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Lindita R. Hobdari, M.D

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The Patient Wanted to Play Tennis Again. I Wanted to Know Why He Couldn't.

By Dr. Lindita Hobdari

"My tennis game is becoming a challenge. I get short of breath," a patient told me. Someone had told him it was just part of getting older. But he knew something had changed, and I believed him. We looked into it. A cardiac evaluation found serious coronary disease, and he ultimately needed four stents.

I still think about that visit. I have been a physician for more than 27 years, and I have cared for Naples families for nearly two decades. When a patient tells me something has changed, I pay attention. He wanted to play tennis again. That was his goal. My responsibility was to understand why he could not. I listen to the patient's goal first, and then I look at the whole person. Sometimes the answer is straightforward. Sometimes, as it was for him, the story takes us somewhere much more serious.

When a patient asks me about weight loss

Patients ask me about weight loss injections all the time, and I understand why. GLP-1 medicines can be very helpful for the right person. What concerns me is how easy it is to buy into a promise before anyone has really looked at your health. The FDA has warned about misleading promotion of some unapproved products and dosing errors with compounded semaglutide. A medicine that affects your body deserves more attention than an online checkout.

When we sit down together, I want to know your medical history, the medicines you take and what you have tried before. Some GLP-1 products should not be used if you or a family member has had medullary thyroid cancer, or if you have MEN2. We also discuss problems to watch for, including pancreatitis and gallbladder symptoms. Then we make a plan for dosing, nutrition, maintaining muscle and checking in as treatment goes on.

I start by asking, "What are you hoping to change?" For one person it is keeping up with grandchildren; for another it is getting blood sugar under control or feeling strong again. Then I look at what may be getting in the way. If we decide a GLP-1 medicine is appropriate, I want to know how you are tolerating it, whether you are eating enough protein and how we are protecting your muscle. That follow-up is part of the treatment.



A conversation about testosterone

The same is true of testosterone. Patients bring me products a friend recommended or hormones they started elsewhere, sometimes without anyone checking how they are responding. I ask them to show me everything they take. There is no judgment; I want to know what is happening in their bodies. In men, testosterone can raise the red blood cell count, and breast symptoms may call for an estradiol assessment. A blood donation or anastrozole is not an automatic answer. In women, too much testosterone can cause acne, facial hair, scalp hair loss or even a deeper voice. We look at the dose, symptoms and labs together. I do not want a patient left guessing whether a treatment is helping or causing harm.

When I refer you to a specialist

I built Hobdari Family Health around that kind of attention. We care for children, adults and older family members, and our physicians and advanced practice providers share my belief that you must listen before you decide what to do. We manage chronic conditions and preventive care and offer on-site diagnostic and laboratory services. When I refer someone to a cardiologist or surgeon, I do not consider my job finished. I want to know what the specialist found, make sure the patient understands the next step and continue caring for the rest of their health. That is the standard I ask of our whole team.

Why I brought functional medicine into the picture

As a family physician, I also hear patients say, "My tests are normal, but I do not feel like myself." I do not dismiss that. I want to understand their sleep, nutrition, stress, hormones and everything else that might be affecting how they feel. That is why I built Naples Functional Medicine Healing. It gives us room to explore those questions in depth, while Hobdari Family Health continues to be the patient's medical home. For me, primary care and functional medicine belong in the same conversation.

Depending on the person, that care may include medically supervised weight loss, hormone replacement therapy, acupuncture, selected peptide therapies, hyperbaric oxygen therapy in our FDA-cleared chamber, or wellness infusions such as Myers' cocktail, NAD⁺ and glutathione. I do not expect every patient to need these services. We talk through which options, if any, fit your goals and health history.

"Holistic Healing, Not Hype" grew out of the conversations I have with patients every day. I am interested in new approaches, but I always ask: What does the research actually show? Is this safe for this particular patient? Who is following the results? If you have heard about a treatment and want to discuss it, bring it to me. I would much rather talk it through with you than have you try it alone.

October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month, so let me ask you what I ask my patients: When was your last mammogram? If you've been putting it off, tell me. Maybe life got busy, or maybe you're worried about what it might find. We can talk through that together. I also want to know if you've noticed a change in your breasts or if breast cancer runs in your family. We'll decide what screening makes sense for you, and if anything needs a closer look, I'll help you with the next step.

Come talk with us

Hobdari Family Health has offices in Naples and Bonita Springs. We welcome eligible Lee Health employees and their families through the Best Care Alliance network. When our participation with Blue Cross and Blue Shield ended this past February, I didn't want patients who had trusted us for years to feel they had to leave, so we offered \$100 self-pay visit option for anyone who wanted to continue their care with us. We also offer self-pay, fee-for-service visits for uninsured patients and same-day appointments when openings are available. Our team can help you confirm plan benefits, provider participation or self-pay pricing when you schedule. You can come to us with a symptom that has been brushed aside, a treatment you have questions about or simply the feeling that something is off. Tell me what you want to be able to do again. We will listen, look carefully and make a plan together. And when the next step involves a specialist or a new treatment, we will stay part of the conversation.

Dr. Lindita Hobdari is a family physician and founder of Hobdari Family Health and Naples Functional Medicine Healing. Hobdari Family Health serves patients in Naples and Bonita Springs.

Learn more at hobdarihealth.com and naplesfunctionalhealing.com.



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Why Flu Prevention Matters More as We Age

By Michael McDowell, DO, 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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COMPASSIONATE CARE THROUGH EVERY STAGE OF LIFE

How Integrated Care Is Reshaping Health Outcomes Across Southwest Florida

By Emma Garon - Communications Intern, Avow

Healthcare is undergoing one of the most significant transformations in modern history. Advances in medicine continue to improve survival rates for chronic and complex diseases, while an aging population is living longer than ever before. Yet longevity alone is no longer the benchmark of successful healthcare. Increasingly, healthcare leaders are asking a more meaningful question: *How can we help people live better throughout every stage of illness?*

The answer extends beyond hospitals, physician offices, and medical procedures. It requires a coordinated model of care that supports individuals wherever they are, addresses physical and emotional well-being, and recognizes that quality of life is as important as clinical outcomes. This shift toward whole-person care is redefining healthcare delivery across the nation and is particularly important in Southwest Florida, where one of the country's fastest-growing senior populations is creating new demands for comprehensive, community-based healthcare services.

For more than four decades, Avow has embraced this philosophy. While many know the organization for its nationally recognized hospice program, Avow today provides an integrated continuum of care that includes Medicare-certified home health, palliative care, hospice, grief and bereavement services, and specialized support for children and families. Together, these services reflect a healthcare model designed not simply to treat illness, but to improve the experience of living with it.

Healthcare Beyond Hospital Walls

Healthcare increasingly recognizes that recovery and healing often occur most effectively outside the traditional clinical setting. As hospitals continue to reduce inpatient stays and focus on transitioning patients safely back into their communities, home-based healthcare has become an essential extension of modern medicine.



Avow Home Health provides skilled nursing, rehabilitation therapies, medical social work, and home health aide services that enable patients to recover where they are often most comfortable: at home.

Whether following surgery, hospitalization, or the onset of a chronic medical condition, care is coordinated with physicians to create individualized treatment plans that promote recovery while helping patients maintain their independence.

Research consistently demonstrates that appropriately coordinated home health services can improve recovery, reduce avoidable hospital readmissions, and enhance patient satisfaction. Equally important, receiving care at home allows patients to remain connected to their families, routines, and communities, factors increasingly recognized as critical contributors to both physical and emotional health.

