringing new perspectives to healthcare.

The timing of these two projects feels particularly important because healthcare is undergoing a transformation.

Patients today have access to more information than ever before. Advanced laboratory testing, genetic analysis, metabolic assessments, wearable technology, and functional diagnostics allow us to gain unprecedented insight into how the body is functioning long before disease becomes obvious.

Unfortunately, many people still wait until they are sick before taking action.

By the time symptoms appear, dysfunction has often been developing for years.

Inflammation, hormone imbalances, nutritional deficiencies, environmental toxin exposure, chronic infections, poor sleep, unmanaged stress, and metabolic dysfunction can quietly accumulate beneath the surface. Eventually, the body reaches a tipping point.

The good news is that many of these factors are measurable and modifiable.

One of the concepts I discuss extensively in my book is what I call becoming a "health detective." Rather than accepting symptoms as isolated events, patients can learn to investigate the underlying patterns that influence their health.

For example, fatigue may not simply be fatigue. It may reflect thyroid dysfunction, mitochondrial stress, hormone imbalance, chronic infection, nutritional deficiencies, blood sugar instability, inflammation, or toxic burden.

Likewise, cancer is not simply a collection of abnormal cells. It exists within a complex biological environment influenced by immune function, metabolism, inflammation, circulation, hormones, stress physiology, and environmental exposures.

When we understand these relationships, we gain opportunities to intervene earlier and more effectively.

This does not mean abandoning conventional medicine. Quite the opposite.

Some of the most successful outcomes occur when evidence-based conventional treatments are combined with strategies that strengthen the body's resilience, improve recovery, reduce treatment side effects, and address the factors that may have contributed to illness in the first place.

Healthcare should not be an either-or conversation. It should be a collaborative one.

The future of medicine belongs to personalized care. Every patient brings a unique combination of genetics, lifestyle factors, environmental exposures, emotional experiences, nutritional status, and medical history. Two individuals may share the same diagnosis yet require entirely different treatment strategies.

That realization is driving many of the advances we are seeing in precision medicine, functional medicine, and integrative oncology today.

As I continue working with patients throughout Southwest Florida, I remain inspired by the remarkable resilience of the human body. Given the right tools, support, and environment, healing is often possible in ways that surprise both patients and practitioners.

My hope is that Biohacking Cancer helps empower readers to ask better questions, become active participants in their care, and recognize that they have far more influence over their health than they may realize.

My appearance in *America's Best Doctors* provides an opportunity to share that message on a larger stage, but the mission remains the same as it has always been: helping people understand the root causes of illness and creating personalized strategies that support long-term wellness.

Health is not simply the absence of disease.

It is the result of thousands of daily biological decisions taking place within the body.

The more we understand those decisions, the more power we have to influence our future.

The next era of medicine will not be defined solely by new drugs or technologies. It will be defined by informed patients, personalized care, and a deeper understanding of the complex systems that make healing possible.

That future is already here.

For more information about Dr. Doreen DeStefano, upcoming events, educational programs, and patient resources, contact Root Causes Holistic Health & Medicine at 239-425-2900 or visit [rtcausesmd.com](http://rtcausesmd.com).



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# STRENGTH TRAINING AND CHRONIC DISEASE

By Julie Hoffmann, Owner & Coach

**S**trength training is one of the most effective forms of exercise for preventing, managing, and in some cases slowing the progression of many chronic diseases. Organizations like the American College of Sports Medicine, American Heart Association, and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend it as a key component of a healthy lifestyle.

Here are some of the major benefits:

## Heart Disease

- Lowers blood pressure.
- Improves cholesterol by increasing HDL ("good") cholesterol and reducing triglycerides.
- Improves circulation and blood vessel function.
- Helps maintain a healthy body weight, reducing cardiovascular risk.

## Type 2 Diabetes & Prediabetes

- Increases muscle mass, allowing muscles to store and use more glucose.
- Improves insulin sensitivity.
- Helps lower A1C levels.
- Reduces the need for diabetes medications in some individuals (under medical supervision).

## Obesity

- Increases resting metabolic rate by building lean muscle.
- Burns calories during and after exercise.
- Helps preserve muscle while losing fat.
- Supports long-term weight maintenance.

## Osteoporosis

- Stimulates bone formation and increases bone density.
- Reduces bone loss associated with aging.
- Lowers the risk of fractures by improving strength and balance.

## Arthritis

- Strengthens the muscles that support joints.
- Reduces joint pain and stiffness.
- Improves mobility and daily function.
- Can decrease reliance on pain medications.

## Cognitive Decline & Dementia

- Improves memory and executive function.
- Increases blood flow to the brain.
- May reduce the risk of cognitive decline.
- Enhances independence through better physical function.

## Depression & Anxiety

- Releases mood-enhancing endorphins.
- Improves self-confidence and self-esteem.
- Reduces stress and anxiety symptoms.
- Improves sleep quality.

## Sarcopenia (Age-Related Muscle Loss)

- Slows or reverses muscle loss.
- Increases strength and power.
- Improves balance and coordination.
- Reduces fall risk.
- Helps older adults maintain independence.

## Falls & Frailty

- Improves balance and reaction time.
- Strengthens legs and core.
- Increases confidence during walking and everyday activities.
- Significantly reduces the risk of falls.

## Cancer

For many cancer survivors, strength training can:

- Reduce cancer-related fatigue.
- Preserve muscle during treatment.
- Improve quality of life.
- Enhance physical function and independence.
- Improve bone health, especially in those receiving hormone therapies.

## Chronic Pain

- Reduces chronic back pain.
- Improves posture.
- Strengthens muscles that stabilize the spine.
- Decreases pain associated with many musculoskeletal conditions.

## Chronic Lung Disease

For people with conditions such as Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease:

- Improves muscle endurance.
- Makes everyday activities easier.
- Reduces fatigue.
- Improves overall quality of life.

## Why Strength Training Is So Powerful

Muscle is often called the body's "metabolic engine." More muscle helps:

- Regulate blood sugar.
- Reduce inflammation.
- Improve hormone function.
- Protect bones and joints.
- Maintain mobility and independence.
- Increase energy.
- Support healthy aging.

## A Powerful Takeaway

Strength training doesn't just build muscle—it builds resilience. It helps prevent and manage many of the most common chronic diseases while improving energy, confidence, independence, and quality of life.

For adults—especially those over 50—even 2–3 supervised strength-training sessions per week can produce meaningful improvements in health, function, and longevity when combined with regular aerobic activity, good nutrition, and adequate recovery.



**JULIE HOFFMANN**

**Owner & Coach**

Julie Hoffmann, alongside her husband Bill, is the owner of EP Fitness Studio SWFL. Opening this studio is a lifelong dream come true for her.

Helping people improve their quality of life through movement has always been Julie's motivation. She became a certified personal trainer and fitness instructor at 18 years old during her freshman year of college, and she has remained dedicated to the field ever since.

Julie taught college-level Health, Fitness, and P.E. courses for 21 years in Illinois. She has also instructed a wide range of fitness classes for more than 30 years, including Spinning, Pilates, Step Aerobics, Kickboxing, Rhythmic Weight Training, Get Fit While You Sit, and Arthritis Foundation classes.

