

HEALTH



Hackensack
Meridian Health

U

HOW TO AVOID HEART DISEASE

page 14

SHOULD
YOU DRINK
APPLE CIDER
VINEGAR?

page 9

Put Your Health First in 2022

WHEN TO GET
SCREENED FOR
BREAST CANCER

page 10

Before you fast...

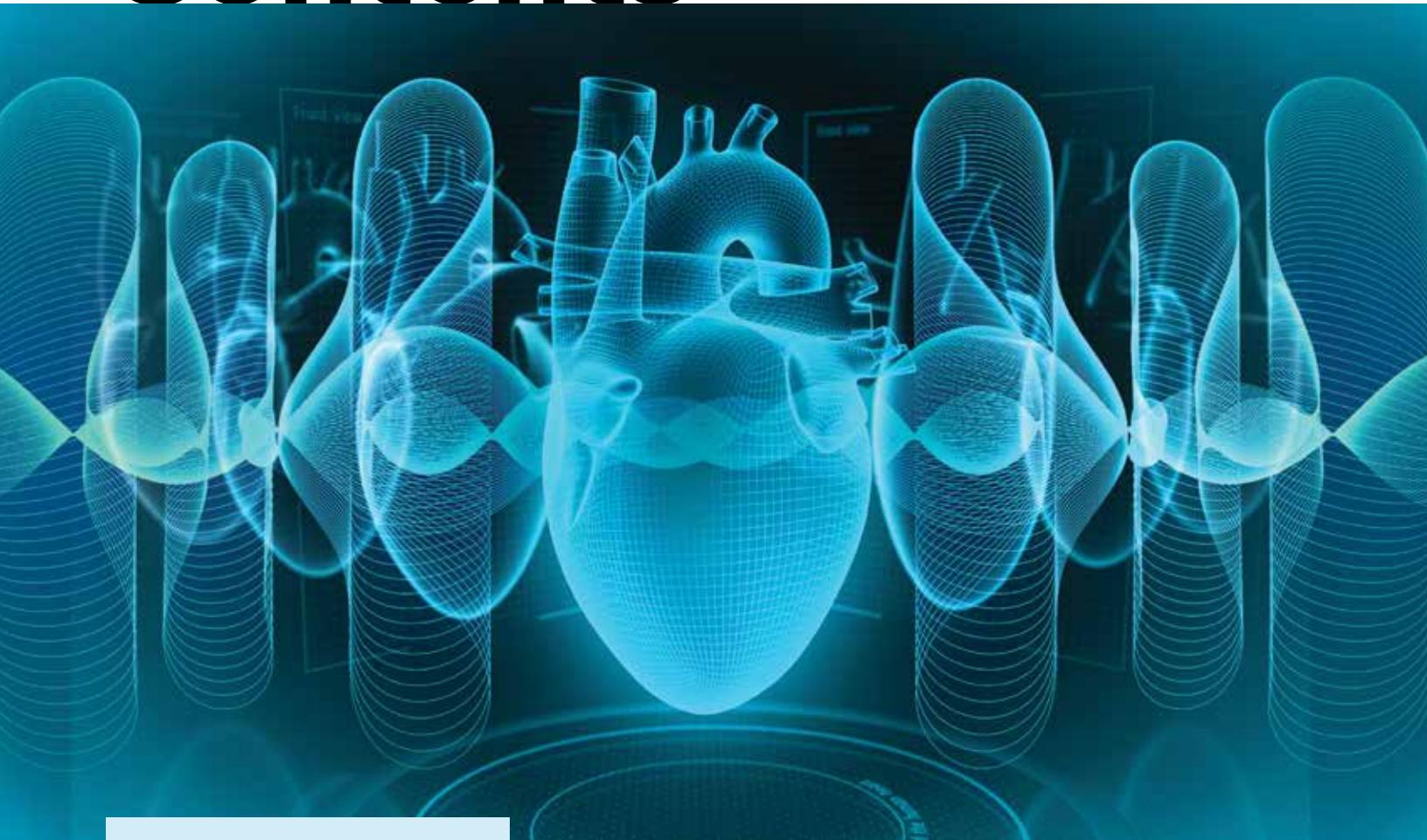
page 7

PHYSICAL THERAPY
FOR ARTHRITIS

page 18

Contents

Winter 2022



 Hackensack
Meridian Health Theatre

at the Count Basie Center for the Arts

"We are grateful for our valued partnership with the Count Basie Center for the Arts," says Robert C. Garrett, CEO of Hackensack Meridian Health. "Research suggests that experiencing music and the arts can reduce stress, relieve pain, create energy and boost moods."



22

Innovation transforming medical research into treatments

New Wave

Doctors at Hackensack University Medical Center and Jersey Shore University Medical Center have a new tool in their arsenal to prevent heart disease.



Learn three tips to avoid slipping on the ice this winter at HMHforU.org/Ice.



09

12

17

27

04 Hi. Welcome to this issue of HealthU
A message from Robert C. Garrett, FACHE,
CEO of Hackensack Meridian Health.

Better U quick tips to help you live your healthiest life

05 5 Tips for a Great Workout
Plus: ■ How gut health is linked to mental health
■ What to know about intermittent fasting
■ Recipe for stormy weather chowder
■ What's trending?

Spotlight on U health topics that matter the most to you

10 Who Should Get Screened for Breast Cancer?
Find the latest screening guidelines. Plus: Learn about surgery to reduce the risk of breast cancer.

12 Do Broken Bones Heal Stronger?
This often-repeated notion about broken bones is just not true. Plus: Thanks to a new shoulder surgery method, Eugene Fioravanti lives pain-free.

14 6 Ways to Avoid Heart Disease
Are you treating your heart with care? Plus: TJ Bellissimo avoided a massive heart attack thanks to cardiac catheterization.

16 How Does Guillain Barré Syndrome Happen?
Learn more about this rare neurological disorder. Plus: At 4 months old, Layla Maloney had risky surgery to address a rare birth defect of the skull.

18 Can Physical Therapy Help Your Arthritis?
Depending on your diagnosis and treatment, physical therapy can help manage symptoms. Plus: What to know about joint pain and protein.

20 The Facts on ALS
Find answers to some of the most common questions about ALS.

Doctor Spotlight

21 Getting to Know Michelle Lomotan, M.D.
Internal medicine doctor at JFK University Medical Center.

Schedule event and class listings

24 Your Calendar for Winter 2022
Live and virtual events and classes you won't want to miss.

Foundation meaningful gifts from U

26 Funding Education
Barry and Carol Anne Cawley Weshnak's generous gift will fund a nursing position dedicated to substance use disorder services for patients and families.