As healthcare continues to shift toward value-based care, home health represents more than convenience. It has become an integral component of improving outcomes while delivering care that is both clinically effective and deeply personal.

Redefining Quality of Life Through Palliative Care
Living with a serious illness often involves challenges that extend well beyond the diagnosis itself. Persistent pain, fatigue, anxiety, shortness of breath, and the emotional burden of navigating complex medical decisions can significantly affect patients and those who care for them.

Palliative care addresses these challenges by focusing on quality of life alongside medical treatment. Unlike hospice care, palliative care is appropriate at any stage of a serious illness and can be provided concurrently with curative or life-prolonging therapies.

Avow's interdisciplinary palliative care team works collaboratively with physicians and specialists to manage symptoms, improve communication, coordinate care, and help patients better understand their treatment options. The objective is not to replace existing medical care, but to strengthen it by addressing the physical, emotional, and practical needs that often accompany serious illness.

Increasingly, healthcare systems across the country recognize palliative care as a clinical best practice. Early integration has been associated with improved symptom management, greater

patient satisfaction, fewer emergency department visits, and more informed healthcare decision-making. It represents a proactive approach to care that empowers patients to live as fully and comfortably as possible throughout their healthcare journey.

Hospice Care: A Different Definition of Hope

Few areas of healthcare remain as misunderstood as hospice. For many families, the word is associated with giving up. In reality, hospice represents a thoughtful transition in clinical priorities, one that emphasizes comfort, dignity, and meaningful living when curative treatment is no longer providing benefit. Hospice care is not about shortening life or abandoning care. It is about ensuring that every remaining day is lived with the highest possible level of comfort, support, and personal dignity.

Avow's interdisciplinary hospice team includes physicians, nurses, certified nursing assistants, social workers, chaplains, grief counselors, volunteers, and other specialists who work together to address the full spectrum of patient and family needs. Care is provided wherever patients call home, whether that is a private residence, assisted living community, skilled nursing facility, or one of Avow's hospice houses.

Beyond expert symptom management, hospice provides families with guidance, education, emotional support, and confidence during one of life's most difficult transitions. By reducing unnecessary hospitalizations and focusing on patient goals, hospice enables individuals to spend more meaningful time where they most want to be, surrounded by those they love.

Caring for Families as Well as Patients

Serious illness rarely affects only one individual. Family members often become caregivers while balancing careers, children, financial responsibilities, and their own physical and emotional well-being.

Recognizing caregivers as essential partners in the healthcare journey is fundamental to delivering exceptional care.

Avow provides education, counseling, practical resources, and compassionate guidance that help families navigate complex medical decisions with greater confidence. This commitment extends beyond the patient's lifetime through comprehensive grief and bereavement services available to adults, children, and families throughout the community.

Programs such as Avow Kids reflect an understanding that grief is experienced differently across every stage of life. By providing age-appropriate counseling, support groups, and community-based programs, children and adolescents receive the tools they need to process loss, build resilience, and move forward in healthy ways.

Advancing Healthcare Excellence in Southwest Florida

As Southwest Florida continues to experience rapid population growth, the demand for coordinated, compassionate healthcare will only increase. Organizations capable of integrating clinical expertise with personalized support will play an increasingly important role in helping communities navigate the complexities of aging, chronic illness, and changing healthcare needs.

Avow has earned a reputation for delivering that level of care. The organization's 4-Star Medicare Hospice Rating, Level 5 Partner status with the We Honor Veterans program, and recognition as a Certified Great Place to Work for six consecutive years reflect a culture committed to clinical excellence, innovation, and continuous improvement.

These achievements represent more than organizational milestones. They demonstrate a commitment to delivering healthcare that is evidence-based, patient-centered, and focused on outcomes that matter most to individuals and families.

Healthcare is no longer defined solely by the ability to cure disease. It is measured by the ability to preserve independence, reduce suffering, strengthen families, and improve quality of life throughout every stage of the human experience.

That philosophy continues to guide Avow's mission as it serves the communities of Lee, Collier, Hendry, and Glades counties, ensuring that compassionate, coordinated care remains available whenever and wherever it is needed most.



For more information, visit avowcares.org or call (239) 306-8121



2027 MEDICARE ANNUAL ENROLLMENT IS HERE!

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

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

Medicare Annual Enrollment is October 15 - December 7th for January 1st, 2027, effective. What can be changed at this time is Medicare Part D Drug Plans and Medicare Part C (Advantage Plans). You should have received your Notification of Change from your current insurance plan. This outlines the current year to the new year changes, as an example if your specialist provider costs \$20 now it might say \$35 in 2027 (no correlation just an example).

Medicare Part C / Advantage Plans, most carriers have raised out of pocket limits and copays along with decreased extra value benefits for 2027. Annually Medicare Advantage Plans make changes. They must all include the same features as Original Medicare but not at the same cost share. They can have a premium, Medical and or Prescription deductible, copays and coinsurance can change. Extra Value such as Vision, Dental, Over the Counter, Part B Give Back, transportation, etc. can all change or be eliminated. Medicare sets the annual in-network out of pocket maximum; in 2026 it is \$9,250 for in-network and \$13,900 out-of-network services combined (2027 this will increase). However, individual insurance plans may set lower limits.

The old saying if it is not broken do not fix it DOES NOT apply to Annual Enrollment. Every year I see many people that have not checked/compared their current plan to what is new. I have saved so

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

If your plan was CANCELLED/DROPPED for 2027, you have a guaranteed issue into a Medigap/Medicare Supplement. This is huge and very important, know your options!

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

Medicare Part D "most insurance carriers have taken away insurance agents' ability to help you with your Part D Only drug plans this does not apply to most Advantage plans", standalone drug plans as well as Advantage Plans, you won't have to pay more than \$2,400 in out-of-pocket drug costs, which include deductibles, co-pays, coinsurance. It is especially important to check your plans formulary as medication must be in formulary to be capped. 2027 RX deductible will be capped at \$715.00. As a reminder the cost of the plan is not as important as the cost plus your medications, that is what you look at, the total cost. It is important to know what the medication is used for to determine if it is covered by the plan. Example Wycovy may be covered but to be covered it must be used for certain heart conditions or diabetes, Medicare does not cover weight lose medications at this time. As a reminder if you choose NOT to ENROLL in a Part D

drug plan and in later years you want one you will have to wait for Annual Enrollment and then you will assed a penalty for every month you did not have a drug plan, that penalty will last for the REST OF YOUR LIFE!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



BRADLEY MIDDAGH, O.D.
Optometric Physician

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

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

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

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

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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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WHAT NO ONE TELLS YOU ABOUT NEUROMAS:

A Modern, Non-Surgical Solution

By Dr. Kevin Lam, DPM, FACFAS - Clinical Director, Family Foot & Leg Center

For millions of people suffering from chronic foot pain, a Morton's neuroma can feel like an unending battle. Characterized by a sharp, burning sensation or the feeling of standing on a folded sock, this nerve condition often drives patients through a relentless gauntlet of treatments. From orthotic inserts and anti-inflammatory medications to corticosteroid injections, physical therapy, and even dry needling, many find themselves running out of non-invasive options. When conservative therapies fail, foot surgery is traditionally presented as the final destination.