For the last 10 years, Julie has worked in rehabilitation hospitals—Walter Reed in Washington, DC, Shirley Ryan AbilityLab in Illinois, and Encompass in Florida—where she has assisted with Physical Therapy and witnessed firsthand the devastating effects of sedentary lifestyles.

At EP Fitness Studio SWFL, Julie's mission is to meet clients exactly where they are—regardless of age or ability—and empower them to live their best lives.

*Certified Personal Trainer, American Council on Exercise (ACE)*

*Certified Master Fitness Specialist, Cooper Institute*

*CPR/AED Certified, American Heart Association*

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# How The Good Feet Store's 3-Step Arch Support System (and Your HSA/FSA Funds) Can Help You Walk Pain-Free this Summer

If you've been living with that dull ache in your feet after long days—or that persistent twinge in your knees, hips, or lower back—you've probably learned to just “deal with it.” Maybe you've swapped shoes, stretched, or tried to ignore the discomfort altogether. But what if the problem isn't your shoes—or even your body? What if it's your alignment?

That's where The Good Feet Store comes in. Their 3-Step Arch Support System isn't just about comfort. It's about realignment—helping your body rediscover the posture and balance it was designed for. And here's something even better: you can use your HSA or FSA funds to invest in your health before those dollars disappear at the end of the year.

Let's break it down.

## The Root of the Pain

Foot pain can be sneaky. It starts with a bit of soreness, maybe after standing all day or going for a walk. But over time, that misalignment in your feet can ripple upward, causing discomfort in your knees, hips, and even your lower back. Think of your feet as your foundation. If that foundation is uneven, everything above it starts to shift and strain.

The Good Feet Store's 3-Step System is designed to rebuild that foundation. Each set of arch supports—Relaxers, Maintainers, and Strengtheners—plays a role in helping your body find balance again. The Relaxers give you soothing comfort when you're off your feet. The Maintainers support you through everyday activity. And the Strengtheners help train your arches and muscles to stay properly aligned over time.

It's not just about temporary relief; it's about long-term correction. When your feet are properly supported, everything from your stride to your posture improves. You feel lighter. More stable. More you.

## Real People. Real Relief.

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Yes! And this is where a lot of people are pleasantly surprised. Your Health Savings Account (HSA) or Flexible Spending Account (FSA) dollars can be used toward Good Feet Arch Supports because they qualify as a medical expense—after all, they're designed to help relieve pain and improve your health.

Here's the catch: many FSA plans expire at the end of the year. That means if you don't spend those funds, you lose them. Poof—gone. So instead of scrambling to find something eligible in December (hello, boxes of bandages and extra contact solution), consider investing in something that gives back every single day—relief.

Using your HSA/FSA funds for The Good Feet Store's arch supports is not only smart, but also strategic. You're putting your health dollars toward something that genuinely improves your quality of life.

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There's never a bad time to start taking better care of your body, but summer is the perfect time. As the days heat up, we're all on our feet more: walking, traveling, gardening, and soaking up time outdoors. With sandal season in full swing, there's real motivation to take that next step (literally) toward comfort.

Imagine heading into the new year with your body aligned, your pain reduced, and your posture improved—all thanks to a set of arch supports that feel like they were made just for you.

## The Bottom Line

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Don't let this summer slip by with pain in every step. Visit your local Good Feet Store for your free fitting and test walk and see just how good it feels to step into balance again.

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# Tired of Missing Teeth Ruining Your Life?

## Fort Myers Has a Game-Changer – And It's Already Here.

By Dr. Eugene Titov and Dr. Olga Titov

**P**icture this: you walk in missing teeth (or with teeth that are failing you), and you walk out the SAME DAY with a full, functional smile. No gummy bears for dinner. No hiding your smile in photos. Sound too good to be true?

It's not. Marsh Cove Dental has quietly been doing exactly this in Fort Myers for years now and the people who've been through it can't stop talking about it.

### One Office. One Specialty. Done Right.

Most dental offices dabble in a little bit of everything. Marsh Cove's Fort Myers location does one thing: full-arch dental implants. You might know them as All-On-4, Teeth-In-A-Day, or Same-Day Teeth.

That focus matters. When a team does the same complex procedure every single day instead of occasionally, they get really, really good at it.

"We're the alternative to the corporate dental chains that treat you like a number," says Dr. Titov, the practice's lead implant specialist. "Our patients tell us the difference is night and day."

### "I Was Told No Everywhere Else" — Not Here

Here's the part that's turning heads: patients who were rejected elsewhere because of bone loss are getting approved at Marsh Cove.

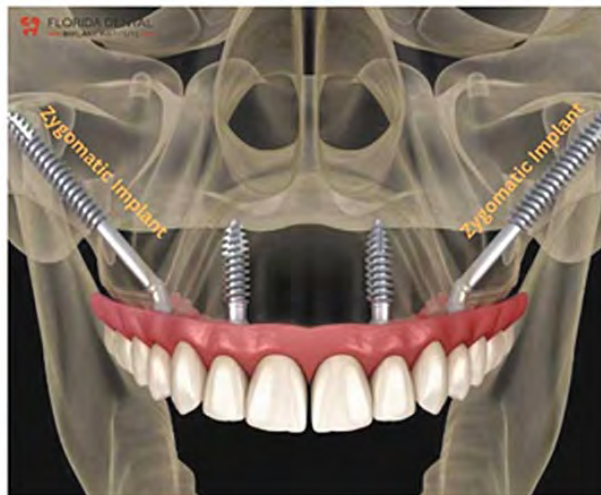
The secret? Zygomatic implants. Instead of relying on the jawbone (which is often too thin or damaged after years of missing teeth), these implants anchor directly into the cheekbone, one of the densest, strongest bones in your entire face. That means:

- No sinus lifts
- No bone grafting
- No waiting months for bone to heal before you get teeth

If you've been told "you're not a candidate," that "no" might just need a second opinion.

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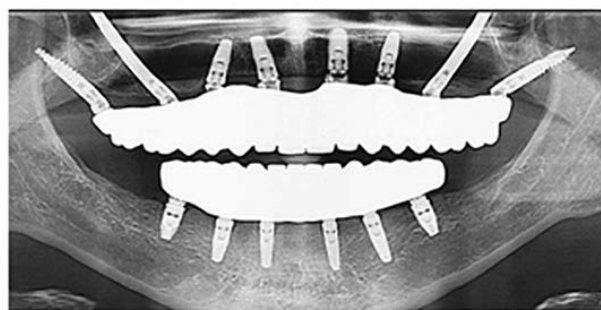


within hours of your implant surgery. You leave the same day with teeth that work, not a hole, not a denture you're afraid to bite into.

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### You're Not Doing This Alone (or Awake and Anxious)

Sedation matters, especially if you're nervous or have health conditions. That's why Marsh Cove brings in dedicated anesthesiologists and CRNAs for every procedure. Dr. Titov focuses 100% on your teeth while a separate professional focuses 100% on keeping you safe and comfortable. Procedures go faster, safer, and smoother.



### Still Growing, Still Changing Lives

Since opening its doors in Fort Myers, Marsh Cove has become Southwest Florida's go-to destination for full-arch dental implants—known for taking on the toughest cases other offices turn away and for treating every patient like a person, not a procedure number.