By the Numbers a snapshot view of an important health issue
27 New Year, New U
Set goals to achieve a healthier, happier life in 2022.



Our expert debunks common false claims about COVID-19 vaccines at HMHforU.org/VaccineMyths.



What are the worst foods to eat for your health? Find out at HMHforU.org/WorstFoods.

HealthU is a 2021 APEX Award winner and a 2021 Content Marketing Awards finalist



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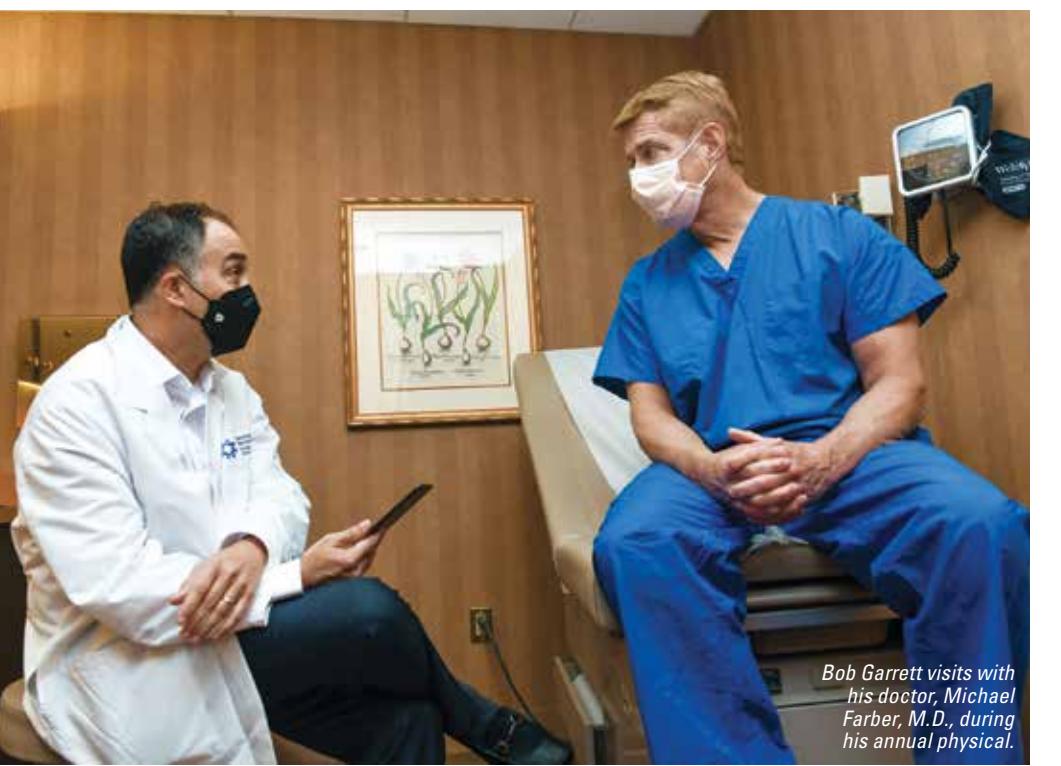
What's Your Resolution?

This time of year, many of us make promises to ourselves to live healthier lifestyles in the coming months, whether through exercise or diet.

There is no denying the tremendous impact of a healthy diet and regular exercise on our overall health. If you need a little inspiration for setting some unique goals for the new year, turn to the back of this magazine for our ideas. Or, check out tips for a great workout for your heart on page 5 and what you should know about intermittent fasting on page 7.

Aside from diet and exercise, an equally important aspect of a healthy lifestyle is getting the right health screenings at the right time. Screenings are medical tests that check for diseases and health conditions, ideally before they become a problem for your health. Your health is unique to you, and many things can influence which screenings you should get and when.

Talk to your doctor about which screenings may be right for you and when you should get them. We've also created an



Bob Garrett visits with his doctor, Michael Farber, M.D., during his annual physical.

Robert C. Garrett, FACHE, CEO
Hackensack Meridian Health



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BetterU

quick tips to help you live your healthiest life

INSIDE THIS SECTION

- 6 How gut health is linked to mental health
- 7 What to know about intermittent fasting
- 7 Recipe for stormy weather chowder

5 Tips for a Great Workout

Personal advice from our cardiologist

"Eighty percent of heart disease is preventable, and regular exercise plays a key role," says Sheila Sahni, M.D., cardiologist at JFK University Medical Center.

"This is why we speak regularly to our patients about the importance of keeping active."

Dr. Sahni shares five tips about incorporating heart-healthy exercise into your daily routine:



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1 Try to commit to at least 30 minutes of exercise five times a week. Finding some form of exercise you actually enjoy can make that easier. You can also break up the sessions to fit your schedule, such as two 15-minute activities per day.

2 Stretching is essential. Your whole body will benefit from regular exercise, but be sure to incorporate stretching, as well, so you don't tear or injure any muscles or joints. The good news is that stretching has benefits beyond the gym. It enhances your whole body's flexibility and range of movement, which can benefit you all day long.

3 Warm up before engaging in strenuous exercise. This allows your heart rate to rise slowly and manageably, and prepares your muscles for the workout ahead, preventing injuries.

4 Two sessions of strength training a week are recommended. This could include lifting weights, using resistance machines or any form of body-weight exercise. Stronger muscles help you with daily activities and prevent injuries as you continue to exercise.

5 Exercises that help you relax and unwind are also powerful ways to prevent heart disease. Yoga is a great option, training both the body and the mind. It's easy to get into—with no special equipment required—and classes and routines are available for all ages and levels of mobility.

Go Online

Ready to kickstart the year with new fitness goals? Attend a class or event near you: HMHforU.org/Events.

Have you ever had a "gut feeling" about a situation? Or maybe you get butterflies in your stomach when you're nervous? You may even feel like you need to run to the restroom when your anxiety kicks in.

Our gut has a lot to say when it comes to our mental health, and it plays a key role in our overall well-being. Your intestinal wall stores 70 percent of the cells that make up your immune system. An unwell gut will lead to more health problems down the road. Stress, depression and anxiety can negatively affect our gastrointestinal system.

"Research has found that the gastrointestinal system and central nervous system are in constant communication," says **Donald J. Parker, LCSW**, president, Behavioral Health Care Transformation Services. "This relationship is referred to as the gut-brain axis. Psychological factors can impact how your GI tract moves and contracts. Vice versa, an unhealthy GI tract can cause you to experience depression, anxiety, brain fog and more."