However, standard surgical neurectomy carries a critical, often unspoken risk: a 50% complication rate. Even in the hands of the most skilled surgeons, no one can accurately predict whether a patient will develop a painful stump neuroma—a complication where the severed nerve forms a new, hypersensitive bundle of scar tissue. Faced with a coin-flip chance of postsurgical complications, many patients—and informed practitioners—look for a safer, highly effective alternative.

That alternative is live, ultrasound-guided radiofrequency ablation (RFA).

Why Diagnostics Matter: MRI vs. Live Ultrasound

A common misconception in podiatric care is that a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan is the gold standard for diagnosing a neuroma. In reality, MRIs provide static photos that are notoriously inaccurate for this specific condition, even when contrast dye is used. A static image cannot capture how the nerve behaves dynamically under pressure.

High-resolution ultrasound offers a dynamic, real-time diagnostic solution. By scanning the bottom of the foot between the metatarsal heads—the "knuckles" of the forefoot—a practitioner can clearly visualize the compressed nerve as a distinct nodule. Ultrasound allows the clinician to squeeze the patient's toes together during the examination to watch the nerve move in real time. This level of direct visualization is vital for precision targeting during treatment.

How Radiofrequency Ablation Works

Radiofrequency ablation is a minimally invasive, in-office procedure designed to disrupt the pain signal sent by the inflamed nerve without physically removing it or damaging surrounding structural tissue.

The Procedure Step-by-Step:

1. Targeted Anesthesia: Rather than injecting local anesthetic blindly into the forefoot, ultrasound guidance is used to locate the nerve near the ankle first. Numbing the nerve at this site completely deadens sensation across the bottom of the foot, ensuring the patient remains entirely comfortable throughout the procedure.

2. Precision Front-Angle Access: Modern techniques avoid entering through the top of the foot. Instead, an RFA probe is inserted directly through the front space between the toes at a calculated angle. Guided by live ultrasound imaging, the clinician maneuvers the probe until it sits precisely within the affected nerve tissue.

3. Thermal Ablation: Once the probe is correctly positioned, radiofrequency energy delivers targeted heat at 90°C. This controlled thermal energy creates a specific micro-injury to the nerve, effectively turning off its ability to transmit chronic pain signals to the brain.

Clinical Outcomes and Patient Recovery

Because radiofrequency ablation does not involve surgical incisions, structural disruption, or nerve excision, it bypasses the severe risks associated with conventional surgery—most notably the formation of stump neuromas.

TRADITIONAL NEUROMA SURGERY VS. RADIOFREQUENCY ABLATION (RFA)

FEATURE	TRADITIONAL SURGERY	RADIOFREQUENCY ABLATION (RFA)
PROCEDURE TYPE	INVASIVE EXCISION	MINIMALLY INVASIVE THERMAL
GUIDANCE METHOD	DIRECT SURGICAL VIEW	LIVE HIGH-RESOLUTION ULTRASOUND
RISK OF STUMP NEUROMA	SIGNIFICANT (1-50% COMPLICATIONS)	NEGLECTIBLE
RECOVERY PROFILE	EXTENDED / SURGICAL WOUND CARE	IMMEDIATE WALKING / FAST RETURN

The typical protocol for radiofrequency ablation includes up to two targeted sessions. Clinical results from this two-step approach show substantial promise:

- **Complete Resolution After One Session:** A significant number of patients experience total relief after their initial procedure and do not require the second scheduled session.

- **Progressive Relief:** Patients who retain residual symptoms after the first treatment frequently report a 50% to 80% reduction in pain, making the second protocol treatment highly effective at resolving remaining discomfort.

So compelling is the safety and efficacy profile of RFA that podiatric specialists routinely perform the procedure on their own family members—preferring a 90°C thermal treatment over the 50% complication risk of an operating room.

A Modern Alternative to the Knife

When conservative methods fail to deliver relief from neuroma pain, patients are often told that surgery is their only remaining option. However, live ultrasound-guided radiofrequency ablation provides a proven, non-surgical path forward. By combining real-time imaging with precise thermal energy, RFA eliminates pain signals at the source, offering a high success rate and letting patients reclaim an active lifestyle without surgical risks.

Do Not Suffer from Foot Pain Any Longer

If burning, sharp pain in the ball of your foot is keeping you from living life comfortably, you do not have to live with it—and you do not have to default to risky nerve surgery.

At Family Foot & Leg Center, our team of board-certified foot and ankle specialists are dedicated to bringing you the latest non-surgical, advanced treatments.

For More Information
View Dr. Lam's Video
of this Procedure.



Kevin Lam, DPM, FACFAS, DABLES, DABPS
Clinical Director

Dr. Kevin Lam is a podiatric physician and surgeon practicing in Southwest Florida. Double Board Certified: American Board of Foot and Ankle Surgery.



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ALIGNMENT MATTERS:

Rebuilding Shoulder Function After Mastectomy

By Shannon Willits, NPCP, FAFS



Breast cancer surgery changes more than breast tissue. Mastectomy and lumpectomy procedures disrupt the pectoral fascia, axillary lymph nodes, and the muscular sling that normally coordinates scapular movement. The result, for a significant portion of patients, is a predictable cluster of impairments: restricted shoulder flexion and abduction, tightness across the anterior chest wall, a forward-rounded resting posture, and in some cases axillary web syndrome, a palpable cording of tissue along the inner arm that limits extension. For patients who undergo axillary lymph node dissection, there is an added and lasting concern: lymphedema risk in the ipsilateral arm.

Pilates has drawn increasing attention as a rehabilitation tool for this population, not because it is trendy, but because its core mechanics map closely onto what post-mastectomy tissue needs: controlled, breath-linked movement through a deliberately limited range, with constant attention to scapular position rather than raw repetition.

The research base, while still modest, is instructive. A 2009 pilot study in the *Journal of Bodywork and Movement Therapies* found that breast cancer survivors completing a structured Pilates program showed measurable gains in shoulder range of motion, upper extremity function, and mood compared with non-exercising peers. A 2012 study in the *Clinical Journal of Oncology Nursing* enrolled fifteen postmastectomy survivors in a 12-week mat-based Pilates program and recorded statistically significant improvement in shoulder abduction and internal rotation on the affected side, along with gains in cervical rotation and flexion. A 2018 Brazilian cohort of 42 post-surgical patients found significant improvement in shoulder flexion, abduction, and external rotation after just 30 days, with continued gains through 90 days.

In practice, that means sequencing matters. In the earliest phase, typically once a surgeon has cleared movement, work should prioritize diaphragmatic breathing, scar tissue mobility, and gentle scapular setting, without loaded resistance on the affected side. As tissue heals and clearance progresses, usually in the six-to-eight-week range but always individualized to the patient's surgical history and any reconstruction, controlled range-of-motion work can expand into flexion, abduction, and rotation, with the instructor monitoring for any change in arm circumference, heaviness, or skin texture. Spring resistance, when introduced, should be light and symmetric, avoiding the instinct to overload the unaffected side to compensate.



Thoracic extension work is particularly valuable here, since chest wall surgery and the protective posture that follows it tend to compound each other, flattening breathing mechanics and accelerating the forward-shoulder pattern.

None of this is a substitute for oncology followup or certified lymphedema therapy. It is a complement to it, and it depends on an instructor who has been specifically trained in post-surgical and oncology-informed movement rather than general mat certification alone. Patients considering this route should ask directly whether their instructor has that training, whether the studio communicates with their care team when needed, and how progression is tracked over time.