## See What Our Patients Say



*I am very happy with my dental implants from Marsh Cove Dental's Ft. Meyers office. The entire process was smooth, and the results exceeded my expectations. They look Natural, feel comfortable, and have given me much more confidence when eating and smiling.*

*The staff was professional, caring, and supportive throughout the treatment. Dr. T is a true protectionist. He wanted me to absolutely love my new smile and made adjustments that I wouldn't have even noticed myself. His attention to detail and commitment to excellence really set him apart.*

*That's why it's best to leave it to the professionals, Dr. T has an eye for beautiful, natural looking teeth and takes pride in every detail. I highly recommend this practice to anyone considering dental implants. Thank you Dr. T and the entire team, for giving me a smile I love! - Donna N.*

### Patients Always Come First at Marsh Cove

For the husband and wife dental team Dr. Evgeny Titov and Dr. Olga Titov, dentistry is far more than a vocation, it's their true passion. They strive to provide exceptional quality restorative and cosmetic dentistry to patients in a comfortable practice setting.

Using a wide variety of cutting-edge technologies, they truly love helping patients achieve beautiful smiles.



*Marsh Cove Dental and Implant Center is the cleanest medical facility I have ever seen. The staff are wonderful. My experience from the time I walked in the door until my procedure was finished I would rate as 10+. Dr Tito's is the BEST! I highly recommend Marsh Cove Dental and Implant Center. - Bill K.*



*The staff is friendly, welcoming, and all around amazing. Dr. Titov PERFECTED my smile! David the consultant and Jen the receptionist cheered me along through the process. Dr. Titov changed my life!! He was very thorough patient and listened to every detail. My dental assistant Lindsay was awesome!! She always made me feel comfortable with the confidence and pride that she took in taking care of my implants through the healing process. I would recommend Marsh Cove of Ft. Myers to anyone Looking for a professional compassionate and it's all around amazing experience. - Kelly A.*



*Marsh Cove Dental is an amazing experience. If you really wanna get your teeth fixed and have your beautiful smile back the staff everybody that works Their doctor key and his staff treats you like family after your teeth are fixed the temporary they put in if anything should happen to them. They will get you any immediately. No questions asked Lindsey and Sara are freaking amazing. They know their stuff and they treat everybody extremely well. I have no complaints nor will I ever have any complaints about marsh Cove dental Jennifer Sara Lindsay they made sure that I was taken care of. They made sure that everything was going according to plan I will standby marsh Cove dental 100% if you really wanna get your teeth fixed, I highly suggest going to Marsh Cove Dental the pricing is extremely reasonable for all the work and effort they put into your mouth to get you your smile back thank you so much marsh Cove dental for making me feel whole again.*

- Matthew C.

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# IS YOUR TOOTH DYING?

## Symptoms and Treatments for a Dead Tooth

By KELLY M. DAINIAK, DMD, GENERAL DENTIST

**H**aving a “dead tooth” sounds intimidating, but it is a common dental issue that can often be resolved with prompt professional care. At Premier Dental Studio, we specialize in identifying the early stages of tooth decay and trauma to prevent tooth loss.

### WHAT EXACTLY IS A DEAD TOOTH?

A tooth is considered “dead” (or non-vital) when the blood flow to the internal pulp—the living tissue containing nerves and vessels—is cut off. This usually happens due to two main reasons:

1. **Deep Decay:** Bacteria reach the center of the tooth, causing an infection.
2. **Physical Trauma:** A sudden impact (like a sports injury) can sever the blood supply.

### COMMON SYMPTOMS TO WATCH FOR

Because the nerve is dying, you might actually feel less pain over time, but that doesn't mean the problem is gone. Watch for:

- **Discoloration:** The tooth may turn yellow, light brown, gray, or even black.
- **Persistent Pain:** A dull ache or sharp pain when eating.
- **Gum Swelling:** An abscess or pimple-like bump on the gums near the tooth.
- **Bad Taste/Breath:** Signs of an underlying infection.

### HOW WE CAN SAVE YOUR SMILE

At Premier Dental Studio, our goal is always to save your natural tooth whenever possible. Depending on the severity, treatment options include:

- **Root Canal Therapy:** We remove the dead pulp, disinfect the area, and seal it to prevent future infection.
- **Dental Crowns:** Often placed after a root canal to restore the tooth's strength and appearance.
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# The Relationship Between COVID-19 And Hair Loss

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

**C** OVID-19 sent out shockwaves through all aspects of society, many of which we still feel today. We all remember the toilet paper shortages and the social distancing requirements, but less known are the long-term effects that can come from those who had this virus, some of which we're still trying to understand.

Among these conversations about COVID-19's lasting impact is an increasing number of reports of hair loss, which many people notice only after they have had the virus. By logical reasoning, the question then arises of whether COVID-19 can cause hair loss and how to reverse it in the case that it does.

## Hair Loss from COVID-19

COVID-19 is a virus most notably known for its effects on the respiratory system, where it likes to invade the lungs and interfere with breathing. This begs the question, though, of how this virus that prefers the lungs can result in hair loss. However, this hair loss might not be as central to COVID-19 as we expect.

Hair loss is normal after having any high fever or illness, and fever is a common symptom in those who have COVID-19 because of the body's desire to attack and rid itself of this outside contagion. So, hair loss has less to do with COVID-19 itself, and more to do with it being a virus that causes illness and fever in the body.

Furthermore, while many people may consider it hair loss, it's actually hair shedding, with the medical name of telogen effluvium. Still, the term hair loss is commonly used to depict the scenario.

A 2022 study into telogen effluvium found that of the 198 patients included in the study, 48 showed hair loss after having COVID-19, making it a prominent comorbidity, or lasting health complication, for those who had this virus.

Telogen effluvium (TE) is one of the most popular types of alopecia in women and can be provoked by:

- trauma
- stressful events
- hormonal imbalance
- malnutrition
- drugs



This condition occurs when more hairs than usual enter the shedding, or telogen, phase of the hair growth lifecycle at the same time.

So, while COVID-19 is not the only cause of TE, as a viral infection it is a possible culprit.

## Why Does COVID-19 Trigger Hair Loss?

It can be a distressing situation to have undergone COVID-19 infection, something with aftereffects that are still largely unknown, only to begin experiencing hair loss. Furthermore, since hair shedding due to COVID does not occur immediately following infection, it can often be hard to narrow down if the cause is COVID, genetics, or something else entirely.

There are a few reasons why COVID-19 may cause hair loss, and they all primarily stem from stress. As for the type of stress, it can be physical stress on the body, or mental stress of the mind.

For physical stressors, those with COVID-19 often have a high fever, which is often associated with hair shedding following infection. While this stressor is mild, more serious physical stressors can also lead to

hair loss, such as being placed on a ventilator because of respiratory complications. Both of these complications place the body under physical stress, which may trigger TE.

COVID-19 also increases mental stress as you deal with the infection and how you feel because of it.

When you look at it this way, it is clear that COVID-19 infection can place tremendous stress on the body through various means, which is resulting in more cases of TE following infection.

Still, the severity of hair loss does not always relate to how severe the illness was. For instance, some people with severe COVID symptoms may not have any hair loss, while those with mild symptoms experience severe hair loss.

## How Long Can It Last?

If you suffer from hair shedding due to COVID-19, or any other illness, it becomes most noticeable about two to three months after having the fever or infection. As for how long it lasts, it may take six to nine months before shedding stops and your hair begins to look normal again. However, some

studies on COVID-19-related hair shedding have seen that it stops sooner than this, sometimes in only two to three months instead of the six-month average.

