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Health & Wellness[®] MAGAZINE

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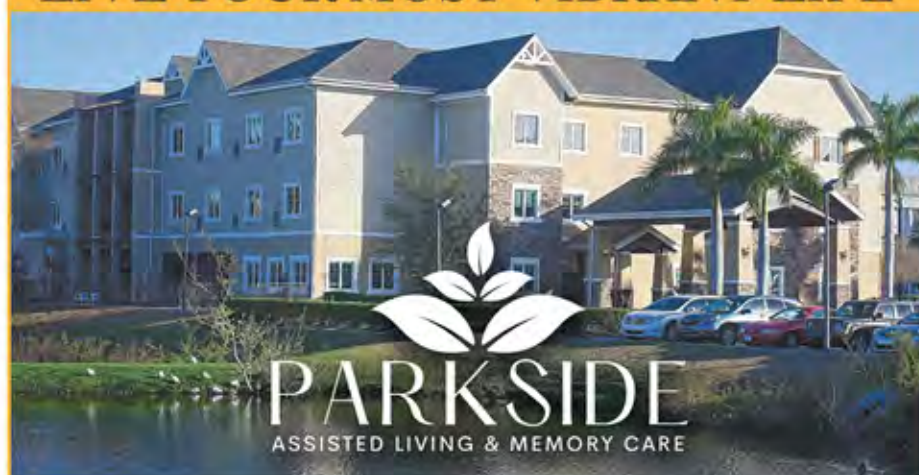
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When to Consider Knee Replacement Surgery

Life can take you anywhere — until knee arthritis pain slows you down. Whether it's walking, golfing, traveling, or playing with your grandkids, the activities you love shouldn't be limited by chronic knee pain. So, what's the solution?

For many, knee replacement surgery is an effective option to reduce pain from arthritis and continue to live an active life. The great news is that there are several different types of knee replacement surgery, as well as advanced surgical techniques that can even speed up your healing.

Whether you're just beginning to explore treatment options or preparing for surgery, our board-certified orthopedic surgeons at AdventHealth can help you understand the different types of knee replacement procedures and what to expect throughout your recovery journey.

Who Needs Knee Replacement Surgery

The leading cause of knee replacement surgery is osteoarthritis, a degenerative condition that gradually wears down the cartilage in the knee joint. As the damage progresses, pain and stiffness can worsen over time, making everyday activities increasingly difficult.

Common symptoms of knee osteoarthritis include:

- Gradual knee pain that worsens with activity
- Knee stiffness
- Knee swelling
- Pain after extended sitting or resting
- Knee pain that continues to get worse

If you have osteoarthritis, your doctor will start by offering the most conservative treatments to alleviate your pain.

Some initial treatments for knee osteoarthritis might include:

- Weight loss
- Physical therapy
- Anti-inflammatory medications
- Cortisone injections
- Viscosupplementation or gel injections

If these strategies are not helpful and your condition worsens, your doctor might offer knee replacement surgery as a promising option to reduce pain and return to the active life you love again.



Types of Knee Replacement Surgery

Not every knee replacement is the same. While a total knee replacement restores the entire joint with an artificial implant, some patients may qualify for a partial knee replacement, which replaces only the damaged portion of the knee and preserves more of the natural joint.

What to Expect Before Knee Replacement Surgery

Once you and your surgeon have worked together to decide the right treatment plan for you, you'll likely need to make an appointment with your primary care doctor to assess your general health and clear you for surgery. You may also need an evaluation and clearance from your dentist.

Once this step is completed, you'll be able to schedule your knee replacement surgery appointment. You may also need a CT scan of your knee so your surgeon can more precisely customize your replacement to most naturally fit your knee anatomy and movement.

In preparation, make sure you have someone who can take you to your surgery appointment and be there as your caregiver after the procedure. This person will be able to drive you home, get any prescribed medications and help maintain your comfort after surgery.

Your medical team might also advise you to stop taking certain medications (such as blood thinners, NSAIDs like aspirin or other supplements) up to a week before your surgery date. You'll also be advised to fast prior to surgery. In most cases, you can't have anything to eat or drink (including water) after midnight on the night before your surgery.



Some other ways to prepare your home ahead of time include:

- Setting up your comfortable space for resting and elevating your leg
- Clearing the floor and pathways of fall and trip risks such as rugs
- Having ice packs frozen and ready for when you return home

What to Expect During Knee Replacement Surgery

Your exact recovery will depend on exactly what type of procedure you are having as well as your overall health. Some patients may have outpatient knee replacement surgery and go home the same day. This is especially true for minimally invasive surgical procedures. Other knee replacement procedures may require you to stay in the hospital from one to four days.

On the day of surgery, you'll be prepped for the procedure and given anesthesia. Most knee replacement surgeries take about one to two hours to complete. Afterward, you'll recover under close observation before receiving instructions on pain management, medications, physical therapy and follow-up care. To help you safely regain mobility, you'll likely use crutches or a walker during the early stages of recovery.

What to Expect After Knee Replacement Surgery

Your surgeon will provide you with a follow-up appointment and a prescription for physical therapy. Physical therapy after surgery is essential to regain your strength and get optimal results from your knee replacement. Physical therapy usually begins immediately after surgery and may continue for up to six weeks.

After roughly six weeks, most knee replacements are up to 80% healed. After three months, most achieve 90% healing and by one year, most patients are back to their active lifestyle with nearly complete knee function and comfort.

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Why Flu Prevention Matters More as We Age

By Joshua Bertollo, MD, Family Medicine at Millennium Physician Group

Staying protected from the flu is an important part of staying healthy throughout the year. For older adults, influenza can be much more serious. As we age, changes in the immune system can make it harder to fight infections. At the same time, chronic conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, asthma, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) can increase the risk of complications.

That makes flu prevention essential to your overall wellness – especially as another flu season approaches. The good news is that a few simple steps, beginning with an annual flu vaccination, can help reduce the risk of serious illness.

Flu Season Is Coming. How Can You Prepare?

Flu is a highly contagious respiratory infection caused by influenza viruses. It spreads easily when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks, and you can also pick up the virus from contaminated surfaces before it reaches your eyes, nose, or mouth.

For the 2026-2027 flu season, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends annual flu vaccination for everyone 6 months and older. Flu activity generally increases in fall and winter, although the timing and severity can vary each season. For most people, September and October are the ideal months to get vaccinated. The timing is particularly important for older adults because the body needs about two weeks after vaccination to develop its protective immune response.

This doesn't mean the opportunity to protect yourself passes after October. If you haven't received your flu vaccine, it is still worthwhile to get vaccinated later in the season while flu viruses are circulating and the vaccine is still available.

And if you've already had the flu this season, vaccination is still beneficial. Flu vaccines protect against multiple influenza strains, so having one strain does not necessarily provide protection against others that may circulate later.

Why Older Adults Face Greater Flu Risks

Adults 65 and older are more likely than younger adults to experience serious complications from influenza. One reason is immunosenescence, the natural change in immune function that occurs with age. The immune system may not respond to infections as strongly as it once did, making recovery more difficult.



The risk can be even greater for older adults living with certain chronic health conditions. Influenza can worsen existing heart and lung conditions, and may contribute to complications such as pneumonia, hospitalization, and, in several cases, death.

Recent flu seasons demonstrate why prevention matters. During the 2024-2025 season, flu-related hospitalizations and outpatient visits reached their highest levels in 15 years, with more than an estimated 710,000 hospitalizations and more than 45,000 deaths reported, according to the CDC.

Is There a Different Flu Vaccine for Older Adults?

Because the immune response can become less robust with age, the CDC recommends that adults 65 and older receive one of three types of flu vaccines when available:

- A high-dose vaccine
- An adjuvanted vaccine
- A recombinant vaccine

These vaccines are designed to produce a stronger immune response in older adults than a standard-dose flu vaccine. However, if a preferred vaccine isn't readily available, getting a standard flu vaccine is still better than delaying vaccination.

Pneumococcal Protection Matters, Too

Flu isn't the only respiratory illness worth preventing. Pneumococcal infections can cause serious conditions, including pneumonia, meningitis, and bloodstream infections, and pneumonia can also be a complication of influenza.

The CDC recommends pneumococcal vaccination for adults 50 and older, as well as for certain individuals at increased risk. If you're unsure whether you are up to date, your healthcare provider can review your vaccination history and determine which vaccine(s) is appropriate for you. In some cases, flu and pneumococcal vaccines can be given during the same visit.



A Flu Shot is One Part of Staying Well

Vaccination is an important step you can take to reduce your risk of seasonal flu, but it works best alongside everyday precautions:

- Wash hands regularly
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick
- Stay home when you're ill to limit spread

It's also important to recognize when you may need medical attention. Flu symptoms often begin suddenly and can include:

- Fever or chills
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Body aches
- Headache
- Intense fatigue

Older adults do not always develop a fever, so any sudden change in how you feel during flu season is worth paying attention to.

Get Ready for Flu Season with Millennium Physician Group

You don't have to navigate flu season alone. Millennium Physician Group can help you understand your vaccination options, determine which prevention plan is right for you, and answer questions about protecting yourself and loved ones from influenza and other respiratory illnesses. A conversation with your healthcare provider today can help you take a proactive approach for your health throughout flu season.