Recovery from mastectomy is not linear, and neither should the movement plan be. But for patients cleared to move, precise, breath-driven work aimed at the specific mechanics disrupted by surgery offers a measurable path back to shoulder function, posture, and a sense of ownership over the body again. For many women rebuilding that relationship with their bodies, that starting point is worth seeking out.

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.

Official Recommendations

ACSM Exercise Guidelines for Cancer Survivors (2019 International Multidisciplinary Roundtable): 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity per week, or 75 minutes of vigorous activity; 2–3 strength-training sessions per week targeting major muscle groups; flexibility work for major muscle groups on days other exercise is performed. The roundtable, convened by ACSM with the American Cancer Society and National Cancer Institute, emphasizes that exercise prescriptions be adapted to each survivor's diagnosis, treatment history, and treatment-related side effects, not applied as a generic program.

American Cancer Society, "Exercises After Breast Cancer Surgery": ACS recommends beginning specific shoulder and arm exercises within days of surgery, under physician guidance, including shoulder blade squeezes, pendulum swings, wall climbs, and overhead reaches, performed in short daily sets and progressed gradually over four to six weeks. Range is limited to shoulder height until any surgical drains are removed.

Where Pilates Fits.

These map directly onto Pilates fundamentals and are the movements most instructors will start with once a patient is cleared:

- **Breath work:** Diaphragmatic, rib-expansion breathing, the foundation of every Pilates exercise, supports lymphatic flow and re-teaches full chest wall expansion after surgery limits it.
- **Shoulder mobility:** Controlled arm circles and supported arm sweeps, done slowly and within pain-free range, echo the ACS pendulum and wall-climb progressions while adding breath coordination.
- **Scapular stability:** Seated or supine scapular isolation work, drawing the shoulder blades down and together without shrugging, builds the same stabilizing pattern as the ACS shoulder blade squeeze, with more precise cueing around symmetry and compensation.

Timeline: When Is It Safe to Begin?

- **Gentle breathing and scar mobilization:** often within the first two weeks, only with surgeon sign-off
- **Controlled range-of-motion work:** typically 6–8 weeks post-surgery, varies by procedure and reconstruction
- **Loaded or resistance-based work:** only after clearance from the surgical and oncology team, introduced gradually

Watch For

Any new heaviness, swelling, tightness, or skin change in the affected arm should be reported to the patient's physician or certified lymphedema therapist before continuing exercise.

WWW.CLUBPILATES.COM



RETURN TO FIRST PRINCIPLES: WHY LEE COUNTY SHOULD VOTE REPUBLICAN ON NOVEMBER 3RD

By Mercedes Price-Harry, Lee GOP Chair

Voters of Lee County,

In times of heightened political tension, it is easy for frustration or disappointment with the actions of a few to cast a shadow over an entire movement. I write to you today not to paper over any concerns about the current climate, but to invite a return to first principles, the enduring ideas that have guided the Republican Party and that still offer the strongest foundation for ordered liberty, prosperity, and self-government.

Floridians saw these principles tested most starkly during the COVID years. While many in positions of power expanded emergency authority, restricted movement, closed businesses, and imposed sweeping controls on daily life, Republicans in Congress, in statehouses, and in local offices stood most consistently against prolonged lockdowns and the permanent expansion of bureaucratic power into our private lives. It was never about denying a public-health challenge; it was about insisting that temporary measures must remain temporary, and that the Constitution does not go into hibernation during a crisis.

NEVER FORGET. During COVID, the contrast in approach was real, and it clarified for millions why the principles of limited government matter in practice. While the majority of America was locked out of their schools, jobs, and even family get-togethers, the world watched Florida, and Lee County, open and free, explode with growth. People from all over came to Florida for refuge, keeping our livelihoods and employment stable and our businesses flourishing. We should continue to thank and support local Republicans and of course, America's Governor, a Republican Governor, Ron DeSantis.

Throughout our history the Republican Party has delivered concrete results rooted in the same ideas: tax reform that left more money in the hands of families and entrepreneurs, regulatory relief that lowered barriers for small businesses, strong national defense, support for the rule of law, and policies that treat education, work, and family as

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the primary engines of upward mobility. Those achievements were never perfect, and no party is immune to error. Yet the consistent thread has been a preference for individual agency over centralized control.

That preference is most powerful when it is practiced close to home. National headlines will always dominate the news cycle, but the decisions that shape our schools, public safety, property taxes, and local economy are made right here in Lee County. I therefore urge every voter who shares a commitment to limited government, fiscal responsibility, and personal liberty to support Republicans who will appear on the local ballot November 3rd.

Disappointment with any individual or political party is understandable. What must not follow is the abandonment of the Party that has proven, over time, to be the surest guardians of freedom and opportunity. The remedy for imperfect leadership is more informed, more engaged citizenship, not retreat. Let us keep our eyes on the enduring principles, support Republican candidates, and do the practical work of self-government at the local level where it matters most.

Visit www.LeeGOP.org for a current list of Republican candidates and for information on election and candidate events. Be an informed voter. Meet the people seeking your vote. Ask them hard questions.

Vote for Freedom. Vote Republican!
Mercedes Price-Harry, Lee GOP Chair

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November 3, 2026	Election Day

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A NEW NAME, THE SAME HANDS:

Introducing Wimmer Regenerative Orthopedics and Our New Concierge Membership

By Derek P. Wimmer, PA-C

For years, our patients have trusted us with their knees, hips, shoulders and spines. They've trusted us to help them stay on the golf course, on the tennis court, on the boat, and on their feet through every season of life. Today, we're proud to announce a new chapter: our practice is now Wimmer Regenerative Orthopedics. Along with the new name comes a new way to receive care: Wimmer Concierge Orthopedics, a membership program built for patients who want more access, more time and a proactive plan to keep doing what they love.

Why the Change?

The new name reflects what our practice has become. We focus on non-surgical, regenerative orthopedic care, using treatments designed to support the body's own healing. Those include PRP, Wharton's Jelly Stem Cells, Mesenchymal Stem Cells, Exosomes, Peptide Therapy, Focused Shockwave Therapy, Non-Surgical Spinal Decompression and Precise Image-Guided Injections.

Our philosophy hasn't changed. Derek Wimmer, PA, built this practice on three principles: see clearly, explain honestly and treat precisely. As Derek puts it, "I built this practice so patients aren't shuffled through a system. You get my time, my hands, and a plan made specifically for the life you want to keep living." The rebrand simply makes that promise clearer.

What Is Concierge Orthopedics?

Most people know how traditional orthopedic care works. You wait weeks for an appointment, spend a few minutes with a provider, and leave with a plan that reacts to pain after it has already taken over your life. Concierge orthopedics turns that around.

For an annual membership, you get direct, ongoing access to your provider and a care plan designed to keep you ahead of problems. We don't wait for them to get worse. Here's what that means for you.

Direct access to Derek, 24/7. Every member gets Derek's private phone line. If you tweak your back on the course, feel a new twinge in your knee or have a question about your recovery, you don't have to go through a call center or wait for a callback. You reach the person who knows your case.

Unlimited office visits. There's no need to decide whether something is "worth an appointment." If something doesn't feel right, come in. Catching small issues early is one of the best ways to keep them from becoming big ones.

Unhurried visits. Concierge visits are longer by design. You can talk through several concerns in one visit, ask every question on your list, and leave understanding your plan, not just holding a prescription.

In-office imaging included. Imaging is part of your membership, so your care is guided by what we can actually see. Decisions get made faster and with more precision.