#### Is COVID-19 Hair Loss Permanent?

The good news about TE from COVID-19 is that it is not permanent. The hair phase shifts to telogen more quickly than it should, but once the new strand begins growing in, the hair can return to normal.

This is because TE does not cause someone to lose their hair follicles, which is what occurs in the case of hair loss. While there might be a bit of time when the hair does not grow, since the hair follicle is still there, the hair will eventually regrow.

Still, as with most things, there is an exception. In less than 10% of cases, those experiencing hair shedding may suffer from chronic TE, which is when the hair shedding persists beyond six months. While the exact cause of chronic TE is unknown, in cases linked to COVID-19, it's suspected to be from the significant amount of stress you underwent while infected and the fact that you might not yet be back to normal even after six months. Even in this case, though, TE is not permanent, only longer lasting.

#### Reversing COVID-19-Related Hair Loss

If you are experiencing hair shedding due to TE, you do not have to worry about losing all of your hair, as the proportion of telogen hairs never exceeds 50%. Still, this is something that you likely want to avoid.

So, what can be done if you are suffering from hair loss? The following are some great steps:

#### Check For Other Causes of Hair Loss

Since TE is delayed from your COVID-19 infection, it can be hard to know if your hair loss is from COVID or something else. To be sure, you can check other possible causes of hair loss.

Nutritional deficiencies are one such possibility. Hair relies on a balanced amount of nutrients, and in some cases, your hair loss might be because you're suffering from a deficiency in one type.

A blood test can be used to check for any nutritional deficiencies that might be affecting your hair growth. Furthermore, focusing on a more well-rounded and healthy diet can increase your chances of getting all the nutrients your body needs from the food you eat.

Your hormones might also be the culprit, with thyroids that are unbalanced possibly being the cause of your hair loss. A laboratory test can check your thyroid hormones, and if they are unbalanced, medication can be prescribed to address the low or high levels.

#### Check Your Stress

If tests for nutrient deficiencies and unbalanced hormones show no problems in these areas, and TE is determined to be the cause of your hair shedding, the only thing that you can really do is wait it out.

However, it's easier said than done to give your hair months to hopefully regrow, but one very important thing that you can do in this time is focus on your stress levels and keep them as minimal as possible.

TE most often results from stress, whether the stress of your environment or stress placed on your body from the illness. To ensure that TE runs its course and does not stick around longer than you want, you want to ensure that your stress levels do not remain high.

If you experience stress in your life, whether from your work, home life, or even thoughts of your hair loss, you want to work hard to address these concerns to lower your stress. Finding a healthy way to work through your worries, such as meditation, exercise, or counseling, can also be influential.

As for stress due to illness, this involves providing your body with all it needs to properly care for itself and recover from illness. For instance, your body may require more sleep as it heals or a more balanced diet rich in vitamins and nutrients it can use to repair and damage.

Stress can keep TE around longer, so by actively working to reduce stress in all forms, you can increase the odds of your hair finally beginning the regrowth cycle.

#### Medication

Medication is not always the right choice, but sometimes it can be.

For those with acute TE, hair growth will recover spontaneously, and their hair will begin growing again. Because of this, and since it can be hard to know when to stop medication once it has been started, it's not often recommended for those with acute TE. However, once you have been experiencing hair shedding for four to six months, and it does not appear to be getting better, it might be time to look into medication.

#### Remember: It's Not Permanent

In most cases, hair shedding results because of stress. While it is usually from stress sustained by the body due to illness, any stress you experience from the current state of the world can also influence your hair's growth phase.

However, it's also common for hair shedding to then cause increasing stress, perpetuating the problem.

In these cases, it's important to remember that any hair loss due to TE is not permanent, and your hair will recover. Even chronic cases of TE, which last longer than 6 months, are still not cases of permanent hair loss. Once the body returns to balance, hair will begin regrowing again.

So, the best thing you can do to reverse hair loss is to remain calm, both in your mindset about any hair you have lost and in all other aspects of your life.

#### COVID-19 Hair Loss: Key Takeaways

Because of the increasing amount of physical and mental stress COVID-19 infection places on the body, more and more people are suffering from hair loss months after their infection.

Unfortunately, there's not much that can be done to reverse hair loss from COVID-19 beyond waiting for everything to sort itself out. If you find yourself at this point, remember that your hair will grow back, and this is only a temporary process.

Still, while COVID-19 can cause hair shedding, it may not be the cause of your hair loss, which is why it is best to reach out to a doctor to look into your health profile to determine if something else is to blame for your hair loss.

Remember, while hair is often considered only for its influence on physical appearance, it can provide a lot of information about your internal health. If your hair is shedding more than before, it may be wise to listen to your body and look into why this is happening with your doctor.

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# BLINDNESS AND BURNS IN BACKYARD: Fireworks Displays Can Go Haywire in a Hurry

By Rick Weber

**K**elly Goebel can't unsee the horrific images. They are permanently embedded in her memory, forever altering how she views the events that caused them.

In her 36 years of nursing experience, she has witnessed the devastating consequences of fireworks-related injuries. Having worked in a Level I trauma center and served as Chief Flight Nurse for an aeromedical transport program, she has cared for and transported patients suffering from severe burns, traumatic eye injuries and even amputations caused by fireworks.

"I am certain that none of those individuals anticipated that a day meant for celebration would end with a trip to the emergency department—or an emergency flight to a trauma center," says Goebel, program director and assistant professor in the School of Nursing in the Marieb College of Health & Human Services at Florida Gulf Coast University.

"Many believed they were taking appropriate precautions, yet accidents still occurred. These experiences have reinforced my belief that no celebration is worth a life-altering injury and that safer alternatives can create lasting memories without the devastating consequences that can accompany fireworks. Years of providing care in these arenas have taught me one thing: People rarely expect to become the patient."

She says backyard fireworks displays are clouded by the misconception that legal means safe. In reality, even legal fireworks are considered small explosives and are capable of causing severe injury.

"Consumers also may believe that certain fireworks such as sparklers are safe," she says. "While media and advertising portray fireworks as fun and exciting, the devastating injuries they can cause receive less attention. Fireworks are deeply associated with celebrations such as the Fourth of July and New Year's Eve, and many people have used fireworks for years without incident. But it's important to remember that while people may have had years of backyard fireworks display, it only takes one incident to change a life."

Class 1.4G consumer fireworks are legal to purchase in Florida for those 18 years of age or older, but their recreational use is restricted to three designated

holidays: New Year's Eve, New Year's Day and the Fourth of July. Year-round use is only legal for agricultural purposes or if the devices are non-aerial "sparklers."

Lee County's strict burn ban—which was extended through the spring months due to drought—has officially been rescinded following recent seasonal rainfall. But local fire departments still urge extreme caution and recommend keeping a connected hose or fire extinguisher immediately on hand. And if you live in a neighborhood governed by a Homeowners Association, your HOA rules can legally override state law. Many Lee County HOAs fine residents heavily for setting off loud or aerial fireworks.

As a Critical Care Nurse Practitioner currently practicing at Naples Comprehensive Health (NCH), Goebel would rather see fewer people celebrate the holiday with backyard fireworks displays.