How Gut Health Is Linked to Mental Health

How to Keep Your GI Tract in Top Shape

It's important to keep your GI tract in tip-top shape. Here are tips for cleaning up your gut and, in turn, supporting your mental health:

Improve Your Diet: If you're experiencing a great deal of inflammation and irritation of the gut, consider eliminating dairy and gluten from your diet, as well as eating more organic and colorful fruits and vegetables. These steps may help heal your GI tract. Adding high-fiber and fermented foods to your diet will be useful, too. If you want additional guidance on how you can clean up your diet, consider nutritional counseling.

Take Time for Self-Care: Stress, depression and anxiety have a huge impact on your gut health. Putting time aside to meditate and journal at some point during your day may help alleviate some of these feelings. Of course, there are times when our mental health may be too much to handle on our own. When additional support is needed, consider making an appointment with a mental health professional.

Learn more about behavioral health services at Hackensack Meridian Health at HMHforU.org/MentalHealth.



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5 Things to Know About Intermittent Fasting

Is intermittent fasting a healthy, effective and natural way to shed some pounds?

"Intermittent fasting is a pattern of eating where you withhold food for a certain amount of time, so you allow your body to use energy more efficiently," says **Nripen Dontineni, M.D.**, internal medicine specialist at **JFK University Medical Center**. "Research is still being conducted on how effective fasting is for weight loss, but the idea is that instead of using energy from intake, such as carbs, you can potentially break down fats."

Here are five things you should know about intermittent fasting:

- 1** **You can drink during periods of fasting,** as long as it's a zero-calorie beverage and nothing is added, such as creamers or sweeteners. "A lot of people forget to drink water during the day and can become dehydrated," Dr. Dontineni says.
- 2** **Before fasting, eat foods high in fiber,** such as nuts, beans, fruits and vegetables, as well as foods high in protein, such as meats, fish and tofu.
- 3** **Certain people should avoid fasting,** including those who are over the age of 65, those under the age of 18, people with diabetes, women who are pregnant or lactating, anyone with a body mass index below 19, cancer patients, anyone with an immunodeficiency and anyone with a history of an eating disorder.
- 4** **There are potential side effects of fasting.** "Some studies have shown that people tend to overeat and binge," Dr. Dontineni says. "You can't fast for two days and then eat 3,000 calories a day for the other five days. You have to eat healthy foods and meals within your caloric limit."
- 5** **Intermittent fasting may not be sustainable in the long run.** "There is a higher drop-out rate among intermittent fasters versus those on a calorie-restrictive diet, which suggests that fasting may not be a sustainable approach," Dr. Dontineni says. "It's a quick way to lose weight, but you can't really do this for more than a few weeks."

If hunger is a concern, don't be afraid to break the fast. "Listen to your body," Dr. Dontineni says. "If you find yourself getting light-headed, shaky or low-energy from not eating enough, grab some healthy food."



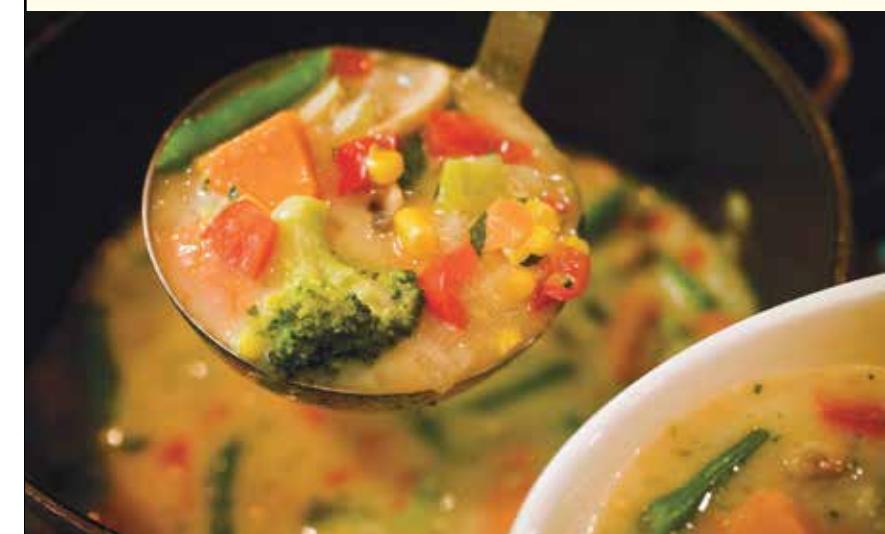
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Looking to try intermittent fasting? Talk to your primary care doctor first. Find one near you at HMHforU.org/FindADoc.



Stormy Weather Chowder

Serves 4–6

Ingredients

2 cups low-sodium chicken broth
1½ cups broccoli, chopped
1 large sweet potato, peeled and cubed
1 cup mushrooms, sliced
1 medium onion, chopped
1 tablespoon olive oil
2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
2 cups nonfat milk
1 15-ounce can whole kernel corn, drained
1 cup green beans
1 red bell pepper, chopped
1 tablespoon basil
½ teaspoon salt and optional dash black pepper

Steps

- ❶ In a large soup pot, bring broth, broccoli and sweet potato to boil. Reduce heat. Cover and simmer for 5 minutes. Do not drain. Set aside uncovered.
- ❷ Meanwhile, in a large saucepan, heat olive oil, add mushrooms and onions, and cook until tender, about 3–5 minutes.
- ❸ Whisk flour into milk and add all at once to mushrooms. Turn heat to low, and whisk until bubbly.
- ❹ Pour mushroom mixture into soup pot with broccoli, broth and sweet potato.
- ❺ Add corn, green beans, red pepper and basil. Heat through 2–3 minutes. Add salt and black pepper to taste.

Nutritional Information

Per serving: 245 calories, 12g protein, 42g carbohydrate, 5g fiber, 5g fat (1g sat, 4g mono/poly), 253mg sodium

Find more recipes and tips for healthy eating at HMHforU.org/HealthyEating.



Does IV hydration cure hangovers?

Jasmine Baez, M.D., weighs in:

Getting IV fluids to make your headache, fatigue and nausea disappear may sound more appealing than lying in bed until the unpleasant symptoms pass, but there's no medical evidence to this type of treatment. There's no cure for a hangover, but there are remedies that offer relief:

Drinking lots of water and other fluids to replace electrolytes	Getting extra rest if possible	Using over-the-counter anti-nausea medication as needed
Taking non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs like ibuprofen for a headache (do not use these if you are experiencing severe gastrointestinal symptoms)	Avoiding acetaminophen because it's broken down by your liver, which is focused on clearing the alcohol from your system	
If you are experiencing long-lasting symptoms of dehydration such as vomiting, diarrhea, headache, lethargy, muscle cramps and increased thirst, seek treatment from a medical professional rather than an "IV lounge" or "drip bar."		