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The Role of Physical Therapy in Lateral Ankle Instability and Peroneal Tendonitis

By Dr. Sahiba Singh, DPM

At Family Foot & Leg Center in Port Charlotte, Florida, two of the most frequent complaints I treat in active adults and athletes are lateral ankle instability and peroneal tendonitis.

These conditions rarely occur in isolation; they exist as a problematic duo—one directly feeding into and worsening the other. When a patient arrives expressing frustration that their ankle constantly feels weak, wobbly, or ready to "give way," we almost always find that the supporting tendons along the outside of the ankle are overworked, inflamed, and painful.

Fortunately, surgery is not always the first answer. Physical therapy serves as the central pillar of conservative management for both conditions, helping patients overcome pain, rebuild joint stability, and protect their ankles against future injury.

Decoding the Link Between Instability and Tendonitis

To understand why physical therapy is so effective, it helps to see how these two conditions interact under daily stress:

- **Lateral Ankle Instability:** Typically develops after repeated inversion injuries (ankle sprains) that stretch or tear the lateral ligament complex—specifically the anterior talofibular (ATFL) and calcaneofibular (CFL) ligaments. Compromised static stabilizers leave the joint loose, causing persistent instability on uneven surfaces, stairs, or during quick turns.

- **Peroneal Tendonitis:** Running along the outside of the ankle are the peroneus longus and peroneus brevis tendons, which perform eversion and provide dynamic stability. When ligaments are stretched, these tendons work overtime to keep the foot upright. This chronic overuse leads to micro-tearing, inflammation, and pain behind or below the outer ankle bone.

Without intervention, weak ligaments lead to unstable biomechanics, which overworks the tendons, leading to fatigue and tendonitis—further decreasing your foot's ability to protect itself from rolling again.

The Comprehensive Physical Therapy Framework

Simply resting and waiting for acute ankle pain to subside does not restore structural mechanics. A structured physical therapy program addresses the functional root causes through a targeted, multi-stage protocol.

1. Detailed Clinical Assessment

Rehabilitation must be tailored to the individual. During an initial evaluation, we assess far more than just where it hurts:

- **Joint Range of Motion:** Checking for restrictions, especially in dorsiflexion (bending the ankle upward).
- **Strength & Muscle Balance:** Isolating the peroneal, calf complex, and intrinsic foot muscles.
- **Proprioception & Control:** Testing postural control, single-leg stance efficiency, and spatial awareness.
- **Proximal Mechanics:** Evaluating hip strength and core stability, as weak hips cause faulty mechanics further down the leg.

2. Progressive Loading and Strengthening

Building tissue capacity is essential for damaged tendons and weakened muscles.

- **Targeted Ankle Resistance:** Controlled movements with resistance bands progress to heavier dynamic loading targeting eversion, inversion, dorsiflexion, and plantarflexion.
- **Functional Kinetic Exercises:** As tendon irritation resolves, therapy advances to loaded movements like weighted calf raises, single-leg step-downs, lunges, and multidirectional agility drills.
- **Proximal Stabilization:** Strengthening gluteal and intrinsic foot muscles to improve lower-extremity alignment.

3. Proprioceptive and Sensorimotor Retraining

Spraining an ankle damages specialized nerve endings (proprioceptors) that communicate joint position to your brain. Restoring this feedback loop is critical to preventing future ankle rolls.

- **Static Balance Progression:** Moving from basic double-leg stances on firm ground to single-leg balances on unstable surfaces like foam pads or wobble boards.
- **Dynamic Perturbations:** Introducing unpredictable elements, such as catching a ball while balancing, forcing the nervous system to react rapidly.
- **Sport-Specific Drills:** Integrating high-speed dynamic drills—hopping, cutting, acceleration, and deceleration—to prepare athletes for real-world demands.

4. Manual Therapy and Load Management

To manage acute symptoms and improve joint mechanics, physical therapists employ hands-on techniques:

- **Joint Mobilization:** Restoring glide to the talocrural and subtalar joints to resolve stiff movement patterns.
- **Soft Tissue Techniques:** Targeted friction massage, myofascial release, and stretching to relieve tension along the peroneal belly.
- **Supportive Bracing or Taping:** Utilizing functional bracing during early rehab stages to offer structural feedback without locking down joint mobility permanently.

Long-Term Prevention and Safe Return to Activity

The primary goal of conservative care at Family Foot & Leg Center is long-term joint health. Symptom relief alone does not mean an ankle is fully healed; true readiness is defined by measurable functional performance.

Before returning to athletics, demanding occupations, or long walks on Florida's beaches, patients must demonstrate restored muscular strength, solid dynamic balance, and high movement quality under load. Structured physical therapy provides the safest pathway to break the cycle of chronic sprains and eliminate lateral ankle pain for good.

Take the First Step Toward Stronger Ankles

Don't wait for another ankle sprain or worsening tendon pain to keep you off your feet. If you are struggling with persistent ankle instability, swelling, or pain while walking, our expert team at Family Foot & Leg Center in Port Charlotte is here to help you regain your strength, stability, and mobility.

Dr. Sahiba Singh is a board-qualified podiatric physician at Family Foot and Leg Center, located at 3161 Harbor Blvd., Suite B, Port Charlotte, Florida, where she provides comprehensive medical and surgical care for foot and ankle conditions, including pediatric podiatry, sports injuries, diabetic foot care, wound care, and reconstructive foot and ankle surgery.



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THE LIFE-SAVING POWER OF REGULAR SKIN CANCER SCREENINGS: WHY EARLY DETECTION MATTERS

In a world where health consciousness is on the rise, one critical aspect of preventive care often goes overlooked: regular skin cancer screenings. With skin cancer being one of the most common types of cancer worldwide, the importance of early detection through routine check-ups cannot be overstated. This article delves into why staying vigilant about your skin health, particularly in checking for melanomas, could be a life-saving decision.

Understanding Skin Cancer and Melanoma

Skin cancer occurs when skin cells grow abnormally, often due to damage from UV radiation. While there are several types of skin cancer, melanoma is the most dangerous. Melanoma develops in the melanocytes, the cells responsible for producing skin pigment. Although it's less common than other skin cancers, melanoma is far more likely to spread to other parts of the body if not caught early.

The Power of Early Detection

The key to successfully treating skin cancer, especially melanoma, lies in early detection. When caught in its initial stages, the five-year survival rate for melanoma is an impressive 99%. However, this rate drops dramatically to 27% for melanomas that have spread to distant parts of the body. These statistics underscore the critical importance of regular skin checks and professional screenings.

Recognizing the Warning Signs

While professional screenings are crucial, being aware of your own skin and any changes is equally important. The "ABCDE" rule is a helpful guide for identifying potential melanomas:

Asymmetry: One half of the mole doesn't match the other half.

Border: The edges are irregular, ragged, or blurred.

Color: The color is not uniform and may include shades of brown, black, or tan.

Diameter: Melanomas are usually larger than 6mm (about the size of a pencil eraser).

Evolving: The mole changes in size, shape, or color over time.

Any mole or skin growth exhibiting these characteristics warrants immediate medical attention.

The Screening Process

A professional skin cancer screening is a quick, painless procedure that can be performed by a dermatologist or trained healthcare provider. During the screening, the doctor will thoroughly examine your skin, paying close attention to areas frequently exposed to the sun. They may use a dermatoscope, a special magnifying tool, to get a closer look at suspicious spots.

Who Should Get Screened and How Often?

While everyone should be mindful of their skin health, certain factors increase the risk of skin cancer:

- Fair skin
- History of sunburns or excessive sun exposure
- Multiple or atypical moles
- Family history of skin cancer
- Weakened immune system

For those at average risk, an annual skin check is recommended. However, individuals with higher risk factors may need more frequent screenings. It's best to consult with a healthcare provider to determine the most appropriate screening schedule for your specific situation.

Beyond Professional Screenings: The Importance of Self-Checks

In between professional screenings, monthly self-examinations are crucial. These self-checks allow you to become familiar with your skin's normal appearance and help you spot any changes quickly. Use a full-length mirror and a hand mirror to examine your entire body, including hard-to-see areas like your back, scalp, and between your toes.

Prevention: Your First Line of Defense

While regular screenings are vital, prevention remains the best strategy against skin cancer. Protect your skin by:

- Applying broad-spectrum sunscreen with at least SPF 30 daily
- Wearing protective clothing, including wide-brimmed hats and sunglasses
- Seeking shade, especially during peak sun hours (10 am to 4 pm)
- Avoiding tanning beds and sun lamps

The Broader Impact of Regular Screenings

Regular skin cancer screenings don't just benefit individuals; they have a broader societal impact. Early detection reduces the overall burden on healthcare systems by catching cancers when they're most treatable. It also helps raise awareness about skin cancer, encouraging others to prioritize their skin health.

Conclusion: A Small Step for Significant Peace of Mind

In the grand scheme of health maintenance, skin cancer screenings are a relatively small investment of time that can yield enormous benefits. By making these screenings a regular part of your health routine, you're taking a proactive step in protecting yourself against one of the most prevalent forms of cancer. Remember, your skin is your body's largest organ and its first line of defense against the environment. Treating it with the care and attention it deserves isn't just about aesthetics—it's about preserving your overall health and potentially saving your life.