"I think attending a community fireworks display is safer," she says.

But if consumers are determined to stage their own backyard fireworks displays, Goebel stresses that they should follow established safety guidelines by the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), the National Safety Council, HealthChildren.org, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF), the American Burn Association (ABA) and the National Fire Protection Agency.

"Consumers should never point or throw fireworks at another person, never hold lighted fireworks in their hands, never use fireworks while impaired by drugs or alcohol, never ignite devices in a container," she says. "Additional safety measures include wearing protective eyewear when using or standing near someone using fireworks."

In 2024, there were 11 reported fireworks-related deaths in the United States—a 38% increase over 2023, with most involving misuse and device misfire/malfunctions, according to the CPSC. An estimated 14,700 people were injured by fireworks, up 52%. An estimated 1,700 emergency room-treated injuries in 2024 involving sparklers.

In multi-year tracking of fireworks-related deaths by the CPSC, 44% of the victims had consumed alcohol or drugs prior to the fatal incident. Multi-year injury estimates analyzed by Monge & Associates reveal that 11.7% of all adult fireworks injury cases treated in emergency departments directly involve alcohol or drug impairment.

"Burn injuries account for most firework injuries and may involve the hands, face, arms and legs," Goebel says. "Burn injuries may result in redness, blistering, swelling, severe pain, and in full-thickness injuries, the burn may destroy all layers of the skin and underlying tissues. Do not apply ice, butter, ointments or home remedies. Burns should be covered with a clean, dry dressing. 911 should be called for severe burn injuries."

Goebel's recommendation: Keep kids out of the equation.

"Children should never be allowed to play with or ignite fireworks, including sparklers," she says. "While sparklers may be considered 'safe', they burn at temperatures of about 2,000 degrees Fahrenheit and, according to the National Fire Protection Association, accounted for 29% of fireworks injuries for children under the age of 5 in 2022.

"Safer alternatives to sparklers or traditional fireworks include glow sticks, LED light toys, bubble machines, confetti poppers and colored streamers. Families can create a festive atmosphere and reduce the risk of fireworks-related injuries by planning safer alternatives such as outdoor movie nights, glow-in-the-dark games and patriotic craft activities. Decorating flag, painting rocks and other hands-on projects provide children with engaging experiences while eliminating the risk of injury."

Have fun. But be safe.

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# A 'MINOR' HAND INJURY CAN COST YOU YOUR GRIP FOR LIFE – HERE'S WHY

By Dennis O. Sagini, MD

**T**hink about the last hour of your life. You used your hands to make coffee, type a message, turn a steering wheel, hug someone you love. We rely on our hands so constantly that we stop noticing them, until an accident reminds us exactly how much we need them.

Hand trauma is one of the most common reasons people end up in an emergency room, and it's also one of the most misunderstood. A "minor" cut, a smashed finger in a car door, a fall onto an outstretched hand, a deep puncture from a kitchen knife—these moments can look small and feel survivable. But the hand is an extraordinarily complex structure, packing 27 bones, dozens of tendons, ligaments, nerves, and blood vessels into a space smaller than most dinner plates. There is very little room for error, and very little tissue to spare.

## Why Hand Injuries Are Different

Unlike a broken bone in your leg, where surrounding muscle can sometimes compensate, the hand has almost no redundancy. Sever one tendon and a finger may never bend again. Crush one nerve and you may lose sensation permanently. Delay treatment on an open fracture and infection can spread through tendon sheaths in a matter of hours, threatening not just function but the limb itself.

I have seen patients delay care because the injury "didn't look that bad." A laceration that seemed shallow had actually nicked a flexor tendon. A jammed finger that swelled overnight turned out to be a fracture-dislocation requiring surgery. The visible damage to skin rarely tells the whole story of what's happening underneath.

## The Warning Signs You Should Never Ignore

Seek immediate evaluation if you experience any of the following after a hand injury:

- Inability to fully bend or straighten a finger
- Numbness, tingling, or loss of sensation
- A wound that won't stop bleeding or appears deep
- Visible deformity or a joint that looks out of place
- Rapidly increasing swelling, especially with pain that feels disproportionate to the injury
- Any injury involving machinery, power tools, or animal bites



These aren't reasons to "wait and see." They are reasons to act now. The window for the best possible outcome in hand trauma is often measured in hours, not days.

## Why Specialized Care Matters

General urgent care and even many emergency departments are not equipped to manage complex hand injuries. Reattaching a tendon, repairing a nerve under magnification, or stabilizing a small joint fracture requires the trained eye and microsurgical skill of a fellowship-trained hand specialist. The difference between general treatment and specialized care can be the difference between a hand that heals and one that never fully recovers its strength, dexterity, or feeling.

As an orthopaedic surgeon specializing in the hand, wrist, and elbow, I built my practice around a simple belief: every patient deserves the chance to get their full function back. That means accurate diagnosis from day one, a treatment plan tailored to how you actually use your hands—whether for surgery, art, sports, or simply holding your grandchild—and a recovery process that doesn't stop until you do.

## The Bottom Line

Your hands are irreplaceable tools that you will use every single day for the rest of your life. Treat every significant hand injury with the urgency it deserves. If you've experienced trauma to your hand, wrist, or elbow, don't wait for it to get worse.

The choices made in the first hours after an injury often determine the outcome for the rest of your life. Don't leave that outcome to chance, and don't let uncertainty keep you from getting answers.

A short phone call today could be the difference between a full recovery and a lifetime of limitation.

Contact us today to schedule an evaluation with Dr. Dennis O. Sagini and protect the hands that carry your life forward.



## Dennis O. Sagini, MD

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

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

Dr. Sagini is a member of the Lee County Medical Society, the American Association of Orthopedic Surgery and the American Board of Orthopedic Surgery.

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



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# Why Does Consistency Matter to Long-Term Investment Returns?

By Rick Walker, Financial Planner & CPA, and Kimberlee Clark, Financial Planner

**W**hen we talk about consistency in investing, we're referring to the ability to generate solid, dependable returns over many years rather than chasing spectacular gains one year followed by significant losses the next.

Why does this matter? The concept has parallels in many areas of life. In baseball, players who consistently get on base help their teams score more runs and win more games over the course of a season. Investing works much the same way. While some investments may post exceptional returns in a single year, those gains can be erased if they are followed by sharp declines. That type of volatility often creates unnecessary stress, sleepless nights and leads investors to make emotional decisions at the worst possible times.

Consider two hypothetical investment funds. One experiences dramatic highs and lows, while the other delivers steadier, more consistent returns. Although the more volatile fund may outperform in certain years, investors often react emotionally—buying after periods of strong performance and selling after significant declines. Unfortunately, this pattern of chasing returns and locking in losses can be one of the greatest obstacles to long-term success.

The real key isn't how you react during a difficult market. More important is the discipline exercised during periods of strong performance. Investors who remain focused on long-term goals rather than short-term market movements are often better positioned to achieve lasting results.

## Flexibility in Decision-Making

Consistent investment performance also provides greater flexibility when building a portfolio. When investors have confidence in the stability of part of their portfolio, they often feel more comfortable allocating an appropriate portion to long-term growth investments. That balance can help improve long-term returns while reducing the temptation to make emotional investment decisions.