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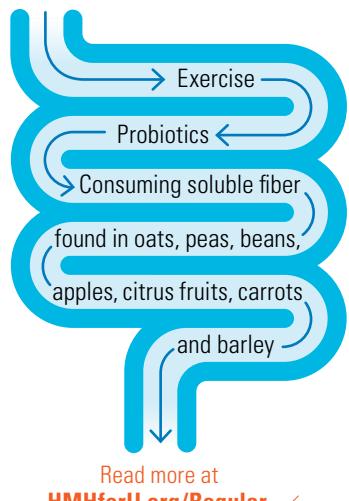
How can I stay regular?

Chintan Modi, M.D., weighs in:

Normal bowel movement frequency depends on the person, their diet and their upbringing. For some people, being "regular" means having a bowel movement once a week; for others, it's twice a day. Color and consistency are also unique to the individual. What you should be concerned about isn't so much regularity, but a dramatic change in what has been normal for you.

When most people ask about staying regular, they really want to know how to avoid constipation.

How to avoid constipation:



Read more at [HMHforU.org/Regular](#).

Should I be concerned about secondhand vaping?

Kishore Ratkalkar, M.D., weighs in:

Vaping and secondhand vaping are just as dangerous as smoking and secondhand smoke. Secondhand smoking is the process whereby a bystander inhales both the smoke that comes from burning either a cigarette or a pipe and the smoke that is exhaled by the smoker into the air. Vaping is a little different given that it doesn't burn and there is no smoke, but the process of inhaling secondhand fumes is essentially the same. Allowing vapor to enter your body—even as a bystander—puts you at risk for health concerns similar to those associated with secondhand smoking.



Read more at [HMHforU.org/Vaping](#).

Vape juices can contain the following ingredients:

- ▶ Nicotine
- ▶ Ultrafine particles that can be inhaled deep into the lungs
- ▶ Flavor additives such as diacetyl, a chemical linked to serious lung disease
- ▶ Heavy metals, such as nickel, tin and lead
- ▶ Formaldehyde (embalming fluids)
- ▶ Benzene (found in car exhausts)



Should I drink apple cider vinegar?

Elliot Rudnitzky, M.D., weighs in:

Apple cider vinegar hasn't been shown to aid with weight loss, despite what you may have read on social media, and it may be harmful if you ingest it the wrong way or at the wrong time of day. You may know someone who swears that apple cider vinegar has helped them curb their appetite or lose weight, but that information is not research-proven. Because apple cider vinegar is highly acidic, some people experience acid reflux after consuming it. People who are prone to heartburn, acid reflux or gastroesophageal reflux disease should not consume anything acidic 30–60 minutes before bedtime to minimize the chances of experiencing burning and discomfort.

Read more at [HMHforU.org/AppleVinegar](#).



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Who Should Get Screened?

Breast cancer screening with a mammogram is one of the most effective ways to find breast cancer in a person before they experience any symptoms.

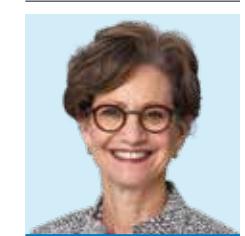
"Breast cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death in women in America," says **Harriet Borofsky, M.D.**, breast imaging specialist and medical director of the women's centers at **Bayshore Medical Center** and **Riverview Medical Center**. "An early breast cancer diagnosis is your best hope for a cure. Plus, treatment options can be less aggressive and better tolerated when cancer is detected early, so having regular mammograms is crucial."

While there is no concrete way to prevent breast cancer, annual mammograms have reduced the mortality rate by 40 percent. Routine breast cancer screening is important for all women because most women who get breast cancer have no family history of breast cancer or significant risk factors.

"In addition to these general guidelines, women of color have the highest breast cancer mortality rate and are more likely to receive an advanced-stage diagnosis," Dr. Borofsky says. "All women should have a risk assessment before age 30, so those at higher risk can be identified—especially women of color and of Ashkenazi Jewish descent." ☀

When to Get Screened

Who	When to Start	How Often to Repeat
Women at average risk of breast cancer	Age 40	Annual mammogram as long as you are in good health
Women at higher risk of breast cancer because of a BRCA1 or BRCA2 gene mutation	Age 25	Annual MRI, ages 25–30; annual mammogram alternating with MRI at six-month intervals, age 30 and above
Women with history of chest radiation therapy	8 years after the radiation, but not before age 25	Annual MRI, ages 25–30; annual mammogram alternating with MRI at six-month intervals, age 30 and above
Women at higher risk of breast cancer because of a strong family history	10 years prior to the first-degree relative's diagnosis (mom or sister), but no sooner than 30 and no later than 40	Annual mammogram (supplemental screening with ultrasound or MRI might be indicated; risk assessment should be performed)



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Source: American College of Radiology

Go Online

Find a breast imaging location near you at HMHforU.org/BreastScreening.

What to Know About Surgery to Reduce Risk

One in eight American women will develop invasive breast cancer during her lifetime. Certain factors can make someone at higher risk of developing breast cancer—notably, carrying a BRCA gene mutation in one's DNA.

Is Genetic Testing Right for You?

Genetic testing is encouraged for anyone who is at an increased risk of having inherited a gene mutation. You are more likely to have a BRCA gene mutation and should seek out genetic counseling and testing if you:

- ▶ Have a relative with a known BRCA1 or BRCA2 mutation
- ▶ Have a personal history of breast cancer and Ashkenazi Jewish ancestry
- ▶ Have or had breast cancer that was diagnosed before age 45
- ▶ Have a personal history of two or more types of cancer
- ▶ Have one or more family members with breast cancer
- ▶ Have a male relative with breast cancer
- ▶ Have triple-negative breast cancer diagnosed before age 60

"Genetic counseling is often recommended for those seeking genetic testing to help people better understand what their results mean in regard to their health," explains **Renee Armour, M.D.**, breast surgeon at **JFK University Medical Center**. "A positive test result

means you carry the BRCA gene mutation, while a negative result means that no mutation was found."

When to Consider Surgery

If you test positive for a BRCA 1 or BRCA 2 gene mutation, you may want to consider the ways you can reduce the risk of developing cancer in the future. According to the National Cancer Institute, a prophylactic (preventive) mastectomy in women who carry a BRCA1 or BRCA2 gene mutation can reduce the risk of developing breast cancer by 90–95 percent.