Don't wait for a problem to arise. Schedule a skin cancer screening today and empower yourself with the knowledge and vigilance needed to keep your skin healthy for years to come. Your future self will thank you for this simple yet powerful act of self-care.



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On a GLP-1?

YOUR GUT NEEDS ATTENTION, TOO

By Aiste Magitman

GLP-1 medications such as Ozempic, Wegovy, Mounjaro and Zepbound have changed the lives of many people. But as a pharmacist, I'm also seeing another side of the story.

People taking these medications are reaching for laxatives because they're constipated, antacids because they're experiencing reflux, and sometimes even hemorrhoid creams because they're straining.

It makes sense when you look at how GLP-1 medications work. They reduce appetite and can slow gastric emptying, helping you feel full sooner and eat less.

But there's something we don't talk about enough:

When you eat less, you may also be feeding your beneficial gut bacteria less.

A smaller appetite can mean less fiber, fewer plants and less variety. Some people may also drink less because they feel full more easily. Combine that with changes in gastrointestinal motility, and constipation, bloating and unpredictable bowel habits aren't so surprising.

And this is where the **gut microbiome** comes in.

Your gut is home to trillions of microorganisms that depend, in part, on what you eat. Certain gut bacteria ferment fiber and produce beneficial compounds called **short-chain fatty acids**, including butyrate. Butyrate provides energy to the cells lining your colon and helps support your gut barrier—the protective lining that helps absorb what your body needs while keeping potentially harmful substances and microbes from crossing where they don't belong.

Your gut microbes also interact with your immune system, metabolism and nervous system. Some bacteria can produce certain B vitamins and vitamin K, while microbial activity can influence how nutrients and other compounds are processed in the gut.

So supporting your gut is about much more than bowel regularity. You're supporting an entire ecosystem.

Different gut microbes thrive on different fibers and plant compounds, which is why dietary variety matters. Prebiotic fibers provide food for gut microbes, while polyphenols can influence which bacteria thrive. Research has linked polyphenol-rich foods and supplements with beneficial bacteria such as *Akkermansia*, *Bifidobacterium* and *Faecalibacterium*.

This is exactly what inspired me to create **Best Gut Forever**.

As a pharmacist, I didn't want to focus only on managing one digestive symptom after another. I wanted to create a simple daily formula designed to support the gut from several angles.

That became my **3-3-2 formula**: three prebiotic fibers—psyllium, acacia and baobab; three polyphenol sources—pomegranate, grape seed and blueberry; and two digestive botanicals—ginger and turmeric.

Each group has a purpose. The fibers help support stool consistency and regularity while providing food for gut microbes. The polyphenol-rich ingredients provide plant compounds that can help beneficial bacteria thrive and support a diverse microbiome. Ginger and turmeric add another layer of digestive support, with ginger particularly studied for its role in gastrointestinal motility.

Instead of focusing on just one digestive symptom, the idea behind my 3-3-2 approach is simple: **support regularity, nourish your gut bacteria and support digestion—all at the same time.**

If you're taking a GLP-1, eating less may be part of the goal—but nourishing your gut still matters. Focus not only on how much you eat, but on what you're giving your gut each day: adequate hydration, fiber and a variety of plant foods.

Your GLP-1 can support your weight-management journey. **Don't forget to support your gut along the way.**



Aiste Magitman is a licensed pharmacist and founder of Best Gut Forever. This article is for educational purposes and is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent disease.

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STUBBORN KNEE OR JOINT PAIN? SURGERY IS NOT THE ONLY OPTION

Exploring Regenerative Medicine and Non-Surgical Adjunctive Therapies

By Axel Ruiz, MD, DABFP, CWS

Could You Be a Candidate for a Regenerative Medicine Evaluation?

Regenerative and non-surgical treatment options may be worth discussing if you are experiencing:

- Persistent knee or back pain
- Osteoarthritis of the knee, hip, shoulder, or spine
- Meniscus tears
- Ligament injuries, including MCL or LCL injuries
- Cartilage damage or degeneration
- Tendon inflammation or degeneration
- Persistent joint pain that has not improved with conventional treatment
- Joint stiffness or reduced range of motion
- Pain when walking, climbing stairs, exercising, or participating in sports
- Difficulty returning to normal activities because of chronic joint discomfort

Exploring Options Beyond Surgery

For appropriately selected patients, a comprehensive regenerative medicine program may incorporate exosome-based or stem cell-based biologic injections together with supplemental treatments such as shockwave therapy, therapeutic laser, red-light or near-infrared therapy, and rehabilitation.

Regenerative Biologic Injections

Exosome-based and stem cell-based products are being investigated for their potential roles in cellular communication, inflammatory modulation, and tissue-repair signaling. These approaches should be considered only after an appropriate medical evaluation and review of the patient's diagnosis, imaging, and treatment history.

Shockwave Therapy

Extracorporeal shockwave therapy uses targeted acoustic energy and may be incorporated into a musculoskeletal treatment program to support local tissue response and address certain sources of chronic pain. It can be used as a supplemental modality when clinically appropriate.

Therapeutic Laser Therapy

Therapeutic laser uses selected wavelengths of light as a non-invasive adjunct. Depending on the device



and clinical indication, it may be incorporated to support pain management, circulation, and cellular activity.

Red-Light & Near-Infrared Therapy

Photobiomodulation uses red or near-infrared wavelengths of light. Research is evaluating its effects on cellular energy production, inflammatory signaling, and pain pathways. It may be included as part of a broader rehabilitation program.

Why Combine Therapies?

Chronic joint and back pain can involve multiple structures and biological processes, including cartilage degeneration, inflammation, tendon or ligament dysfunction, muscle weakness, and altered biomechanics. For this reason, an individualized program may combine biologic procedures with supplemental shockwave, laser or red-light therapy and appropriate rehabilitation rather than relying on a single modality.

The Goal: Preserve Function and Explore Your Options

Not every painful joint requires surgery, and not every patient is a candidate for regenerative procedures. The first step is a comprehensive evaluation to identify the source and severity of the problem. Depending on the diagnosis, imaging findings, overall health, and degree of joint degeneration, an individualized non-surgical strategy may be considered before proceeding to major surgery.

BEFORE YOU DECIDE ON SURGERY, KNOW YOUR OPTIONS.

A personalized approach combining regenerative medicine, shockwave therapy, therapeutic laser, red-light therapy, and appropriate rehabilitation may offer selected patients another avenue to explore for persistent musculoskeletal pain.

IMPORTANT NOTICE: This material is for educational purposes only and does not constitute medical advice or guarantee clinical outcomes. Exosome products and many stem cell/cellular or tissue-derived products offered for orthopedic applications are investigational and are not FDA-approved to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent osteoarthritis or other orthopedic diseases. Results vary, and no outcome can be guaranteed. These therapies are not substitutes for medically necessary surgery. A qualified medical evaluation is required to determine appropriate treatment options.

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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MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH: THE CONVERSATION THAT COULD CHANGE A LIFE

Every year, Mental Health Awareness Month serves as an important reminder that mental health is just as critical as physical health. Yet too often, individuals struggling with depression, anxiety, trauma, substance use, bipolar disorder, or other behavioral health concerns delay seeking treatment due to stigma, uncertainty, or concerns about access to care.

At North Port Behavioral Health (NPBH), we see firsthand the difference that timely intervention can make. Mental health conditions are highly treatable, but many individuals wait until symptoms significantly impact their relationships, employment, physical health, or overall quality of life before seeking help.

Every day, people walk through our doors carrying burdens that are invisible to everyone around them.

They are parents who continue showing up for their families while quietly battling depression. They are teenagers struggling with anxiety so overwhelming it impacts school, friendships, and sleep. They are professionals who appear successful on the outside yet feel emotionally exhausted, disconnected, or hopeless. They are older adults coping with grief, isolation, or life changes that have left them feeling lost.

One thing many of these individuals have in common is that they waited.

They waited, hoping things would get better on their own. They waited because they didn't want to burden others. They waited because they weren't sure their situation was "serious enough." They waited because asking for help felt uncomfortable. During Mental Health Awareness Month, one message deserves more attention than any other:

You do not have to wait until you are in crisis to seek help.

MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES ARE MORE COMMON THAN MANY REALIZE

Behavioral health concerns affect people of all ages, backgrounds, and professions. Individuals may experience persistent sadness, overwhelming anxiety, mood instability, substance misuse, difficulty coping with life stressors, changes in sleep or appetite, or thoughts of self-harm. While symptoms can vary in severity, they all deserve attention and professional evaluation.



Mental health challenges are medical conditions, not personal failures.

Depression is not a lack of gratitude. Anxiety is not a lack of strength. Trauma is not something a person can simply "get over." Substance use disorders are not character flaws.

Mental health conditions can affect how we think, feel, sleep, work, communicate, and engage with the people we love. Left untreated, symptoms often become more disruptive over time, affecting relationships, job performance, physical health, and overall well-being.