## Using Income to Fuel Growth

Many investors establish a "core" portion of their portfolio consisting of high-quality income-producing investments. These holdings often generate interest and dividends while providing greater stability during periods of market volatility.

## THE POWER OF CONSISTENCY

Two funds. Similar ending returns. Very different journeys.



Rather than spending that income, some investors choose to reinvest it into growth-oriented investments. For example, a \$500,000 income portfolio generating approximately \$27,000 annually could provide about \$2,250 each month to invest in growth assets. Over time, consistently reinvesting that income may significantly increase long-term portfolio value while preserving the stability of the core holdings.

## Consistency During Retirement

Consistency becomes even more important during retirement. Owners of traditional IRAs and 401(k) plans are generally required to begin taking Required Minimum Distributions (RMDs) beginning at age 73. The amount required increases over time and is based partly on the value of the account.

A portfolio with more consistent returns can provide retirees greater flexibility in deciding when to take those withdrawals, reducing the likelihood of having to sell investments during unfavorable market conditions.

## Knowing When to Harvest Gains

Successful investing isn't just about buying quality investments—it's also about knowing when to take profits. Occasionally, certain holdings appreciate far beyond expectations. Rather than allowing a single investment to become an outsized portion of a portfolio, investors may choose to trim the position, rebalance into more diversified holdings, or simply recover their original investment while allowing the remaining shares to continue growing.

needs, and income sources all influence the appropriate strategy. As those circumstances change, investment plans should evolve as well.

Financial planning software and professional guidance can help investors evaluate different scenarios objectively and develop strategies designed to support their long-term goals. While no investment can guarantee future results, maintaining a disciplined, consistent approach often provides investors with greater confidence and a better opportunity for long-term success.

If you have questions about your own investment strategy or retirement plan, we'd be happy to discuss your individual circumstances. Please contact us at (239) 434-6613 or *RSVP to our next Luncheon at Seasons 52 August on 28th!*



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# KIDNEY CANCER: Are You at Risk?

By Neetu Malhotra, MD

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Treatment

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

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

### Associates in Nephrology

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

### Chronic Kidney Disease Program

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

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

Source:

1. [https://www.nfcr.org/cancer-types/kidney-cancer/?gclid=CjwKCAIAYc2BBhAaEiwA44-wW9qTM7gXbIKsBU1dxNN-rM7OKwmG3j43bZni6h175MIIQCzwNsKORoCE5QQAvD\\_BwE](https://www.nfcr.org/cancer-types/kidney-cancer/?gclid=CjwKCAIAYc2BBhAaEiwA44-wW9qTM7gXbIKsBU1dxNN-rM7OKwmG3j43bZni6h175MIIQCzwNsKORoCE5QQAvD_BwE)

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

### Services Provided

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

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- Electrolyte Disorders
- Fluid Overload, Edema (swelling)
- Glomerulonephritis
- Hypertension
- Injections of Aranesp for Anemia related to Kidney Disease
- Kidney Transplant Services: Patient and Donor Evaluations, Post-Transplant Follow-up Care
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- Nephrotic Syndrome
- Pyelonephritis
- Polycystic Kidney Disease
- Recurring kidney stones
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We work collaboratively with a patient's primary care physician and specialists to slow the progression of chronic kidney disease (CKD) and prevent or manage complications such as hypertension, anemia, and bone disease. Additionally, our multidisciplinary team of professionals can assist you in arranging a wide array of supportive services and education programs for patients in all stages of CKD. For patients with end-stage renal disease (ESRD), our nephrologists can prepare them for all renal replacement therapies: in-center or home hemodialysis, peritoneal dialysis, and kidney transplant.

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

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

## What is an Otolaryngologist?

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

## Areas of Expertise

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

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

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

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



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

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

## When to See an Otolaryngologist

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

## The Collaborative Approach

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

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

## Expert Care You Can Trust

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



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

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



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



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# THE VOLUME-EXCELLENCE CONNECTION: Why High-Volume Physicians Deliver Superior Patient Outcomes

By Joseph Gauta, MD, FACOG

In the world of medical care, there's a powerful correlation that continues to shape patient outcomes across specialties: physicians who perform procedures more frequently tend to achieve better results. This relationship between surgical volume and excellence isn't just statistical noise—it represents a fundamental truth about medical expertise that patients should understand when choosing their healthcare providers.

## The Science Behind Volume and Outcomes

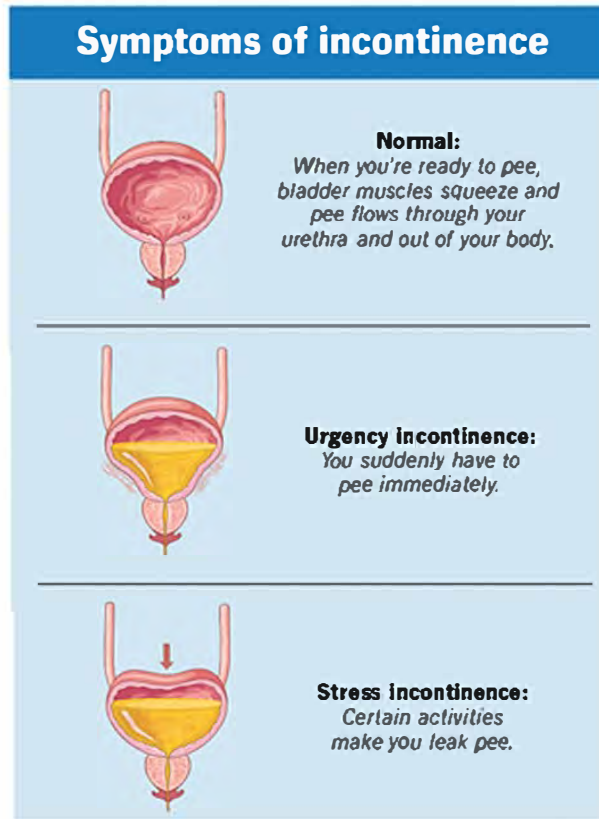
Research consistently demonstrates that high-volume physicians develop refined techniques, encounter diverse case presentations, and maintain peak procedural skills through regular practice. This phenomenon, often called the "volume-outcome relationship," spans numerous medical specialties from cardiac surgery to orthopedics to urogynecology.

When physicians perform procedures regularly, they develop an intuitive understanding of anatomical variations, potential complications, and optimal techniques. Their muscle memory becomes finely tuned, their decision-making sharpens, and their ability to handle unexpected situations improves dramatically. This expertise translates directly into better patient outcomes, including reduced complications, shorter recovery times, and higher success rates.

## Excellence in Stress Urinary Incontinence Treatment

Stress urinary incontinence affects millions of women, causing embarrassing leakage during everyday activities like jumping, sneezing, walking the dog, or intimate moments. This condition significantly impacts quality of life, yet many women suffer in silence, unaware that highly effective treatments exist.

Dr. Gauta exemplifies the volume-excellence principle in treating stress urinary incontinence. His exceptional experience with sling procedures—ranking #1 in South Florida and #2 statewide for highest volume—demonstrates the direct connection between procedural frequency and superior outcomes. Sling procedures, which provide support to the urethra to prevent involuntary leakage, require precise placement and technical expertise that comes only through extensive experience.