During a prophylactic mastectomy, surgeons remove one or both breasts before any breast cancer diagnoses to reduce the risk of breast cancer developing in the future.

"The BRCA gene mutations are rare, affecting only 0.2 percent of the U.S. population, but it is always best to identify and reduce any potential risk of cancer as early as possible," says Dr. Armour.

"Undergoing a prophylactic mastectomy is a tremendous thing to consider, but it could potentially save a life."

If you are at high risk of breast cancer, talk with your medical team about all of your options, and lean on the support and guidance of a breast surgeon, medical social worker and even mental health professional to help you find the right path for you.

"The decision to have any surgery to reduce the risk of breast cancer is a major one," says Dr. Armour. ☀



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Go Online

Learn about comprehensive services for women at risk of or diagnosed with breast cancer: HMHforU.org/BreastCancer.

Do Broken Bones Heal Stronger?

You might have heard the often-repeated notion about broken bones healing stronger than before, but it's simply not true.

Have you ever heard someone say that when you break a bone, the healing process makes it stronger than it was in the first place? This often-repeated notion may give you the idea that after your broken bone heals, it will be tougher than ever and won't break again. But this isn't actually true.

"Having had a previous break won't protect you from breaking the same bone again if you happen to experience trauma to the same body part," says **Michael T. Lu, M.D.**, orthopedic surgeon at **JFK University Medical Center** and **Raritan Bay Medical Center**. "Once your broken bone heals fully, it should be just as strong as the rest of your bones, so you won't be more or less likely to break it than another bone."

What Happens When Your Bone Breaks

After you break a bone, your body begins the healing process:

- ▶ At first, a blood clot forms at the site, which protects the injured spot.
- ▶ Within days, a special callus forms at the break, which gradually helps reconnect the broken edges of bone.
- ▶ Initially, the callus is soft and made of collagen, but over time, it becomes harder due to calcium deposits that arrive to mend the bone.
- ▶ New cells form at the fracture site, connecting the broken pieces together again.
- ▶ Once the bone reconnects, the callus breaks down and the bone retains its original shape.

Why the Break Site Is Briefly Stronger Than Surrounding Bone

A doctor should put you in a cast to keep you immobilized while your bone is healing. Because you aren't using the injured body part while it's in a cast, the bone becomes weaker. (If you've ever seen someone's arms side by side after one arm was removed from a cast, you know the unused arm temporarily atrophies due to lack of use.)

At the same time, the fracture site is being fortified with calcium deposits and building itself back up. For this brief period of time, the calcium-fortified region of bone may be stronger than the surrounding healthy bone, which has weakened due to lack of use. 



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Strengthen Your Bones

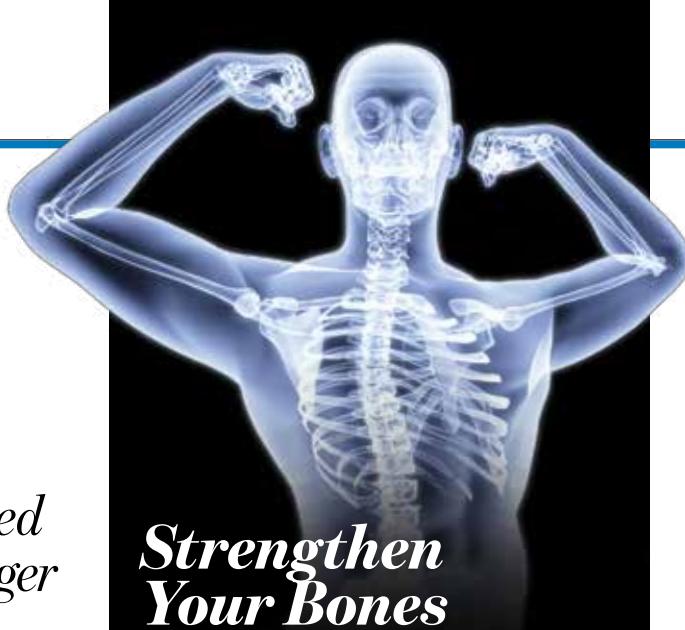
There are more reliable ways to strengthen your bones than waiting for a broken bone to heal. Try adopting these six healthy habits to help keep your bones healthy:

- 1 Eat calcium-rich foods. Include cheese and other dairy products; green vegetables, such as kale and broccoli; and fortified foods and beverages, such as cereal and orange juice, in your diet. The recommended dietary allowance (RDA) for calcium is 1,000 mg for women up to age 50 and men up to age 70; then, the RDA increases to 1,200 mg.
- 2 Eat foods rich in vitamin D, which helps your body absorb calcium. Fish, including salmon and trout, is an excellent source of vitamin D, and some foods and beverages are fortified with the vitamin. The RDA is 15 mcg (600 IU) for adults up to age 70; then, the RDA increases to 20 mcg (800 IU).
- 3 Exercise regularly. Weight-bearing exercise is best if you're able, such as running, walking, stair-climbing, dancing, hiking and lifting weights.
- 4 Quit smoking. Smoking has been associated with weaker bones, and quitting will improve your health in immeasurable ways.
- 5 Limit your alcohol intake. When women have more than one drink per day or men have more than two drinks per day, it increases the risk of osteoporosis.
- 6 Ask your doctor if you need supplements. If your diet isn't rich in calcium and/or vitamin D, your doctor may suggest you take daily supplements to boost your intake of these nutrients.

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Go Online

Learn how our orthopedic experts are committed to helping you maintain optimal health, get moving and live life to the fullest at HMHforU.org/Ortho.



Hole in One

For years, Eugene Fioravanti suffered from increasing shoulder pain. Thanks to a new surgery method, he now lives pain-free.

Eugene Fioravanti, a 57-year-old teacher from Colonia, New Jersey, lives an active life. He loves to golf, body surf and powerlift. But all of that activity throughout his life took a toll. Over the years, he experienced shoulder pain that eventually became almost unbearable. He was unable to do simple things like household chores or tying his shoes.

"It wasn't one thing," says Eugene. "It was cumulative wear and tear over the years. I used to throw newspapers every day for 23 years. I was diagnosed with a rotator cuff tear back in the early 2000s, and I just never wanted to take the time off to get surgery. So basically I 'grinned and bore it' for 20 years."

Unexpected Opportunity

When COVID-19 hit, Eugene saw it as an opportunity to get the surgery he needed all those years. Eugene's teaching went virtual, and working from home made the recovery process much easier. Eugene connected with **Michael T. Lu, M.D.**, an orthopedic surgeon at **Raritan Bay Medical Center**, who offered a relatively new type of surgery to fix Eugene's shoulder.