The good news is that treatment works.

Every day, individuals who once believed things would never improve begin to regain hope, stability, and confidence through appropriate behavioral health care.

THE MOST IMPORTANT STEP IS OFTEN THE FIRST ONE

One of the most common things we hear from patients after beginning treatment is:

"I wish I had come sooner."

Not because they failed.

Not because their symptoms were worse than someone else's.

But because they spent so much time struggling alone.

Seeking an assessment does not automatically mean someone will be hospitalized. It does not mean something is "wrong" with them. It simply creates an opportunity to speak with a behavioral health professional, better understand what is happening, and learn what treatment options may be available.

Just as chest pain deserves a medical evaluation, persistent emotional distress deserves a mental health evaluation.

REMOVING BARRIERS TO TREATMENT

One of the greatest challenges in behavioral health-care is access. Individuals in need of treatment frequently encounter barriers such as lengthy wait times, uncertainty about insurance coverage, or simply not knowing where to begin.

At NPBH, our goal is to eliminate as many of those barriers as possible. We believe access to care should be straightforward, timely, and compassionate.

NPBH offers:

- Walk-in assessments with no appointment required
- 24/7 admissions support
- Acceptance of most commercial insurance plans and government-funded programs
- Comprehensive psychiatric evaluations
- Inpatient behavioral health treatment
- Partial Hospitalization Programs (PHP)
- Intensive Outpatient Programs (IOP)
- Specialized treatment for adolescents, adults, and older adults
- Care coordination and discharge planning to support continued recovery

Whether someone is experiencing an acute behavioral health crisis or simply recognizes they are not feeling like themselves, our team is prepared to evaluate their needs and connect them with the appropriate level of care.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF SPECIALIZED BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CARE

Mental health treatment is not one-size-fits-all. Effective care requires a multidisciplinary approach that addresses the biological, psychological, and social factors contributing to a person's condition.

At NPBH, psychiatrists, nurses, therapists, social workers, and clinical professionals work collaboratively to develop individualized treatment plans. This team-based approach allows patients to receive evidence-based care while building the skills and strategies needed to support long-term recovery.

We also recognize that mental health impacts entire families and communities. When an individual receives appropriate treatment, the benefits often extend well beyond the patient, improving relationships, workplace performance, academic success, and overall community wellness.

HOPE BEGINS WITH A CONVERSATION

Perhaps the greatest misconception about mental health treatment is that people must have all the answers before seeking help.

In reality, many simply need a place to start.

You do not need to know what diagnosis you may have.

You do not need to know what level of care you need.

You do not need to be certain that treatment is necessary.

You simply need to take the first step.

An assessment can provide clarity, direction, and support during a time when everything may feel uncertain.

A MESSAGE TO OUR COMMUNITY

Mental Health Awareness Month is about more than awareness. It is about action.

It is about recognizing the friend who no longer seems like themselves. The coworker who appears overwhelmed. The family member who has withdrawn. The teenager who is struggling. The older adult who feels increasingly isolated.

Most importantly, it is about recognizing those same signs in ourselves.

If you have been wondering whether it's time to seek help, consider this your reminder:

You do not have to wait until things get worse.

The strongest people are not those who struggle alone. They are the ones who recognize when they need support and have the courage to reach out.

Help is available. Hope is real. Recovery is possible.

And sometimes, the decision that changes everything begins with a single conversation.

NPBH welcomes walk-in assessments 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. No referral is required, and most insurance plans are accepted. If you or someone you care about is struggling, let us help you take the next step. A confidential assessment can provide answers, options, and hope for a healthier tomorrow.

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October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month – 3D Mammography

As technology advances, understanding medical exams and procedures becomes more complex. The quality of services provided is an important consideration.

The American Cancer Society endorses mammography, along with yearly physical examinations and monthly self-examinations, as the most effective means of detecting breast cancer at its earliest and most treatable stage. Generally, mammography can reveal benign and cancerous growths before you or your physician can feel them. If detected at the earliest, localized stage, breast cancer has a five-year relative survival rate of over 99 percent, according to the American Cancer Society, as small, early-stage cancers are more treatable and can often be removed before they spread to other parts of the body.

Breast cancer remains the most common cancer among American women, accounting for about 1 in 3 new cancer diagnoses in women each year. The American Cancer Society estimates that in 2026, about 321,910 new cases of invasive breast cancer and 60,730 new cases of non-invasive (in situ) breast cancer will be diagnosed in U.S. women, along with an estimated 42,140 deaths from the disease. Notably, about 85% of women diagnosed with breast cancer have no family history of it — which is why the American Cancer Society recommends mammography as a life-saving screening tool for all women, not just those considered high-risk. And 3D mammography specifically is becoming the preferred choice for physicians in Southwest Florida. With over 30 years of experience and a team of board-certified radiologists, Radiology Associates of Venice & Englewood (RAVE) is proud to offer 3D mammography to our patients.

What is 3D Mammography?

3D mammography is a revolutionary state-of-the-art technology approved by the FDA in February 2011, which gives radiologists the ability to view inside the breast layer by layer, helping to see the fine details more clearly by minimizing overlapping tissue. During a 3D mammogram, multiple low-dose images known as "slices" of the breast are acquired at different angles. With 3D technology, the radiologist can view a mammogram in a way never before possible.

Is 3D a separate exam or part of my usual mammogram?

The 3D exam is a separate procedure that is performed at the same time as your regular mammogram.

What is the cost and will my insurance cover the 3D exam?

Medicare does cover 3D mammography. Even though 3D mammography is FDA approved and covered by Medicare, most private insurance companies are not yet reimbursing for this exam. However, RAVE has never charged the patient the additional 3D portion of the exam if their insurance doesn't cover it. "The Radiologists of RAVE include the additional 3D imaging regardless of payment because it's in the best interest of patient care, so there is never an additional charge." (Philip Mihm, M.D. RAVE Radiologist)

What are the benefits?

FEWER MAMMOGRAM CALLBACKS for additional mammography – 3D mammography helps distinguish harmless abnormalities from real cancers, leading to fewer callbacks for additional mammography and less anxiety for women. Studies show that combining 3D and digital mammography for screening reduces callback rates by 20-40 percent. Doctors and scientists agree that early detection is the best defense against breast cancer. 3D mammography has been shown in clinical studies to be more accurate than conventional mammography alone by detecting cancers earlier. A landmark JAMA study of over 450,000 exams found that adding 3D mammography to digital mammography increases invasive breast cancer detection by up to 40 percent while also reducing unnecessary recalls. It's truly an important component in the screening process.

After 3D mammography, if continued tests and imaging are needed, RAVE uses state-of-the-art technology, including MRI-guided breast biopsies and the Philips 3T wide bore MRI that allows our radiologists to view the breasts in a higher resolution, enabling us to have even more clarity within the breasts. RAVE has been performing MRI breast imaging for over 15 years and with Wide Bore technology, it allows us to accommodate most any sized patient comfortably. With the Philips 3T wide

bore MRI, we are able to cut down on the amount of time it takes for the patient to be scanned. Most breast MRIs take 30 minutes or less, allowing the patient to go on with their day with little disruption.

How long will it take?

The exam will take about 4 seconds longer per view while in compression than the 2D mammography.

How much radiation will I be exposed to?

It varies from person to person and is roughly equivalent to film/screen mammography. The amount of radiation is below government safety standards.

What if my doctor did not mention 3D Mammography to me?

3D is an optional service at this time and elected by the patient. Many physicians know about our new 3D technology and the feedback we have received has been very positive. If you need additional information to help you make this decision, please visit www.RaveRad.com.

Why is RAVE Imaging offering 3D Mammography?

RAVE prides itself on offering the highest quality care for our patients. Our radiologists believe strongly that 3D mammography will benefit our patients.



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Aging Well, Worry Less

How SafeWell55 Brings Peace of Mind to Life After 55

Life after 55 can be some of the richest years of a person's life — more time for family, hobbies, travel, and doing things on your own terms. But it also comes with new realities: health can change unexpectedly, living situations shift, and the world can feel a little less predictable than it used to. For many adults in this stage of life, and for the adult children who worry about them, the question isn't whether something might happen — it's whether help will be there when it does.

That's the problem SafeWell55 was built to solve. It's a personal safety and wellness app designed specifically for adults 55 and older, bundling emergency response, everyday health care, prescription savings, cybersecurity protection, and more into a single, easy-to-use membership. Rather than juggling multiple different services — a medical alert device, a telehealth subscription, a prescription discount card, an identity theft monitor, a pet health subscription — SafeWell55 folds them into one program, accessible from a smartphone.

Help at Your Fingertips

At the core of SafeWell55 is personal safety. With a single tap, members can alert family and friends in an emergency, contact law enforcement if needed, or activate a virtual companion feature that keeps a caring eye on them during a walk, an errand, or any outing where they'd simply feel better knowing someone is watching out for them. It's the kind of quiet reassurance that lets someone head out the door with confidence instead of hesitation.

Privacy is built into the design, not an afterthought. Location is only shared with the people a member chooses, and only while safety features are actively in use — so the app supports independence rather than constant surveillance.