Priority scheduling. Members come first. When you need to be seen, you'll be seen quickly.

A personalized maintenance plan. Your membership is built around your goals, whether that's playing 18 holes three times a week, keeping up with your grandkids or staying active through retirement. We map out regenerative treatments and check-ins throughout the year to help keep your joints and tissues working for you.

Four Membership Levels to Fit Your Goals

Wimmer Concierge Orthopedics has four annual tiers, so you can choose the level of care that matches your needs:

- **Access:** Derek's private 24/7 line, unlimited office visits and in-office imaging.
- **Foundation:** Everything in Access, plus a year of scheduled treatments, including shockwave or spinal decompression sessions, PRP, quarterly Wharton's Jelly Stem Cells, Mesenchymal Stem Cells and monthly B12.
- **Restore:** A deeper regenerative program with additional PRP, a full-dose Wharton's Jelly protocol, quarterly IV vitamin therapy and monthly vitamin D3.
- **Pinnacle:** Our most comprehensive level, with the highest treatment frequency, IV exosome therapy, peptide joint injections and maximum-frequency wellness support.

Because concierge care depends on time and attention, membership is intentionally limited.

Updated Annual Maintenance Plans

We've also redesigned our Annual Maintenance Treatment Plans. Starting at \$125 per month, they offer bundled treatments at a predictable monthly cost for patients who want ongoing care without full concierge access. They're a great option for many patients, and they can be a first step toward membership later.

Who Is Concierge Care For?

Our concierge program is a natural fit for:

- Active retirees who want to stay on the course, the court or the water
- Busy executives and professionals who can't afford long waits or lost time
- Seasonal residents who want reliable, continuous care while in Southwest Florida
- Recreational and competitive athletes focused on performance and recovery
- Patients managing chronic joint or back pain who want a proactive, long-term plan

What Stays the Same

If you're a current patient, don't worry. There's no obligation to join, and your care continues exactly as it always has. You'll find the same provider, the same office at 3380 Woods Edge Circle in Bonita Springs, and the same commitment to honest, personal care.

Take the Next Step

If you've ever wished your orthopedic care felt more like a partnership and less like a transaction, concierge membership may be the right fit. Call us at 239-829-4300 or visit wimmerorthopedics.com to learn more about Wimmer Concierge Orthopedics and schedule a conversation about your goals.

Wimmer Regenerative Orthopedics: proactive care, so you can keep doing what you love.



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WHAT DO YOUR LUNGS HAVE TO DO WITH YOUR BRAIN?

When people think about brain health, they often focus on memory exercises, puzzles, nutrition, or staying socially active. In celebration of National Healthy Lung Month, we're recognizing one of the brain's most important partners that's rarely part of the conversation: the lungs.

The lungs bring oxygen into the body and remove carbon dioxide with every breath. Although the brain represents only a small portion of total body weight, it requires a continuous supply of oxygen and energy to function properly. That means healthy breathing, circulation, and blood vessels all contribute to the brain's ability to support memory, concentration, movement, decision-making, and other everyday activities.

The connection begins with oxygen. Blood carries oxygen from the lungs to organs throughout the body, including the brain. When a respiratory condition interferes with breathing or reduces oxygen levels, some people may experience headaches, tiredness, difficulty concentrating, or confusion. The specific effects depend on the underlying condition, its severity, and the individual's overall health.

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, commonly called COPD, is one condition researchers have studied in relation to brain health. COPD can restrict airflow and make breathing more difficult. Research reviews have reported that cognitive impairment occurs more frequently among people with COPD than among people without the condition, although the reasons may involve several factors. Reduced oxygen, inflammation, cardiovascular disease, smoking history, sleep difficulties, and reduced physical activity may all contribute.

Smoking further demonstrates how closely the lungs, heart, blood vessels, and brain are connected. Smoking damages lung tissue and blood vessels, increases the risk of stroke, and contributes to cardiovascular disease. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, smoking increases the risk of coronary heart disease and stroke. Quitting can benefit health at any age, even for people who have smoked for many years.



Sleep is another important part of the lung-brain relationship. Conditions such as obstructive sleep apnea repeatedly interrupt breathing during sleep. These interruptions may lower oxygen levels and prevent restorative, uninterrupted sleep. People with untreated sleep apnea may experience daytime sleepiness, trouble concentrating, headaches, or memory difficulties. Sleep apnea is also associated with increased cardiovascular and stroke risk, making evaluation and treatment important for both nighttime breathing and long-term health.

The encouraging news is that many habits that support the lungs also support the brain. Regular physical activity strengthens the heart and respiratory system while improving blood flow throughout the body. The CDC notes that physical activity can benefit brain health, help manage chronic disease, and support the ability to perform daily activities independently. Walking, swimming, cycling, gardening, and other appropriate activities can all contribute to healthy aging.

Reducing exposure to tobacco smoke and air pollution may also help protect respiratory health. Preventive care is equally important. Staying current with recommended vaccinations, discussing persistent coughing or shortness of breath with a

healthcare provider, and properly managing conditions such as asthma, COPD, high blood pressure, and diabetes can help support overall wellness.

Changes in thinking or memory should not automatically be attributed to aging, a lung condition, or any single cause. Medication effects, poor sleep, depression, infection, cardiovascular problems, and other medical issues may produce similar symptoms. A healthcare professional can evaluate changes and determine whether additional testing or treatment is appropriate.

The lungs and brain may perform very different jobs, but they depend on the same interconnected system. Every breath helps deliver the oxygen the brain needs, while healthy blood vessels carry it where it needs to go. Taking care of breathing, sleep, circulation, and physical health is not only about protecting the lungs. It may also help create a stronger foundation for lifelong brain health.



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BEYOND THE PINK RIBBON

How to Strengthen the Body Through Breast Cancer Treatment

By Dr. Doreen DeStefano, DNP, NHD, APRN

October brings pink ribbons, screening reminders, survivor stories, and conversations about early detection. All of that matters. But for the woman who has already heard the words “You have breast cancer,” awareness is no longer enough. She needs to know what she can do next.

That question is at the heart of my book, *Biohacking Cancer*. I wrote it because cancer care should involve more than identifying a tumor and selecting a drug. We also need to understand the person carrying that tumor: her metabolism, immune function, hormones, inflammation, nutritional status, genetics, stress response, environmental exposures, and ability to recover.

I describe this as treating the tumor while strengthening the terrain.

Breast Cancer Is Not One Disease

The words “breast cancer” describe many biologically different diseases. An estrogen-receptor-positive tumor behaves differently from HER2-positive or triple-negative breast cancer. Even two tumors with the same diagnosis may have different mutations, metabolic vulnerabilities, growth signals, and treatment responses.

This is why my work begins with assessment. I review the pathology, receptor status, molecular testing, family history, current treatment plan, medications, supplements, laboratory findings, symptoms, and previous responses to treatment. When appropriate, we may assess circulating tumor DNA, inherited genetic variants, tumor genomics, insulin and glucose regulation, inflammation, nutrient levels, thyroid function, hormones, immune markers, and gastrointestinal health.

Testing is not about collecting impressive reports. It is about finding information that changes what we do. One of the central messages in *Biohacking Cancer* is that a cancer plan should be built around the individual. The woman in front of me is never simply a diagnosis, a stage, or a treatment protocol. She is a complete biological system, and every part of that system influences how she experiences treatment.