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## Beyond Surgery: Non-Surgical Innovation

Dr. Gauta's leadership extends beyond surgical interventions. As the #1 physician in Florida for Macroplastique procedures, he offers patients a non-surgical alternative for treating stress urinary incontinence. Macroplastique involves injecting biocompatible material around the urethra to provide additional support and reduce leakage. This minimally invasive option represents the cutting edge of urological care, requiring specialized training and experience to achieve optimal results.

## The Patient Advantage

When patients choose high-volume physicians, they benefit from accumulated expertise that simply cannot be replicated through textbook knowledge alone. These physicians have encountered virtually every variation and complication, developing protocols and techniques refined through thousands of procedures.

For women struggling with stress urinary incontinence, selecting a physician with Dr. Gauta's level of experience means accessing care from someone who

has helped countless patients regain confidence and quality of life. His volume statistics aren't just numbers—they represent successful outcomes for hundreds of women who no longer worry about leakage during their daily activities.

## Making Informed Healthcare Decisions

The volume-outcome relationship empowers patients to make informed decisions about their care. When facing a procedure, asking about a physician's experience and volume can provide valuable insight into expected outcomes. High-volume physicians like Dr. Gauta offer patients the confidence that comes with proven expertise and consistent results.

In healthcare, experience matters. The correlation between volume and excellence continues to guide smart patients toward physicians who deliver the superior outcomes they deserve. To schedule a confidential consultation with Dr. Gauta, contact the Florida Bladder Institute today at (239) 449-7979 or visit [www.floridabladderinstitute.com](http://www.floridabladderinstitute.com).

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Joseph Gauta, MD



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# Weight Loss Through Neuroregulation:

## Addressing Binge Eating, Stress Eating, and Cognitive Overload

By Dr. Waldo Amadeo

**W**eight loss resistance is frequently approached through the lens of caloric intake, macronutrient ratios, and physical activity. While these variables play an important role in metabolic health, they do not fully explain why many individuals struggle with binge eating, stress-driven food behaviors, and cyclical weight regain despite repeated dietary interventions. Increasingly, clinical evidence suggests that dysregulated eating patterns are not solely behavioral issues, but neurophysiological responses driven by stress, emotional processing, and impaired executive function.

Reframing weight loss as a neurobehavioral process allows for more precise intervention—particularly in individuals who experience compulsive eating, intrusive food thoughts, and difficulty sustaining dietary consistency.

### The Brain's Role in Eating Behavior

Eating behavior is regulated by an interconnected network of brain regions, including the prefrontal cortex, limbic system, hypothalamus, and brainstem. The prefrontal cortex governs impulse control, planning, and decision-making, while the limbic system processes emotional input, reward, and threat perception. The hypothalamus integrates hormonal signals related to hunger, satiety, and stress.

Under conditions of chronic stress, sleep disruption, or emotional overload, prefrontal cortex activity decreases while limbic system reactivity increases. This shift compromises impulse control and biases behavior toward immediate relief rather than long-term goals. Highly palatable foods—particularly those high in sugar or refined carbohydrates—provide rapid dopaminergic and serotonergic stimulation, making them a common coping mechanism during periods of cognitive strain.

In this context, binge eating is not a failure of discipline, but a predictable neurological response to reduced executive function and heightened stress signaling.

### Stress, Cortisol, and Metabolic Consequences

Chronic psychological stress activates the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis, resulting in sustained cortisol elevation. Cortisol increases appetite, promotes visceral fat storage, disrupts insulin sensitivity, and alters hunger-regulating hormones such as leptin and ghrelin. Over time, this hormonal environment favors fat retention and metabolic inefficiency.

Cortisol also intensifies mental rumination and emotional reactivity, reinforcing cycles of stress eating. Many individuals report feeling “out of control” around food during high-stress periods—not due to increased

caloric need, but because the brain is seeking rapid relief from cognitive overload. Repeated activation of this pattern strengthens neural associations between food and emotional regulation.

### Binge Eating as a Nervous System Response

Binge eating behaviors are frequently associated with autonomic nervous system dysregulation. Individuals may spend much of the day in sympathetic dominance (fight-or-flight), followed by parasympathetic collapse (freeze or shutdown) later in the evening, when binge episodes most commonly occur.

This pattern is especially prevalent among high-performing adults, caregivers, and individuals with chronic stress exposure. In these cases, food functions as a self-soothing mechanism when adaptive nervous system regulation is insufficient. Traditional dietary counseling alone does not address this physiological pattern, which explains why compliance often deteriorates under stress.

### Neuromodulation and Cognitive Control

Neuromodulation therapies have gained clinical interest for their role in regulating cortical excitability and improving executive function. By influencing neural activity in regions involved in impulse control, emotional regulation, and stress processing, these interventions may support behavioral change at the neurological level rather than relying solely on willpower.

Research on repetitive magnetic stimulation has demonstrated effects on mood regulation, compulsive behaviors, and cognitive flexibility. Improvements in mental clarity and emotional resilience may indirectly reduce binge eating frequency by restoring prefrontal control over limbic-driven impulses.

### The Role of ExoMind Neuromodulation in Weight Loss Support

ExoMind is a noninvasive neuromodulation technology that applies repetitive magnetic stimulation to targeted cortical regions involved in executive function, emotional regulation, and stress response.

In the context of weight loss, ExoMind may be clinically relevant for individuals whose eating behaviors are driven by impulsivity, emotional reactivity, or chronic cognitive overload rather than metabolic hunger. By modulating activity in prefrontal networks responsible for decision-making and impulse control, ExoMind may help reduce intrusive food-related thoughts, diminish stress-driven eating patterns, and improve behavioral flexibility. Patients often report

improved mental clarity and reduced emotional reactivity, which can support greater consistency with nutritional and lifestyle recommendations.

### Thought Patterns, Rumination, and Weight Loss Resistance

Persistent internal dialogue surrounding food—restriction, planning, guilt, and compensation—creates significant cognitive load. This mental fatigue further diminishes executive function, perpetuating cycles of overeating followed by restriction. Over time, the psychological burden of weight loss efforts becomes a barrier in itself.

Reducing maladaptive thought patterns is therefore essential for sustainable weight management. When cognitive noise decreases, individuals frequently report improved satiety awareness, less urgency around eating, and a more neutral relationship with food. Addressing neurological contributors to rumination allows nutritional strategies to be implemented more effectively.

### Rethinking Weight Loss Interventions

Weight loss is not solely a metabolic equation, but a neurobehavioral process shaped by stress physiology, emotional regulation, and cognitive capacity. Approaches that fail to address the brain's role in eating behavior often lead to temporary success followed by relapse.

By integrating nervous system regulation, cognitive support, and functional nutrition, weight loss interventions can become more sustainable and less punitive. As clinical understanding continues to evolve, addressing binge eating and stress-related weight gain through a neuro-integrative framework represents a meaningful advancement in weight management care.

Dr. Waldo Amadeo is a chiropractor and functional neurology practitioner with advanced training in functional medicine and metabolic health. His clinical work focuses on the relationship between nervous system regulation, brain-based behavior, and chronic metabolic conditions in both adults and children.