"For Eugene, we did what's called superior capsular reconstruction, or SCR," says Dr. Lu. "Instead of repairing his rotator cuff tendon to the bone, like we traditionally would do, we arthroscopically implant a piece of tissue into his shoulder to substitute for his rotator cuff."

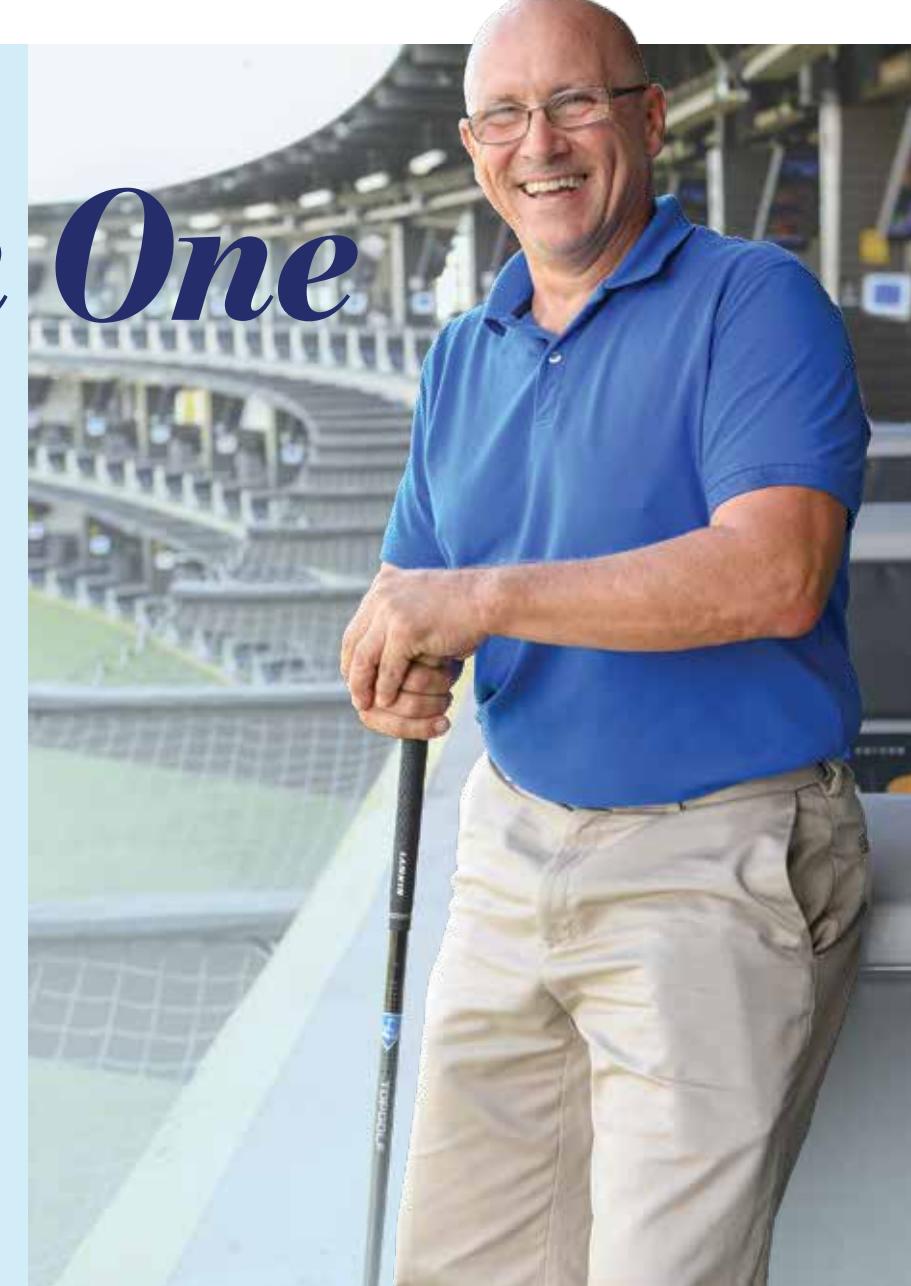
Dr. Lu explains the surgery: When you patch a pair of jeans with a hole in the knee, if the hole is small, you can sew it back together, and it will work fine. However, with a larger hole, you need a patch to fill the space. In the case of surgery, a tissue graft plays the role of the patch and fills in the damaged rotator cuff, essentially replicating the missing tissue.

"SCR can be a good option for managing massive rotator cuff tears that cannot be repaired with more traditional techniques," Dr. Lu says. "Studies have shown reliable improvements in pain, function and satisfaction for these difficult problems."