Helping Patients Stay Strong During Treatment

Chemotherapy, radiation, surgery, immunotherapy, and targeted therapies place very different demands on the body. My role is to help patients prepare for those demands, support healthy tissue, address side effects, and recover more effectively between treatments.

Depending on the patient, this may include personalized nutrition, metabolic support, carefully selected intravenous nutrients, hyperbaric oxygen, regional hyperthermia, photodynamic or sonodynamic therapies, immune support, stress regulation, movement, sleep optimization, and strategies for maintaining muscle mass.

Timing matters. Certain supplements or therapies may complement treatment, while others may interfere if used at the wrong time. A supplement can be helpful in one setting and inappropriate in another. Natural does not automatically mean safe, and more is not always better. Every therapy should have a purpose, a schedule, and a clear relationship to the patient’s oncology treatment.

Clinical guidelines support incorporating selected exercise, nutritional, mind-body, and integrative interventions into cancer care to improve function, quality of life, and treatment-related symptoms (Greenlee et al., 2017; Ligibel et al., 2022). My approach expands that supportive-care conversation by asking what is driving this particular patient’s terrain and which interventions best fit her biology.

Supporting the Terrain

The tumor is important, but it is not growing in isolation. Elevated insulin, poor glucose regulation, chronic inflammation, loss of muscle, disrupted sleep, hormonal imbalance, nutrient depletion, toxic exposures, and immune dysfunction can influence the environment surrounding cancer. These factors also affect energy, resilience, healing, and treatment tolerance.

In *Biohacking Cancer*, I teach patients how to evaluate these interconnected systems and build a coordinated plan. Nutrition may be adjusted to improve metabolic health while maintaining adequate protein and lean body mass. Laboratory testing can identify deficiencies or inflammatory patterns. Exercise can be modified around fatigue, surgery, neuropathy, or treatment days. Sleep and stress support become part of the medical strategy because the nervous and immune systems are constantly communicating.

The goal is to identify the highest-value changes and make them manageable. Cancer patients already have enough to carry. A good plan creates clarity rather than adding another layer of confusion.

Creating a Plan Beyond the Last Treatment

Many patients reach the end of active treatment and suddenly feel abandoned. Appointments become less frequent, yet the fear of recurrence remains. They are

often told to return in several months for another scan or blood test without receiving a meaningful plan for what to do in between.

I believe survivorship planning should begin before treatment ends. We can monitor recovery, rebuild strength, correct nutritional deficiencies, improve metabolic health, address treatment-related hormone changes, and establish an individualized surveillance strategy. We can also help patients understand which habits deserve their energy and which trends are mostly noise.

Breast Cancer Awareness Month should remind us to schedule appropriate screening. It should also remind every woman facing breast cancer that she deserves care that sees the whole picture. Cancer treatment is something a patient receives. Healing also requires her participation.

My work, and the message of *Biohacking Cancer*, is to help each patient understand her body, make informed decisions, and create a plan that supports her through treatment and into the life she is working so hard to protect.

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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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STRENGTH BEYOND THE PINK RIBBON: WHY STRENGTH TRAINING MATTERS

By Julie Hoffmann, Owner & Coach

October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month—a time to raise awareness, honor survivors, remember those we've lost, and encourage women to take an active role in their health.

While breast cancer awareness often focuses on screenings, early detection, and treatment, there is another important part of the conversation: supporting our health, strength, and physical function as we age.

As we age, beginning midlife, the progressive loss of muscle mass and bone density can have significant effects on strength, mobility, and long-term health. Without regular resistance exercise, this decline can accelerate, affecting balance, bone health, and the ability to perform everyday activities.

For women undergoing or recovering from breast cancer treatment, maintaining strength and physical function may take on additional importance. Cancer and its treatments can affect the body in several ways that influence muscle strength, mobility, and overall physical health. Cancer-related fatigue can make everyday activities and exercise more difficult, while surgery, chemotherapy, radiation, and other treatments may temporarily reduce activity levels and contribute to weakness or loss of physical conditioning. Some breast cancer treatments can also affect hormone levels and contribute to bone loss, increasing the risk of osteoporosis and fractures over time. Certain hormone therapies may also be associated with muscle and joint pain and decreased muscle mass.

Strength Training Is About More Than Muscle

The American Cancer Society specifically recognizes physical activity as an important part of health during and after cancer treatment.

According to the American Cancer Society, regular exercise can improve muscle strength, bone health, range of motion, physical function, and quality of life while helping reduce cancer-related fatigue, anxiety, and depression. The ACS recommends regular physical activity for cancer survivors and includes muscle-strengthening exercise at least two days per week as part of its guidelines.

Just as importantly, the ACS emphasizes that exercise after a cancer diagnosis should be individualized. The appropriate type, intensity, and progression of exercise can depend on the type of cancer, treatment, symptoms and side effects, current physical ability, and other health conditions.

That distinction matters. Exercise is not a replacement for cancer treatment. It is an evidence-based component of supporting physical health, function, and quality of life during survivorship.

Stronger Through Recovery and Beyond

For many breast cancer survivors, exercise isn't necessarily about getting back to the person they were before cancer. It can be about moving forward with as much strength, function, and independence as possible.

A properly designed strength-training program can help support:

- Muscle strength and lean muscle mass
- Bone health
- Balance and stability
- Mobility and everyday function
- Management of cancer-related fatigue
- Overall physical function and quality of life

Research and exercise-oncology guidelines have also changed the way we think about resistance training following breast cancer. Progressive resistance exercise can be appropriate for many breast cancer survivors, including those concerned about lymphedema, when exercise is introduced appropriately and progressed gradually. The ACS cites guidance supporting a gradual "start low, progress slow" approach.

Why Strength Becomes So Important After 50

Strength training isn't only important for people who have experienced cancer. It is an important component of healthy aging.

Muscle helps us stand up from a chair, climb stairs, carry groceries, maintain balance, recover from a stumble, participate in recreational activities, and continue living independently.

Strength training also places mechanical stress on bones, which helps support bone strength—an increasingly important consideration as women age and osteoporosis risk rises.

The goal doesn't have to be lifting extremely heavy weights or performing complicated exercises. The goal is to regularly challenge the muscles in a safe, progressive way so they have a reason to adapt and remain strong.

And the encouraging news is that it's never too late to begin working on strength.

Exercise After Cancer Should Be Personal

One of the most important messages from current cancer exercise guidance is that exercise should not be one-size-fits-all.

Medical history, cancer treatment, current strength, balance, mobility, fatigue, bone health, joint limitations, lymphedema, and other health considerations may influence where someone should begin and how quickly exercise should progress.

The American Cancer Society recommends talking with the cancer treatment team before starting or changing an exercise program. For some individuals, guidance from a physical therapist, rehabilitation specialist, or appropriately qualified exercise professional may also be beneficial.

From Awareness to Action

Breast Cancer Awareness Month reminds us of the importance of mammograms, recommended screenings, knowing our bodies, and having conversations with our healthcare providers.

It can also remind us to pay attention to the aspects of our health that help us remain physically capable throughout life.

Move your body. Preserve your muscle. Protect your bones. Work on your balance. Prioritize your health.

For adults over 50 who aren't sure how to begin strength training—or who want more individualized guidance—working with a qualified fitness professional can provide additional structure and supervision.

EP Fitness Studio in Fort Myers specializes in working with adults 50+ through customized strength-training programs. Sessions are closely guided and monitored, with programs designed around each individual's abilities, goals, and limitations. Individuals undergoing or returning to exercise following breast cancer treatment should exercise within the recommendations and restrictions provided by their healthcare team.