A companion feature, "I'm OK / I'm Not OK," gives members an easy way to check in with loved ones on their own schedule. Instead of relying on loved ones to call and check in — or worse, not hearing from someone for days and fearing the worst — members can send a quick daily update about how they're doing. They decide how often to check in and exactly who receives those updates, keeping the family circle informed without feeling like they're being monitored.

Health Care Without the Hassle

One of the more compelling parts of the SafeWell55 program is virtual care. Members get access to licensed doctors and mental health counselors 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, from the comfort of home — with \$0 copay for primary care visits, urgent care needs, and behavioral health sessions. That means a nagging cough, a medication refill, a stressful week that calls for someone to talk to — all of it is a video call away, without the cost, the waiting room, or the drive.

For many older adults, prescription costs are one of the biggest recurring expenses in a monthly budget. SafeWell55 addresses this directly through its Generic Prescription Program. Depending on the plan selected, members get \$0 copay access to over 200 common acute-care generic medications, or broader coverage that includes over 2,500 chronic condition medications with no copays and no deductible. A digital card can be used at pickup, and the benefits are honored at more than 65,000 pharmacies nationwide, including major chains like CVS, Costco, Rite-Aid, and Walgreens, as well as national grocery store pharmacies. For a household managing several prescriptions a month, that kind of savings can add up quickly.

Even the family pet is covered. Through the program's pet telehealth benefit, members can consult a licensed veterinarian through the app at no additional cost — a convenient way to get guidance on a pet's symptoms before deciding whether an expensive in-person vet visit is really necessary.

Protecting More Than Physical Safety

Physical safety is only part of the picture. Adults 55 and older are frequently and disproportionately targeted by online scammers and hackers, and the financial and emotional toll of a cyberattack or identity theft can be devastating. SafeWell55's cybersecurity features monitor for threats, alert members to risks, and provide support to recover if an attack does happen — adding a layer of digital protection alongside the app's physical safety tools.

There's also a rewards component that quietly pays members back for spending they're already doing. Through SafeWell Rewards, members can earn cash back — an average of 5% instantly — at more than 300 retailers, restaurants, and travel partners, including grocery stores and pharmacies. Linking rewards to a cash-back credit card can boost those savings even further, turning routine shopping into a small but steady financial benefit.

For those who want an extra layer of protection, SafeWell55 also offers an optional wearable device that can be connected to the app. If a member falls, feels unwell, or faces another emergency, the wearable can instantly alert their loved ones — giving families additional peace of mind, especially for members who live alone or spend significant time outdoors.

Plans Built for Real Life

SafeWell55 offers two membership tiers, and both can be extended to cover a spouse:

Plan 1 — \$27.95/month individual, or \$38.95/month for individual plus spouse — includes \$0 copay acute generic prescription coverage alongside all core safety, telehealth, and wellness features.

Plan 2 — \$37.95/month individual, or \$52.95/month for individual plus spouse — expands prescription coverage to include acute and chronic condition generic medications with no copays and no deductible.

Both plans include the full suite of personal safety tools, virtual care, pet telehealth, cybersecurity protection, and rewards, with the wearable device available as an add-on for those who want it.

Why It Matters

What makes SafeWell55 stand out isn't any single feature — it's the way the pieces work together. A fall, a scam attempt, a skipped medication because of cost, a lonely stretch without a family check-in — these are often separate problems handled by separate services, if they're handled at all. SafeWell55 brings them under one roof, with one app, one monthly cost, and one goal: helping people over 55 move through their day with confidence, knowing that help — medical, financial, or personal — is never more than a tap away.

For adults navigating this stage of life, and for the families who care about them, that kind of consolidated peace of mind can be worth far more than the modest monthly cost. It's not just a safety app. It's a way to keep living fully, with a safety net quietly in place underneath. Start now and watch our informational video at www.SafeWell55.com today.



www.SafeWell55.com



UNDERSTANDING DEMENTIA: Seeing the Person Beyond the Memory

There is a particular kind of heartbreak in watching someone you love forget.

At first, it may be something small: a forgotten name, a missed appointment, a story told twice. But gradually, the changes become harder to dismiss. Familiar places become confusing. Conversations may wander, repeat, or disappear altogether.

And somewhere along the way, we may begin to see dementia before we see the person. That is one of the things we must learn to change.

Dementia is not simply about forgetting. It is a collection of symptoms that affect memory, thinking, communication, behavior, and everyday activities. But behind every diagnosis is a human being, with a lifetime of experiences, relationships, humor, preferences, and feelings. The disease may change a person's abilities, but it does not erase their humanity.

When Memory Changes, Love Still Remains

One of the most painful misconceptions about dementia is that when someone no longer remembers us, they no longer know us or love us. But human connection is much bigger than memory.

A person with dementia may not remember the name of a daughter who visits every afternoon, yet still feel comfort when she holds their hand. They may not recall the details of a fifty-year marriage, but still respond to a familiar voice with warmth. They may forget yesterday's conversation but feel joy when someone sings a favorite song.

Sometimes the details disappear before the feelings do. That is why a gentle touch, a familiar melody, a smile, or simply sitting quietly beside someone can matter so much.

Look for the Person, Not Just the Symptoms

It is easy to focus on what a person with dementia can no longer do. They cannot remember. They cannot always find the right words.

But there is another way to look.

They can still laugh. They can still enjoy music and sunlight coming through a window. They can still be frustrated, excited, frightened, peaceful, proud, or loved.



They are still themselves. Understanding dementia means meeting people where they are rather than constantly asking them to return to where they once were.

Patience Is an Act of Love

For caregivers and families, this can be extraordinarily difficult. When the same question is asked for the tenth time, patience wears thin. When someone insists on something that isn't accurate, correcting them feels natural.

But sometimes the most compassionate response is not correction. It is reassurance.

If someone asks, "When are we going home?" while sitting in the home they have lived in for decades, perhaps the deeper question isn't about a building. Maybe they are asking: *Am I safe? Am I okay? Is someone here with me?*

Sometimes answering the feeling matters more than correcting the fact. A calm voice communicates safety. A patient response communicates dignity. And a hand held at the right moment communicates everything words cannot.

Dementia Changes Families, Too

Dementia also profoundly affects spouses, children, siblings, friends, and caregivers. Loved ones may grieve while the person they love is still alive, mourning lost conversations, routines, and future plans. They may feel guilt, exhaustion, or loneliness.

These emotions do not make someone a bad caregiver. They make someone human.

Caring for another person requires caring for yourself, too. Asking for help is not failure. Accepting respite is not selfish. Sometimes loving someone with dementia means recognizing that you cannot carry everything alone.

We Can Create a Kinder World

We can slow down when someone struggles to communicate. We can avoid embarrassing someone for forgetting. We can offer assistance without unnecessarily taking away their independence.

Most importantly, we can remember that a diagnosis is not an identity. They are not "the dementia patient." They are a mother. A father. A spouse. A friend. A teacher. A storyteller. A person who has lived a life full of ordinary days, extraordinary moments, heartbreaks, celebrations, and love.

What Dementia Can Teach Us

Perhaps dementia's most profound lesson is that a person's worth was never dependent on how much they could remember or how independently they could function. We are valuable simply because we are human.

When memory fades, kindness still matters. When words become difficult, presence still matters. And when someone cannot remember that they are loved, we can remember for them.

Dementia reminds us that a person's story is much bigger than the chapters they can still recall.

So let us look beyond the forgotten names and repeated questions. Let us look beyond the diagnosis. Let us see the person, and meet them there with patience, dignity, compassion, and love.

If you would like to understand dementia and what your loved one is going through, please join our support group on the third Wednesday of every month at 3:00 p.m.



To learn more about our upcoming caregiver support group, or to reserve your place at a future community event, please contact **Melissa Vanderbilt-Bestor**, Director of Sales and Marketing. We would be honored to share this meaningful educational experience with you.



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Elevate Your Self-Care with Exomind Technology

By Dr. Michael Jonathan Clark

At Island ENT Wellness Spa and Audiology, we're excited to introduce Exomind, a revolutionary brain wellness technology that's transforming how we approach mental self-care and cognitive health.

In our fast-paced world, stress, anxiety, and mental fatigue have become unwelcome companions for many. While traditional self-care often focuses on physical wellness through exercise, nutrition, and relaxation techniques, we're now recognizing that true self-care must also address our cognitive and neurological well-being. This is where Exomind comes in.

What is Exomind?

Exomind represents the cutting edge of neurotechnology, offering a non-invasive approach to optimizing brain function and promoting mental wellness. This sophisticated system uses advanced brainwave technology to help balance neural activity, reduce stress, and enhance overall cognitive performance. By working directly with your brain's natural rhythms, Exomind creates a personalized experience designed to restore mental clarity and emotional equilibrium.

The treatment is remarkably simple yet profoundly effective. During an Exomind session, you'll relax comfortably while the technology gently guides your brainwaves toward optimal patterns associated with calmness, focus, and mental clarity. Many patients describe the experience as deeply relaxing, similar to meditation but requiring no prior experience or effort on your part.

The Self-Care Benefits of Exomind

Self-care isn't selfish—it's essential. When we prioritize our mental and cognitive health, we're better equipped to handle life's challenges, maintain meaningful relationships, and perform at our best in all areas of life. Exomind supports these goals by addressing several key areas of brain wellness.