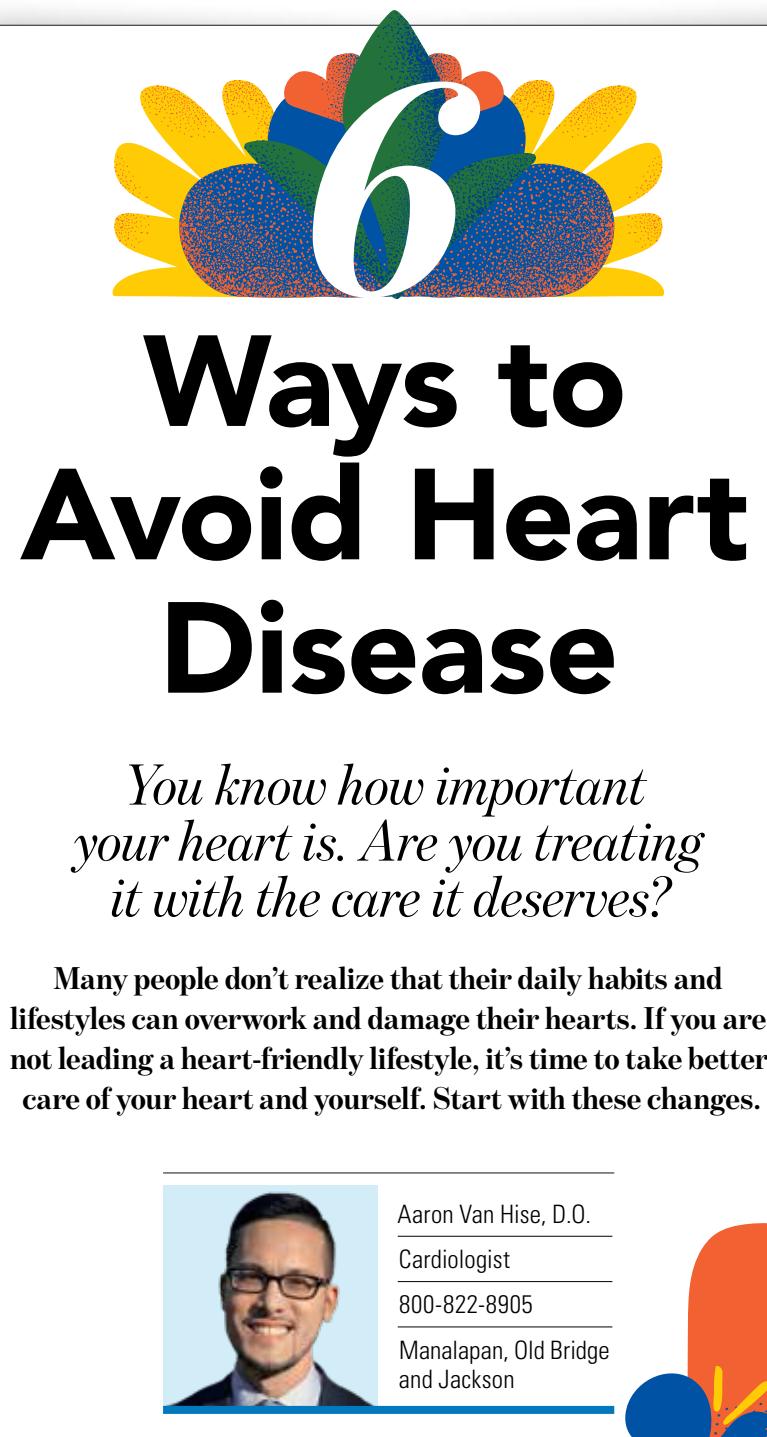
Blown Away by the Results'

In Eugene's case, this couldn't have been truer. "I was blown away by the results," he says. He completed eight weeks of physical therapy and improved the entire time. However, it wasn't until a few months later during a vacation that he realized how much the surgery changed his life.

"Six months to the day, I was down in Myrtle Beach on vacation, and I was swimming in the ocean," he says. "I could ride the waves again. That prompted me to call Dr. Lu and say thank you. I have my life back now—it really means that much to me."



Eugene Fioravanti is happy to be pain-free and back to one of his favorite pastimes: golfing.



6 Ways to Avoid Heart Disease

You know how important your heart is. Are you treating it with the care it deserves?

Many people don't realize that their daily habits and lifestyles can overwork and damage their hearts. If you are not leading a heart-friendly lifestyle, it's time to take better care of your heart and yourself. Start with these changes.



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If You Smoke, Stop

People who smoke have a greater risk for heart attacks compared to those who don't. "Nicotine causes blood vessels to tighten and narrow, making it hard for blood to reach your heart muscle, and it temporarily raises blood pressure," explains **Aaron Van Hise, D.O.**, cardiologist at **Old Bridge Medical Center**. Plus, the carbon monoxide in cigarette smoke lessens the amount of oxygen that gets to the heart. If you smoke, talk with your health care provider about ways to quit. Medicines and nicotine replacements can help.

Make Your Diet Heart-healthy

Eating fatty foods plays a part in the buildup of fat in your arteries, which can lead to blockages and increase your risk for a heart attack. "Limit red meats, salt, fried foods, sweets and added sugars," suggests Dr. Van Hise. "Instead, opt for dairy products with 'good fats,' such as feta cheese, as well as other sheep and goat milk cheeses, like pecorino Romano; lean meats and fish; whole grains; and fruits and vegetables." Choose cooking oils made with unsaturated fats, such as canola and olive oils.

Set Exercise Goals

Exercise gets your heart pumping, helping your body use oxygen better and strengthening your heart. It can also decrease your blood pressure and the amount of fat in your blood. "Talk with your health care provider before starting an exercise program, and begin slowly, especially if you haven't been active for a while," Dr. Van Hise recommends. Start with short sessions, such as 10-minute walks, and gradually increase the length of your workouts to at least 30 minutes, five days a week.

Track Your Blood Pressure

Blood pressure is the force against the walls of your blood vessels as blood flows through them. The harder your heart works, the greater your risk of having a heart attack. "Make sure your blood pressure is in the healthy range or under control. New guidelines suggest keeping systolic pressure [the first number] less than 130 and diastolic pressure [the second number] less than 80. Making smart choices, like eating a diet low in sodium, exercising regularly, avoiding tobacco, reducing stress and limiting alcohol, will decrease your risk of developing high blood pressure," says Dr. Van Hise.

Go Online

Learn more about loving your heart with our informative classes: HMHforU.org/
Events, or learn more about cardiovascular services at Hackensack Meridian Health at HMHforU.org/Heart.

Watch Your Weight

Being overweight and obese are major risk factors for heart disease. If you are overweight, losing weight can decrease your risk. Reaching or maintaining an ideal weight also helps lower your blood pressure and cholesterol levels.

Stress Less

"Continued and elevated stress has been consistently linked to health problems, including an increased risk for heart disease and stroke," says Dr. Van Hise. Try to keep your stress level low by exercising, sharing your concerns with friends and family, and making some quiet time for yourself each day. In addition to making these healthy changes, don't forget about screenings. The American Heart Association recommends regular screening for heart disease risk beginning at age 20 and cholesterol tests every four to six years if you're at normal risk.



Grateful Heart

Thanks to cardiac catheterization, TJ Bellissimo avoided a massive heart attack after a 90-percent blockage was found.

At 54 years old, TJ Bellissimo of Manahawkin, New Jersey, felt pretty good. Once in a while he'd get a little discomfort in his chest, but he shrugged it off as a little indigestion.

But one day while at work, the discomfort became something he couldn't ignore. "I felt a lot of discomfort in my chest and started holding my chest," he says.

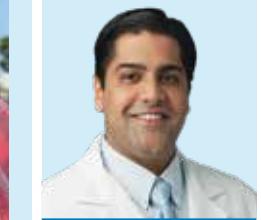
TJ visited a nearby walk-in clinic, where the medical team told him he needed to get to a hospital right away. He drove himself to the emergency room at **Southern Ocean Medical Center**, where he was seen immediately.

Searching for Answers

Tests, including an electrocardiogram, chest X-rays and bloodwork, showed nothing out of the ordinary. With no indication that he was having a heart attack, TJ expected to be sent on his way, but interventional cardiologist **Jasrai Gill, M.D.**, insisted he have a cardiac catheterization.