Because ultimately, strength training isn't about training for a mirror. It's about training for life.

This Breast Cancer Awareness Month, we celebrate the fighters, honor the survivors, remember those we've lost, and encourage every woman to make her health a priority.

**Get screened. Stay active. Build strength.
Keep moving forward.**

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WHAT DOES A CAVITY LOOK LIKE?

By KELLY M. DAINIAK, DMD, GENERAL DENTIST

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

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

THE EARLY SIGNS: OFTEN HARD TO SPOT WITHOUT A PROFESSIONAL

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

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

AS THE CAVITY PROGRESSES: NOTICEABLE CHANGES

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

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

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

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

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

MORE ADVANCED STAGES: THE OBVIOUS SIGNS

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

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

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

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

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



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

WHAT TO DO IF YOU SPOT A CAVITY

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

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

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

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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

Picture 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.

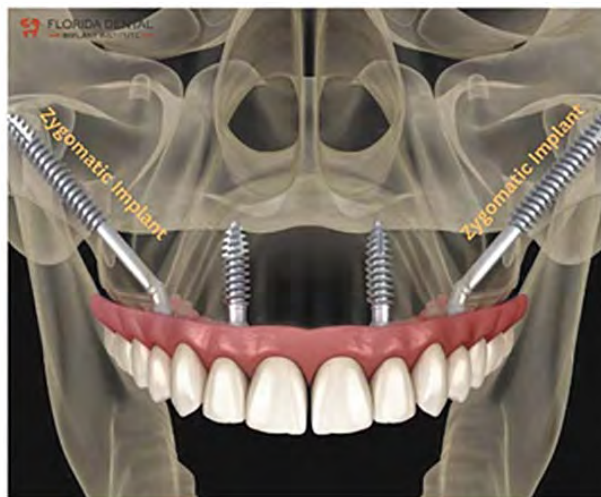
The secret? Zygomatic implants. Instead of relying on the jawbone (which is often too thin or damaged after years of missing teeth), these implants anchor directly into the cheekbone, one of the densest, strongest bones in your entire face. That means:

- 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.

Same-Day Teeth Are Real

Using digital scans taken right in the chair, the team designs and 3D-prints a temporary set of teeth

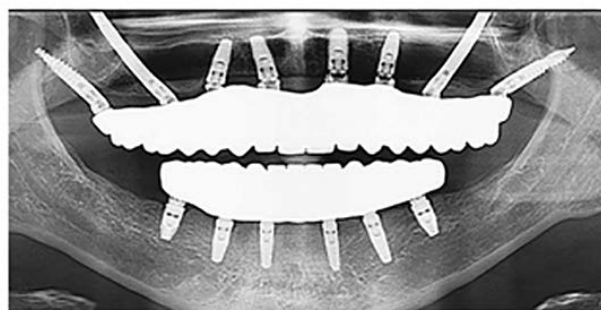


within hours of your implant surgery. You leave the same day with teeth that work, not a hole, not a denture you're afraid to bite into.

Once you've healed, your final teeth are crafted in-house from zirconia, the strongest material in modern dentistry, built to last.

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.



I don't know where to start, the dental team at Marsh Cove changed my life. For over 30 years, a fear of dentists rooted in uncaring care left me with low self-esteem and unable to eat certain foods. I searched for years for a permanent fix, repeatedly hearing "you need zygomatic implants" followed by "but we don't do them" or "too much bone loss." This rare procedure, anchored in the cheekbones instead of the jaw, is performed by very few surgeons. Then I found Marsh Cove. I was greeted by a beautiful, spotless office and a wonderful team: Michael, who scanned my teeth; Dave, who walked me through my plan; and Dr. Titov, who told me, "Don't worry, I will take care of you." I knew I'd finally found the right team. On surgery day, Dr. Titov and visiting specialist Dr. Holtzclaw performed a double zygomatic implant with All-on-Four, while Dr. Andrea, Sara, and Jen kept me comfortable and cared for through recovery. These aren't just a medical team, they're angels. I love and thank each of you. - Schuana W.



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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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.



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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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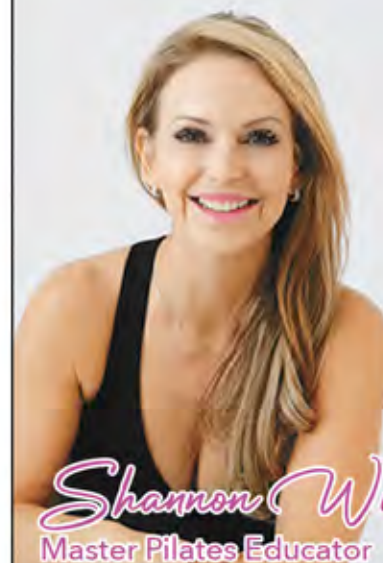
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Hormonal Imbalance and Its Effect on Skin Health

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

The skin is no unsubstantial organ. In fact, it's the body's largest and a significant defender from outside contagions. Beyond the protection it offers your body, the skin also offers a unique ability for you to gauge your internal health purely by looking at it.

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

Hormonal Imbalance

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

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

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

Symptoms of Hormonal Imbalance

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

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

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

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

How Hormonal Imbalance Affects Your Skin

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

Hormonal Imbalance as Skin Manifestations

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

Under Eye Dark Circles

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

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

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

Dry Skin

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

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

Acne

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

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

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

Skin Tags

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

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

Pale or Yellow Skin

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

Balancing Hormones and Regulating Skin Health

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

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

Oral Contraceptives

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

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

Anti-Androgen Drugs

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

Testosterone Replacement

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

Check Your Lifestyle

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

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

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

The Influence of Hormones on Your Skin

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

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

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KIDNEY CANCER: Are You at Risk?

By Neetu Malhotra, MD

The 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.¹

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-wW9qTM7gXbIKsBU1ldxNN-rM7OKwmg3J43bZnl6h175MIIQCzwNsKORoCE5QQAyD_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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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 educations 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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Pain, Dryness & Irritation:

How Women Are Rejuvenating Their Lives

By Joseph Gauta, MD, FACOG

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

Female Sexual Dissatisfaction Has Many Causes

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

CO2RE Intima

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



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PHYSICAL THERAPY MONTH

How Proper Arch Support Enhances Physical Therapy Outcomes

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

Why Feet Matter More Than We Think

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

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

The Missing Piece of the Puzzle

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

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

Better Alignment, Better Results

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



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

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

Relief That Encourages Consistency

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

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

Beyond Recovery: Preventing Future Problems

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

Finding the Right Support

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

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

The Takeaway

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

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

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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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Understanding Otolaryngologists: The Ear, Nose, and Throat Specialists

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

What is an Otolaryngologist?

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

Areas of Expertise

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

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

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

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



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

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

When to See an Otolaryngologist

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

The Collaborative Approach

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

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

Expert Care You Can Trust

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



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

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



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

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Exomind™ for Adult ADHD: SUPPORTING FOCUS, ATTENTION AND MOTIVATION

By Dr. Waldo Amadeo

For many adults with ADHD, the struggle isn't knowing what needs to be done. It's getting their brain to cooperate long enough to actually do it.

Starting a task. Staying focused. Ignoring distractions. Organizing the steps. Maintaining motivation. Following through.