First, stress reduction is one of Exomind's most immediate benefits. By promoting balanced brainwave patterns, the technology helps activate your body's natural relaxation response, counteracting the harmful effects of chronic stress. Users often report feeling calmer and more centered after just one session.



Second, many patients experience improved sleep quality. In our sleep-deprived society, restorative rest is a crucial component of self-care. Exomind helps regulate the neural patterns associated with healthy sleep cycles, making it easier to fall asleep and achieve deeper, more rejuvenating rest.

Third, enhanced focus and mental clarity represent another significant advantage. Whether you're struggling with brain fog, attention difficulties, or simply want to optimize your cognitive performance, Exomind can help sharpen your mental edge and improve concentration.

Making Exomind Part of Your Self-Care Routine

At Island ENT Wellness Spa and Audiology, we believe that comprehensive care means addressing all aspects of health—including the often-overlooked realm of brain wellness. Our experienced team is trained in the latest neurotechnology protocols and will work with you to develop a personalized Exomind treatment plan tailored to your specific needs and goals.

Consider investing in your most important asset: your brain. Whether you're dealing with stress, seeking better sleep, wanting to enhance focus, or simply looking to optimize your mental well-being, Exomind offers a powerful tool for transformation.

Self-care is about creating sustainable practices that support your long-term health and happiness. Unlike quick fixes or temporary solutions, Exomind works with your brain's natural capacity for healing and optimization, creating lasting changes that support your wellness journey.

We invite you to discover how Exomind can elevate your self-care routine and help you achieve new levels of mental clarity, emotional balance, and cognitive vitality. Contact Island ENT Wellness Spa and Audiology today to schedule your consultation and experience the future of brain wellness. Because when it comes to self-care, your mind deserves the same attention and care as your body.

Your journey to better brain health starts here.

About Dr. Michael Jonathan Clark

Dr. Clark has surgical skills that encompass much of the head and neck, and really enjoys a challenge. Dr. Clark loves cochlear implants and their ability to replace the function of the inner ear by directly stimulating the auditory nerve. There is just something special about watching the face of someone hear for the first time in a long time. He also preforms ossicular chain reconstruction, which repairs the tiny bones in the middle ear. It's pretty amazing, really. He removes thyroids and parotid glands that have gone awry, or tonsils that won't stop getting infected. Dr. Clark offers balloon sinuplasty in office (or in the OR if needed) that is comfortable and heals within a few weeks, giving people a whole new way to breathe easy. He also offers in office insertion of ear tubes, which he places with ease. Most importantly, Dr. Clark will explain any procedure he performs in detail and makes the patient feel confident and comfortable. He will also guide you through medical and lifestyle changes that may reduce your need for surgery. He really wants to find the best solutions for you and your family.



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HEALTHCARE • REGENERATIVE MEDICINE • QUALITY OF LIFE

TOP 50 MEDICAL MYTHS IN AMERICA

What if the Biggest Medical Myth is that you cannot get healthy, must live with pain, and have no choice?

By William J. Cole Jr., DO, FAACP, FAOBPMR

Before you read another medical advertisement, accept another prescription, schedule another procedure, or surrender to another surgery, I want you to do something radical: **STOP. THINK. AND ASK BETTER QUESTIONS.**

For decades, Americans have been taught that more healthcare automatically means more health. More appointments. More medications. More injections. More procedures. More surgeries. More money. Yet millions remain in pain, lose function, become dependent on medications, and are told that decline is simply part of aging.

I am not asking you to reject medicine. Drugs can save lives. Surgery can be essential. I am asking why repeated drugs and surgeries—especially those that have already failed—are so often presented as the beginning, middle, and end of the conversation. What if the American healthcare system has become far better at managing dependence than restoring independence?

Read every question. One of them may change the way you see your health—and your future.

I. WHAT HAVE WE BEEN TAUGHT TO BELIEVE?

1. Healthcare makes you healthy—and the system always puts your health first?
2. The body cannot regenerate, repair, or heal?
3. Surgical procedures are always performed to eliminate pain?
4. More medications automatically produce better results?
5. Imaging always reveals the true source of the problem?
6. COVID has been eliminated—and so have the long-term problems associated with it?
7. Surgery will eliminate pain?
8. You cannot negotiate the price of medical treatments?
9. The government could never reduce certain drug prices dramatically through decisive action?
10. As you get older, you simply must live with pain?

II. WHO DOES THE CURRENT SYSTEM REALLY SERVE?

11. There are no options beyond traditional, expensive drugs and surgery?

12. The American healthcare system works equally well for all Americans?
13. The government will eventually fix our broken healthcare system for us?
14. If a doctor did not prescribe it, you do not need it?
15. America must have the world's best healthcare because we spend the most money?
16. If you have back pain, it must be a pinched nerve?
17. Patients should not question their doctors?
18. All of your doctors routinely communicate and coordinate your care?
19. Doctors and healthcare systems are financially rewarded primarily for making you healthy?
20. Drugs and surgery work better than your God-given ability to heal?

III. PAIN, PRIVILEGE, AND PERSONAL TRUTH

21. Health-insurance coverage is automatically going to become better?
22. Dr. Cole, you have no idea what it is like to live with constant pain and dysfunction?
23. Dr. Cole, are you really one of only a few physicians with your combination of credentials?
24. Did you ever experience hardship, hunger, homelessness, disability, or being told that you could not succeed?
25. Do peptides work—and are they safe when appropriately selected and medically supervised?

IV. REGENERATIVE MEDICINE: FACT, FEAR, OR FUTURE?

26. All PRP and stem cell treatments are the same?
27. Stem cell treatments are completely illegal in the United States?
28. There are no regenerative treatments or biologic signals beyond stem cells?
29. Neurologic and brain disorders can never be meaningfully improved?
30. Long COVID affecting the body and brain has no effective treatment strategies?
31. Stem cell treatments must always be repeated again and again?
32. Any nurse, chiropractor, physician assistant, or untrained provider should be allowed to perform stem cell procedures?

33. Ozone therapy has no potential role in integrative or regenerative care?

34. After Failed Joint Surgery or Failed Back Surgery Syndrome, the only remaining choice is another surgery?

35. Politicians receive exactly the same healthcare choices and access as everyone else?

V. ACCESS, COST, AND THE CARE AMERICANS DESERVE

36. Insurance currently covers the full cost of regenerative treatments?
37. Insurance will never cover responsible regenerative treatments?
38. Regenerative medicine, peptides, and adjunct treatments must cost more than years of medications, disability, procedures, and repeat surgery?
39. The current system is working for American families, workers, seniors, and veterans to decrease pain and increase function?
40. AI alone will solve the healthcare crisis?
41. You do not need health insurance because a hospital is obligated to treat every problem anyway?
42. Expert, effective, affordable, and legally compliant regenerative treatment options are unavailable in America?
43. No one cares about quality patient care anymore?
44. You can ask 'Dr. Google' to diagnose and treat you—and you will be fine?
45. There is no such thing as SMART medicine: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Timely?

VI. WHO WILL CHANGE THE FUTURE?

46. There can be no 'Policies Over Politics'?
47. No one has a plan to transform American healthcare?
48. Medicare, Medicaid, and the VA are fully prepared for every future need?
49. Mental healthcare is easily accessible to every American?
50. Women already receive all the individualized healthcare they need and deserve?

NOW—HERE ARE SOME FACTS

America does not lack brilliant physicians, nurses, scientists, hospitals, or lifesaving technology. We lack a system consistently designed to reward prevention, restoration, function, and independence. We routinely pay after people become sicker, but struggle to invest before they lose their health, mobility, jobs, hope, and Quality of Life.

Americans also pay exceptionally high prices for many prescription drugs. So far, Medicare can only Negotiate 10 of 20,000 FDA Drugs in 2026. That's 99.5% subject to sky high overcharging! Policies helped create these prices, and better policies can change them.

Our medication supply is also far more dependent on foreign production than most Americans realize. The FDA reports that approximately 78% of active pharmaceutical ingredient manufacturers are located outside the United States. That is not a partisan talking point. It is a national-health, economic, and security vulnerability.

And surgery is not a guarantee. Even technically successful operations can leave patients with persistent pain, weakness, limited function, complications, or the devastating cycle called Failed Back Surgery Syndrome or Failed Joint Surgery Syndrome. When the first operation does not restore the person, why is another operation so often treated as the only serious option?

Americans do not need more failed drugs and surgeries. Americans should demand responsible access to Advanced Regenerative Stem Cell Therapy and Peptides—to help decrease pain, increase function, and provide the Quality of Life we deserve. This is our God-Given Right as Americans!

THIS IS PERSONAL

I have not reached these conclusions from a comfortable distance. I grew up with poverty, hunger, and periods of homelessness. Near the end of medical school, a life-threatening automobile collision changed my body and nearly ended my life. I lost the use of my arms more than once. I know what pain, dysfunction, fear, and being told to accept limitations feel like.