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# Health Insurance

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

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

**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?

**Special Enrollment Periods – You moved out of your plans service area, New to Medicare, Retiring and coming off your employer group plan, Going into or out of Skilled Nursing, Medicaid and other's may apply.**

We offer **Free Medicare in person consultations,** please e-mail [info@logicalinsurance.com](mailto:info@logicalinsurance.com) to schedule or call 239-362-0855. Medicare's website is [www.Medicare.gov](http://www.Medicare.gov).

**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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# PICKLEBALL, GOLF, AND BEYOND:

## How Active Adults Can Overcome Joint and Tendon Pain

By Dr. Conor Sperzel

**Y**ou finally have the time. The kids are grown, the schedule is yours again, and pickleball courts, golf courses, and tennis clubs are calling. Then, mid-swing or mid-serve, something twinges. A knee aches the next morning. An elbow burns every time you grip a racquet. For many active adults, pain becomes the unexpected price of staying active and too often, it's the reason people quietly stop doing the things they love.

It doesn't have to be that way. Understanding what's actually causing the pain is the first step toward fixing it.

### Not All Pain Is Created Equal

Three culprits show up again and again in active adults: arthritis, tendon injuries, and spine-related pain and they each demand a different approach.

**1. Arthritis** is the gradual wear of cartilage in a joint, most commonly the knee, hip, or shoulder. It tends to show up as a deep, achy stiffness that's worse in the morning or after activity, and it builds slowly over months or years.

**2. Tendon injuries**, like tennis elbow (lateral epicondylitis) or rotator cuff tendinopathy, are a different animal entirely. These involve irritation or microtearing where a tendon attaches to bone, often from repetitive motion, think thousands of overhead serves or backhand swings. The pain is usually sharper, more localized, and flares with specific movements.

**3. Spine-related pain**, from the lower back, neck, or sciatic nerve, can mimic both of the above but usually involves a nerve or disc issue. It often radiates, numbs, or tingles down an arm or leg, a key clue it's coming from the spine rather than the joint itself.

Getting the diagnosis right matters, because treating arthritis like a tendon problem (or vice versa) wastes time and can let the real issue worsen.



### Pinpointing the Problem with Image Guidance

One of the biggest advances in pain management has been image-guided injection therapy. Using real-time ultrasound or fluoroscopy, physicians can now place medication with pinpoint accuracy, directly into an arthritic joint space, around an inflamed tendon, or near an irritated spinal nerve. This precision means better symptom relief with less medication overall, and it allows treatment of structures that were once difficult to reach safely.

### The Power of PRP

Platelet-Rich Plasma (PRP) therapy has become a popular option for select tendon and joint conditions, including knee arthritis and tennis elbow. The treatment uses a concentrated sample of the patient's own platelets, drawn from their blood, to deliver growth factors directly to the injured tissue, supporting the body's natural healing response. While not a fit for every condition, PRP offers an appealing option for patients hoping to delay or avoid surgery.

### Movement Is Medicine, Too

No injection or procedure works in isolation. Physical therapy and targeted rehabilitation remain essential for long-term success, strengthening the muscles that support an arthritic joint, correcting the mechanics that strain a tendon, or stabilizing a vulnerable spine. The goal isn't just pain relief today; it's building a body that can keep playing pickleball, golfing, and walking for years to come.

### Staying in the Game

The biggest shift in pain management isn't one single breakthrough, it's the move toward minimally invasive, precisely targeted care that gets active adults back to what they love faster, with less downtime and fewer risks than traditional surgery.

Joint and tendon pain shouldn't be the reason you hang up your racquet or clubs. With the right diagnosis and a modern, personalized treatment plan, staying active well into your 60s, 70s, and beyond isn't just possible, it's increasingly the expectation.

Vanguard Spine & Pain specializes in advanced, minimally invasive treatments to help active adults move through life with less pain and more freedom.

To learn more or schedule a consultation, contact Vanguard Spine & Pain in Naples.



*Dr. Conor Sperzel* is a Harvard-fellowship-trained Interventional Pain Management physician and founder of Vanguard Spine and Pain in Naples, FL. His background in Physiatry (Rehabilitation Medicine) shapes his approach to interventional pain care. Rather than focusing on pain alone, he emphasizes restoring function and helping patients return to the activities that matter most to them. He treats a wide range of conditions including sciatica, neck and back pain, arthritis-related pain, and other musculoskeletal and nerve disorders using precise, minimally invasive techniques performed in an outpatient setting. His practice emphasizes individualized care, detailed functional evaluation, and timely access to treatment.



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# THE POWER OF HELPFUL HABITS

By Pastor Timothy Neptune

In our fast-paced world, it's easy to get caught up in busyness and miss what truly matters. We only get one chance to make our mark in the world, so it is important that we make wise choices and build good habits that will help us reach our goals.

Have you ever wondered what habits Jesus had during his life? In the Gospel of Luke, we discover that when Jesus was just 12-years-old, he stayed behind in Jerusalem during Passover. His parents discovered that he was not with him and went to search for him. When they found him, he was in the temple listening to teachers and asking questions.

Everyone was amazed at His understanding. Luke 2:52 reveals the balanced growth Jesus experienced: "And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man." This covers intellectual development (wisdom), physical growth (stature), spiritual connection (favor with God), and social well-being (favor with man).

Jesus didn't skip the ordinary. He worked as a carpenter, spent time with family and friends, fished, laughed, and learned Scripture through regular synagogue attendance and prayer. These weren't flashy moments but consistent rhythms that shaped Him. Even during His ministry years, Jesus rose early for solitary prayer (Mark 1:35), withdrew to quiet places amid crowds (Luke 5:16), and returned to the Mount of Olives "as was His custom" (Luke 22:39). As the Son of God in human flesh, He modeled disciplined habits to stay grounded amid life's demands.



The same principle applies to us. Success in health and wellness rarely comes from one dramatic change but from small, repeated actions. As James Clear notes in *Atomic Habits*, tiny adjustments compound into remarkable results. Your weight reflects your eating habits, your energy your movement patterns, your peace your daily rhythms with God and others.

Think of an ice cube in a 25-degree cooler. Raising the temperature one degree at a time does nothing visible—until 32 degrees, when it melts. Breakthroughs build from incremental shifts. Reduce calories by 500 daily for steady weight loss. Commit to a short morning prayer or Scripture reading, even if just a few verses or sentences, like King David's habit: "In the morning, Lord, you hear my voice" (Psalm 5:3). Take a brief walk, sit quietly in your car, or pause in the shower to breathe and recenter.

If you're feeling stressed, rushed, or disconnected, examine your habits. Struggle with consistent Bible time or exercise? Start with 10 minutes. Want deeper relationships? Schedule regular, undistracted connections. Scripture reminds us: faithfulness in little things leads to greater things. Compound interest works in finances, fitness, and faith alike.

We face evil days, as Ephesians 5:15-16 warns, so wise living means making the most of every opportunity. Daily habits of prayer, movement, learning, and connection build resilience, reduce stress, and align us more closely with God's design for flourishing.

One year from today, you'll be the same person you are today unless you choose new rhythms now. Don't wait for motivation—build the habits that create it. Commit to small, consistent steps toward intellectual curiosity, physical stewardship, spiritual depth, and meaningful relationships. You're a work in progress, being conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29). Make the changes today, and watch transformation unfold.

Pastor Timothy Neptune is the founding lead pastor of Venture Church Naples. For more on building life-giving rhythms, visit [venturenaples.com](http://venturenaples.com).



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