These are all functions that depend heavily on the brain's executive networks—which is exactly why **Exomind™** has become such an exciting addition to the way we approach adult ADHD at Heal Thyself Institute.

Exomind is a non-invasive brain stimulation technology that uses magnetic pulses to stimulate targeted areas of the brain. One of the primary regions we can target is the **dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (DLPFC)**, an area involved in attention, working memory, planning, executive function, cognitive control and goal-directed behavior.

In other words, many of the functions adults with ADHD tell us they struggle with every day.

It's Not Just About "Paying Attention"

Adult ADHD is often described as a problem with attention, but that description misses a huge part of the experience.

Someone may be able to focus intensely on something interesting while feeling almost incapable of beginning a mundane task. They may have great ideas but struggle to organize and execute them. They may procrastinate until urgency finally creates enough momentum to act.

That's why **motivation and task initiation** are such important pieces of the ADHD conversation.

Exomind gives us a way to directly stimulate brain regions involved in these executive processes without medication, needles or surgery. A typical Exomind session lasts approximately **24 minutes**, and patients remain awake and alert throughout treatment.



Exomind + Functional Neurology

At Heal Thyself Institute, however, we don't look at Exomind as a stand-alone answer to ADHD.

Two adults can have the same diagnosis and very different brains.

Our functional neurological evaluation allows us to look beyond the label and examine how an individual's nervous system is actually functioning. We may assess areas such as eye movements, balance, coordination, reaction time, sensory processing and other neurological functions.

We can then incorporate Exomind into a broader, individualized plan when appropriate.

That may mean combining Exomind with specific neurological exercises, movement, nutritional and lifestyle support, sleep optimization, or other therapies designed around what we find during the evaluation.

A Different Way to Think About Adult ADHD

For adults who have spent years asking themselves:

Why can't I just start?

Why do I lose focus so easily?

Why do I need a deadline before my brain finally kicks into gear?

Why can I focus for hours on one thing but not ten minutes on another?

There may be more to the story than willpower.

By targeting the neurological networks involved in **focus, attention, executive function and motivation**, Exomind gives us another tool for helping the brain function differently.

And for adults with ADHD, that can open up an entirely different conversation—one focused not simply on managing symptoms, but on understanding and supporting the brain behind them

About the Author

Dr. Waldo Amadeo is a chiropractor and functional neurology practitioner who focuses on the connection between brain function and whole-person health. His work explores how stress, inflammation, sensory processing, and nervous-system regulation influence mood, clarity, and emotional resilience.

At Heal Thyself Institute in Naples, FL, Dr. Amadeo integrates chiropractic care, neuroplasticity-based therapies, neuromodulation, and functional medicine testing to identify the root causes of imbalance within the brain and body. His approach blends structural work, sensory-motor rehabilitation, and metabolic insights to help patients strengthen their brain networks, regulate the nervous system, and improve long-term mental well-being.



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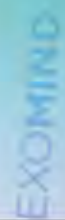
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UNDERSTANDING PEDIATRIC EAR INFECTIONS:

Causes, Symptoms, and Treatment Options

By Joshua D. Galloway, MSN, APRN, FNP-C

Few things are more distressing for a parent than a child who is crying in pain and can't explain why. Ear infections are one of the most common reasons children visit a healthcare provider, and most children will have at least one before their third birthday. Understanding what causes them, how to recognize the signs, and what treatment involves can help you respond quickly and confidently.

What Causes Ear Infections?

The most common type of ear infection in children is acute otitis media, an infection of the middle ear, the air-filled space behind the eardrum. These infections usually begin after a cold, flu, or allergy flare-up causes swelling and congestion in the nose and throat.

The key player is the eustachian tube, a small channel that connects the middle ear to the back of the throat. It helps drain fluid and balance pressure. In young children, these tubes are shorter, narrower, and more horizontal than in adults, so they clog more easily. When fluid becomes trapped behind the eardrum, bacteria or viruses can multiply and cause infection.

Several factors increase a child's risk, including:

- Age between 6 months and 2 years
- Attending daycare or group childcare
- Exposure to secondhand smoke
- Bottle-feeding while lying flat
- Seasonal allergies or frequent colds
- A family history of ear infections

Recognizing the Symptoms

Older children can often tell you their ear hurts, but infants and toddlers rely on behavior to communicate. Common signs include:

- Tugging or pulling at the ear
- Fussiness, irritability, or unusual crying
- Trouble sleeping, especially when lying down
- Fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher
- Fluid or drainage from the ear
- Difficulty hearing or responding to sounds
- Loss of balance or decreased appetite

Because these symptoms can overlap with other illnesses, an ear examination by a qualified provider is the only reliable way to confirm an infection.

Treatment Options

Not every ear infection requires antibiotics. Many mild cases, particularly those caused by viruses, improve on their own within two to three days. Treatment is tailored to your child's age, symptom severity, and health history.

Pain relief. Age-appropriate doses of acetaminophen or ibuprofen can ease discomfort and reduce fever. A warm compress held against the ear may also provide comfort. Always follow dosing guidance from your provider.

Watchful waiting. For children over six months with mild symptoms, your provider may recommend monitoring for 48 to 72 hours before starting antibiotics. This approach helps prevent unnecessary antibiotic use and antibiotic resistance.

Antibiotics. When symptoms are severe, persistent, or occur in very young infants, antibiotics such as amoxicillin are often prescribed. It's important to complete the full course, even if your child feels better after a few days.

Ear tubes. Children who experience frequent, recurring infections or persistent fluid affecting hearing may be referred to an ear, nose, and throat specialist to discuss small tubes that help the middle ear drain.

Prevention Tips

You can lower your child's risk by staying current on vaccinations, including the flu and pneumococcal vaccines, practicing good handwashing, avoiding secondhand smoke, and holding infants upright during feedings.

When to Seek Care

Contact a healthcare provider if your child has ear pain with a high fever, symptoms lasting more than two days, drainage from the ear, or is younger than six months with any signs of infection.

At Top-Tier Mobile Health, we bring expert care directly to your home, making it easier to get your child evaluated and feeling better, without the waiting room.



Meet Joshua D. Galloway, MSN, APRN, FNP-C

Joshua D. Galloway, MSN, APRN, FNP-C, is an experienced Autonomous Florida Family Nurse Practitioner with more than 30 years in healthcare and a career dedicated to caring for patients in some of the most challenging and time-sensitive medical environments.

His extensive clinical background includes emergency medicine, critical care, air medical transport, paramedicine, surgical assisting, trauma care, and community-based acute care. As a former Flight RN/Paramedic, Joshua spent years providing advanced critical care to critically ill and injured patients while working in high-acuity, rapidly changing environments where experience, sound judgment, and compassion were essential.

Joshua also served honorably in the United States Navy as a Hospital Corpsman, with experience in occupational health and aviation medicine. His military and emergency medical background helped shape his commitment to service, discipline, preparedness, and putting the patient first.

As a Family Nurse Practitioner, Joshua brings that same philosophy to every patient encounter. He believes quality healthcare should be accessible, personal, convenient, and centered around the individual—not simply the diagnosis.

Through Top-Tier Mobile Health, Joshua pairs experienced medical care with the ultimate in home comfort and privacy. His mission is to deliver exceptional, tailored health solutions on a flexible schedule that puts the patient's lifestyle first.

After more than three decades in healthcare, Joshua understands that excellent medicine is about more than treating an illness. It is about listening, earning trust, and treating every patient with the dignity and respect they deserve.

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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.

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