For more than 25 years, I have treated patients with chronic pain, disabling injuries, failed surgeries, brain disorders and complex neurologic disorders, and musculoskeletal damage. I have performed more than 100,000 interventional procedures. That experience taught me a lesson no textbook can fully communicate: a scan is not the patient, a diagnosis code is not a life, and managing symptoms is not the same as restoring function.

My position is not 'never use drugs' or 'never have surgery.' My position is: stop pretending they are always the best, first, only, or final answers. Use the right treatment for the right patient, at the right time, based on a proper diagnosis—and measure success by what matters: less pain, more function, greater independence, and a better Quality of Life.

WHAT IS POSSIBLE NOW?

The Human Body is Amazing! Not some passive machinery. It communicates, adapts, repairs, and regenerates through cells, growth factors, signaling molecules, immune responses, circulation, neuroplasticity, and thousands of coordinated biologic processes. Regenerative medicine seeks to work with those processes—to **Have the Body Heal the Body®**—instead of automatically overpowering symptoms or removing anatomy.

Advanced Regenerative Stem Cell Therapy is Legal in Florida, under defined state-law conditions. When ethically sourced, appropriately selected, precisely placed, and performed by a qualified and experienced physician, it accelerates the body's restorative processes. Peptides—short chains of amino acids that can act as biologic messengers—may also have important roles in carefully selected patients. Some peptide medications are FDA-approved; others remain investigational or are used under specialized medical frameworks. They are not interchangeable, they are not appropriate for everyone, and non-certified Internet products are not a substitute for medical judgment.

The same caution applies to stem cell products: not every product marketed as 'stem cells' is equivalent, and many promoted orthopedic or neurologic uses are not FDA-approved. Americans should not demand hype. They should demand science, transparency, legitimate products, qualified physicians, sterile technique, accurate diagnosis, precise placement, responsible research, ethical regulation—and access.

Imagine a system that compares your history, examination, imaging, laboratory testing, medications, nutrition, hormones, sleep, function, genetics, goals, and response to treatment—not to replace the physician, but to expand what the physician can see. AI should mean Augmented Intelligence: technology amplifying experience, recognizing patterns, measuring outcomes, and helping build a truly individualized plan.

HERE'S THE PLAN

First, stop accepting dependence as the definition of healthcare. Ask whether each treatment is merely managing a symptom or working toward restoration. Ask what happens if it fails. Ask about alternatives before—not after—irreversible surgery.

Second, demand transparency. What exactly is being prescribed, injected, implanted, or removed? What evidence supports it? What are the risks, costs, conflicts, qualifications, and realistic outcomes? Who benefits financially if you remain on the same cycle for years?

Third, demand responsible access to Advanced Regenerative Stem Cell Therapy and Peptides—not reckless access, counterfeit products, Internet injections, or promises of miracles. Demand qualified physicians, enforceable standards, real outcome registries, continuing research, ethical sourcing, honest informed consent, and treatment pathways that can eventually be recognized by insurers, Medicare, Medicaid, and the VA as evidence supports the Transition to Real Health, from Those Who Care.

Finally, demand Policies Over Politics. America should aggressively negotiate all excessively priced drugs. Only 10 negotiated Medicare drug prices are in effect. Against more than 20,000 FDA-approved prescription drug products, that is under 0.05%—meaning over 99.95% lack a Medicare-negotiated price! Strengthen domestic manufacturing, reward prevention and function, reduce unnecessary procedures, and invest in treatments that return people to their lives.

You should NOT have to be wealthy to be healthy.

This is bigger than one physician, one clinic, one therapy, or one political party. This is About America and All Americans' Right to Effective Healthcare! It is about moving from a system that too often manages decline to one that actively pursues Life, Liberty, healing, function, independence, and the Quality of Life that Every American Desires...and Deserves.

It is about **"Personalized Stem Cell Therapy Augmented with AI."**

THIS is "The Future of Medicine for All Americans" that You Must Demand—AND THE FUTURE IS NOW!



**William J. Cole Jr., DO,
FAASCP, FAOBPMR**
Double Board-Certified
Physician | Interventional PM&R
and Regenerative Medicine

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IMPORTANT MEDICAL INFORMATION: This article is educational and expresses the author's perspective. It is not individualized medical advice. Regenerative products and peptides vary in regulatory status, evidence, quality, and risk. Many promoted stem cell uses are not FDA-approved. Consult a qualified, appropriately licensed physician and verify the product, evidence, risks, alternatives, and applicable federal and state requirements before treatment.

EDITORIAL VERIFICATION SOURCES: Florida Statutes §458.3245, Stem Cell Therapy; Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, Medicare Drug Price Negotiation Program and Negotiated Prices for Initial Price Applicability Year 2026; U.S. Food and Drug Administration, FDA at a Glance and FDA Globalization; FDA Consumer Alert on Regenerative Medicine Products Including Stem Cells and Exosomes; FDA Patient and Consumer Warning About Potential Serious Risks of Harm Following Use of Unapproved Products From Human Cells or Tissues.

COMING TO A PROVIDER NEAR YOU:

MSK Ultrasound Imaging is Rising as Unit Costs are Falling

By Rick Weber

You've likely had an MRI at some point in your life. But you probably haven't experienced musculoskeletal (MSK) ultrasound imaging.

MSK ultrasound imaging was first used in the United States in the 1970s for investigating the rotator cuff, then the Achilles tendon in the 1980s. Its popularity plateaued, likely because of the lack of physicians and sonographers trained in its use, lower reimbursement rates and the advent of the MRI.

Although it remains a specialized service that is more commonly available in large hospitals, ultrasound imaging is gaining traction and popularity, and is becoming more widely available.

"It was initially used for research purposes, but it became clear that it could be used for diagnostic and treatment purposes," says Arie van Duijn, a professor of Physical Therapy in the Department of Rehabilitation Sciences at Florida Gulf Coast University's Marieb College of Health & Human Services. "Research started to show that the reliability and validity for diagnosing common superficial structures was in many cases comparable to the MRI, and with the rapid decline of the cost of ultrasound imaging equipment, this led to the gradual increase in use of this technology.

"Portable ultrasound imaging units can now be bought for as low as \$5,000, making it accessible to many healthcare providers, and this has led to a rapid increase in its use, especially in the last five years. Equipment manufacturers have also started to develop specialized MSK software for their units, also making it easier for providers to start using it in practice."

Van Duijn says MSK ultrasound imaging provides a low-cost, high-quality, reliable alternative to traditional imaging modalities such as MRI and CT for MSK health care providers to examine superficial MSK structures that can show these structures moving in real time.

It can assist providers when targeting structures for injections or dry needling by visualizing needle placement, and can provide information about effectiveness of treatment. It can be used for biofeedback purposes, such as allowing patients to learn how to

contract muscles that they can't see with the naked eye. And because it is a very safe imaging modality that does not require radiation, it is used in obstetrics (OB) for visualizing fetuses.

There are some downsides to MSK ultrasound imaging:

- Only superficial structures can be seen. Since sound waves cannot penetrate bone, structures that are covered by bone cannot be seen by ultrasound imaging (for instance the ACL or meniscus in the knee are both deep structures largely covered by bone so are difficult to visualize with ultrasound imaging).
- There is a learning curve for providers, so continuing education is needed to teach the technical skills needed.
- Unit cost can be a barrier, but the cost is coming down rapidly.

Facilities such as emergency rooms already had the equipment that was used for other diagnostics (such as OB and vascular), so there was early adoption there for MSK purposes. There is a rapid increase in the equipment in orthopedic physician offices and physical therapy practices now that the cost of the equipment is coming down.

Hand-held portable units are now starting to be used outside the office at what is referred to as POCUS (point-of-care ultrasound), such as in athletics, where athletic trainers, physical therapists and/or physicians use it on the sidelines. Those portable units are simply probes that connect to a phone or tablet that has the image-display app.

Van Duijn, along with FGCU Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) program faculty and graduate students, has been using MSK ultrasound imaging in ongoing projects with FGCU athletics to evaluate how tendon and ligament structures behave during the course of a season in various sports and identify tissue changes that may indicate a higher injury risk.

They have measured the thickness of tendons and ligaments of baseball players and golfers at multiple times throughout the season to understand how those tissues change, and also looked at the presence of fluid in the tendon/ligament to determine what is normal.

"Once we understand the normal course that can be expected, we hopefully can identify if an athlete has abnormal changes that may indicate an increased risk for injury such as a rotator cuff or elbow ligament tear," he says. "We recently acquired the technology to also measure tissue stiffness—called shear wave elastography—that may show abnormal tissue changes that are not yet showing in a change in thickness.

"Decreased tendon or ligament stiffness means that those tissues are less able to withstand the high forces placed on those tissues by overhead throwing, etc., and may also indicate an increased injury risk. Once an athlete tears a tendon or ligament, they are usually looking at surgery (Tommy John elbow surgery) and a good number of those athletes will never be able to come back to the level they were before the injury, so it is important to try to prevent these devastating injuries.

"We are also using ultrasound measurements to evaluate other injuries such as fractures, and to evaluate to outcomes of physical therapy interventions such as manual therapy, exercise, cold water immersion, etc.

"We now are starting to understand what we can normally expect throughout the season. The next phase of these projects is to identify what kinds of deviations from those normals are associated with increased injury risk."

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OCTOBER IS AUDIOLOGY AWARENESS MONTH: UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF AUDIOLOGISTS

By Dr. Noël Crosby, Au.D.

As October ushers in Audiology Awareness Month, it's the perfect time to shine a spotlight on the crucial role audiologists play in our healthcare system. These specialized professionals are the unsung heroes working tirelessly to improve the quality of life for millions suffering from hearing and balance disorders.

What is an Audiologist?

An audiologist is a healthcare professional who specializes in the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of disorders related to hearing, balance, and ear function. Their expertise spans a wide range of responsibilities, from conducting hearing tests and fitting hearing aids to developing auditory rehabilitation programs and managing complex ear-related conditions.

Key Responsibilities of Audiologists

Audiologists wear many hats in their day-to-day practice. They evaluate hearing and balance problems using a variety of tests, including pure-tone audiometry, speech audiometry, and tympanometry. They're also skilled in fitting and adjusting hearing aids, cochlear implants, and other assistive listening devices.

Beyond the technical aspects, audiologists play a crucial role in counseling patients on communication strategies and developing personalized auditory rehabilitation programs. They're often at the forefront of diagnosing and managing conditions like tinnitus and earwax buildup, and many contribute to research efforts aimed at developing new treatments.



Specializations within Audiology

The field of audiology offers various specializations. Some audiologists focus on pediatric audiology, working exclusively with children. Others may specialize in neuroaudiology, cochlear implantation, auditory processing disorders, or balance and vestibular disorders.

Education and Training

Becoming an audiologist requires extensive education and training. Most audiologists hold a Doctor of Audiology (Au.D.) degree, while some may have a Master's or Ph.D. in audiology or a related field. Additionally, many are certified by professional organizations such as the American Board of Audiology (ABA) or the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA).

Where Audiologists Work

Audiologists can be found in a variety of settings. Many work in hospitals and clinics, while others operate private practices. Some audiologists work in schools, helping children with hearing impairments, while others contribute to research institutions, pushing the boundaries of audiological science.

Skills of a Successful Audiologist

Successful audiologists possess a unique blend of technical knowledge and interpersonal skills. They need excellent communication abilities to explain complex concepts to patients, analytical skills to interpret test results, and problem-solving abilities to develop effective treatment plans. Compassion and empathy are also crucial, as they often work with patients experiencing frustration or anxiety due to their hearing issues.

This Audiology Awareness Month, let's appreciate the dedicated professionals who help us hear the world more clearly and navigate it more confidently. Audiologists truly make a sound difference in our lives!

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Defeat Gum Disease

There is a silent oral disease affecting more than 80% of adults. Chances are you either have had or are currently battling periodontal (gum) disease. Unfortunately, in many cases, the disease goes undetected until painful symptoms begin occurring. At which time the disease and any adverse conditions have already set in. Because there are no early signs of periodontal disease, it often goes untreated until the physical symptoms surface and by then the concern is treatment not prevention. It is extremely important for everyone to have regular dental check ups at the recommended six month interval. Without these check ups and proper oral care, periodontal disease can silently cause not only oral health problems but can also contribute to other major health concerns.

Periodontal disease, also known as gum disease, is the chronic infection of the soft tissue around the teeth caused by plaque producing bacteria. The gums hold the teeth in place. As the gums become infected, they loosen their hold on the teeth and pockets are formed. These pockets collect debris and cause more infection and bone loss to the tooth. Gum disease is infectious and contagious. It can spread from tooth to tooth in the mouth and from one person's mouth to another through saliva.

As with other diseases, prevention is key to good oral health. It is important for everyone to practice diligent, thorough, and proper oral care by scheduling check ups every six months. At which time, your dentist will be able to detect and treat any signs of periodontal disease before symptoms begin to show and the damage is done. As mentioned earlier, most people do not know they have periodontal disease until they begin suffering from any combination of the following signs:

- Chronic bad breath
- Red or swollen gums
- Bleeding gums especially after tooth brushing
- Tender or sore gums
- Loose or shifting teeth
- Receding gums
- Sensitive teeth



If you have been diagnosed with periodontal disease, there are various treatment plans your dentist may recommend depending on the severity of your case. The most important action is meticulous at home daily oral care. Teeth must be brushed twice or more times each day for at least two minutes and flossed at least once per day. Other treatments include oral rinses, periodontal cleanings, and sometimes surgery.

Traditional periodontal surgery involves cutting and suturing of the gums and recovery time can be long and painful. With the advancement of modern laser technology, there is an alternative. Joseph H. Farag, DMD offers a better alternative for patients battling periodontal disease. Dr. Farag offers patients laser-assisted new attachment procedure (LANAP™) which is a no-cut, no-sew procedure to treat mild to advanced periodontal disease. The advancements in laser surgery techniques, have made treating periodontal faster and less painful. LANAP™ is much less invasive than traditional surgery, allowing patients to return to work the next day if desired.

Even with the benefits of LANAP™ it is obviously best to practice good oral care. The most important preventative measure to avoid the insidious gum disease is to take excellent care of your teeth. Proper cleaning at least twice a day is imperative. The goal is to keep the bacteria that cause the plaque at very low levels.

If your gums are painful, red, or swollen don't ignore the signs; make an appointment today that may save your teeth and gums. Treating periodontal disease sooner is always better than later.

Benefits of LANAP™

EASY - LANAP™ is about as EASY as erasing a blackboard - unlike older techniques, there is no cutting and no suturing of the gums.

MINIMAL DISCOMFORT - Both during and post procedure, the patient experiences very minimal discomfort with LANAP™ than with prior standard surgery techniques.

SHORTER PROCEDURE TIME - It takes less time to complete LANAP™ than traditional surgery. Typically it takes is two 2-hour visits to the office and two follow up visits. Traditional surgery requires four sessions of about one hour each, with subsequent visits for suture removal and additional check-ups.

LESS GUM LOSS - LANAP™ minimizes the loss of gum tissue, traditional surgery often involves removing a significant amount of gum tissue. This tissue loss can lead to sensitive teeth since your roots are exposed. Also, if the treatment needs to be performed again in the future, you have not removed the bone and gums during the first LANAP™ treatment. Typically with LANAP™, any gum tissue shrinkage is actually due to reduced swelling of the area that was previously diseased and inflamed.

SHORT RECOVERY - Many patients fully recover from LANAP™ within 24 hours. In most cases, patients feel just fine post surgery and daily activities are not interrupted. On the other hand, recovery after traditional surgery can take up to 4 weeks during which patients can experience considerable pain and swelling.

SAFE - LANAP™ with the PerioLase is SAFE for patients with health concerns such as diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure or those taking medications such as Coumadin or Cyclosporine.

Dr. Joseph Farag - Port Charlotte Dentalcare

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BETTER SPIRITUAL HEALTH

By Pastor Tim Neptune

As the years accumulate, many of us notice a quiet tendency to settle. What once demanded excellence now receives a polite “good enough.” That drift appears in our exercise routines, our closest relationships—and often in the condition of our souls.

Holistic wellness is incomplete without the spiritual life. Nothing in us stays fixed. Bodies change, circumstances shift, and so does our inner world. Jesus described His purpose in terms that reach far beyond mere survival: “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). The word translated “abundantly” points to a life that exceeds what we anticipated—more, beyond measure.

Author Jim Collins captured a truth that applies as readily to the soul as to a company: good is the enemy of great. Contentment with an adequate prayer life, a functional marriage, or average health can quietly close the door on something richer. Greatness in any domain is largely a matter of choice followed by consistent work.

A vibrant relationship with God does not happen by accident. It requires the same kind of intentionality we already apply to nutrition, sleep, and movement. Three practices make the difference.

Clear what competes.

Before adding more spiritual activity, identify what to stop. Hebrews 12:1 urges us to “throw off

everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.” Screen time that crowds out quiet, over-commitment that leaves no margin, a hobby that has become an idol, or a habit that dulls the spirit all steal the capacity we need. Discipline is the bridge between good and great. People who grow spiritually do what they do not always feel like doing.

Protect a daily appointment.

Small choices repeated over time compound. Seeking first God’s kingdom (Matthew 6:33) often looks like a few unhurried minutes with Scripture and prayer even when motivation is low. Feelings come and go; habits remain. Consistency produces the inner strength that supports every other area of wellness—physical energy, emotional resilience, and relational patience.

Walk with people who want the same thing.

Isolated effort rarely lasts. Hebrews 10:24–25 calls us to spur one another on toward love and good deeds and not to neglect meeting together. Community is God’s design both for loneliness and for growth. A handful of people who know you well and will tell you the truth keep laziness from winning.

The aim is not religious performance. It is an abundant life that overflows into the rest of who we are. This week, name one distraction to release, one daily slot to protect, and one person or group with whom you will walk. Been thinking about visiting a church? Why not start this Sunday?



God is “able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine” (Ephesians 3:20). Settling for good is optional. Better is available. But great is worth the extra effort.

Tim Neptune is the Lead Pastor of Venture Church located at 14601 Tamiami Trail E. Naples. For service times, visit venturenaples.com or call (239) 775-5323.



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