When Dr. Gill performed the cardiac catheterization, a 90-percent blockage was found in the left anterior descending artery.

"The need for a cardiac catheterization is based on critical aspects: a history and getting a good sense of the patient's story as well as objective evidence that helps you do a baseline risk assessment," Dr. Gill says.



Jasrai Gill, M.D.

Interventional cardiologist

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Manahawkin, Toms River and Neptune



James Orlando, M.D.

Cardiologist

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Manahawkin, Toms River and Neptune

An Excellent Prognosis

TJ's blockage required two stents. But he didn't have any damage to his heart, which gave him an excellent prognosis following the stenting procedure.

TJ will be on blood thinners for about a year, and he is taking part in cardiac rehab three days a week.

"I feel like a million bucks at this point. I'm so happy to be alive. And I'm so happy that I have my hospital and my doctors around me," TJ says. "My care from all my doctors, all the nurses that touched me—it just was a great experience."

Check your risk for heart disease with a CT calcium scoring scan: HMHforU.org/CalciumScan.

How Does Guillain-Barré Syndrome Happen?

Learn more about this rare neurological disorder, including common symptoms and treatment options.

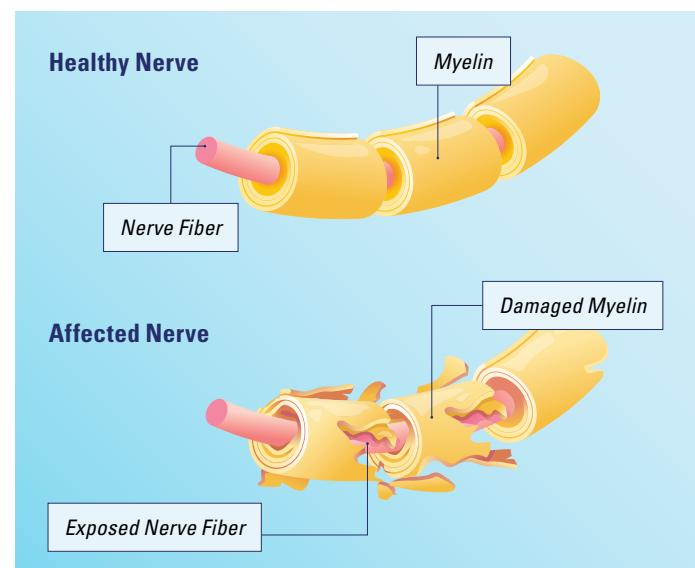
Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS) is a rare neurological disorder in which a person's immune system attacks their own peripheral nervous system. According to the National Institutes of Health's National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, GBS is estimated to affect about one in 100,000 people each year.

What causes GBS is not known, says **Emad Noor, M.D.**, neurologist at **JFK University Medical Center**. "It's random," he says.

How Does It Happen?

It's not genetic or contagious. Typically, GBS will start within a few days or weeks of a respiratory or gastrointestinal infection, he says. What appears to happen is the immune response to a bacterial or viral infection—or very rarely vaccination—triggers a more aggressive response that causes the immune system to attack the body.

One theory is that part of a person's immune system mistakenly perceives the sheathing around nerves—a fatty covering called myelin—as a threat. To counter this "threat," the immune system produces



antibodies that attack the myelin, which leads to nerve damage that causes muscle weakness, paralysis and, in some cases, nerve pain, Dr. Noor says.

What Are the Signs?

"GBS affects all age groups," says Dr. Noor, "and typically presents as weakness and loss of reflexes in the legs." Mild cases may resolve on their own, but severe cases can lead to paralysis of the respiratory muscles, which can be a life-threatening situation.

Common symptoms of GBS include:

- ▶ Tingling in the feet or hands
- ▶ Pain (particularly in children)



Emad Noor, M.D.

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Edison

istock.com/vectorMine

- ▶ Weakness on both sides of the body (frequently noticed as having trouble climbing stairs or, especially in children, difficulty walking)
- ▶ Unsteadiness or coordination problems
- ▶ Difficulty swallowing, speaking, or chewing
- ▶ Digestive and/or bladder control problems

How Is It Diagnosed?

In addition to a physical assessment, which includes testing reflexes in the limbs that are experiencing weakness, key diagnostics are an MRI and a spinal tap (also called a lumbar puncture) to get a sample of spinal fluid. Those with GBS tend to have more protein than usual in their spinal fluid and fewer than usual white blood cells.

How Is It Treated?

Generally, if diagnosed early, GBS is treatable with therapies such as immunoglobulin (IVIg) infusions or plasma exchange, and physical therapy, Dr. Noor says. There is no known cure for GBS.

"The goal of treatment is to prevent things from getting worse," he says. "IVIg has been shown to shorten the length of a period of disability and also may avoid the need for a ventilator."

Once treatment is started, Dr. Noor says, patients typically get better in a matter of a few weeks to a couple of months and make a full recovery, especially if GBS is diagnosed early. More severe cases of GBS can take longer to heal, with some patients still experiencing varying degrees of weakness years later. ☀

Go Online

Learn about our complete lineup of neuroscience services available at Hackensack Meridian Health at HMHforU.org/Neuro.

Head Start

At 4 months old, Layla Maloney needed risky surgery to address the rarest type of craniosynostosis, a birth defect of the skull. Today, she is thriving.

When Layla Maloney was born in June 2020, the back of her head was a little flat, a common condition called plagiocephaly. Her mom, Stephanie Maloney, had worked in childcare, so she had seen children with what is sometimes called "flat head syndrome." She knew she'd have to watch it for a few months.

When Layla was 4 months old, her pediatrician recommended she be fitted for a helmet to help eliminate the flatness and shape her head. But after reviewing Layla's brain scans taken in advance of a helmet fitting, the helmet technician thought Layla may have craniosynostosis and recommended seeing a specialist. Her pediatrician recommended neurosurgeon **Thomas Steineke, M.D.**, chief of the Division of Neurosurgery and chairman of the Neuroscience Institute at **JFK University Medical Center**.

What Is Craniosynostosis?

Craniosynostosis is a congenital anomaly in which the bones of a baby's skull fuse together too early and can lead to major neurological complications, Dr. Steineke says. When the skull bones join together too early, the skull can become misshapen as the soft skull bones shape to the baby's growing brain.

The brain can also become compressed by the joined bones, which can restrict brain growth and lead to a build-up of pressure in the skull. The increased pressure results in a risk for blindness, seizures or brain damage.

A Rare Diagnosis

X-rays showed that Layla had lambdoid synostosis, a form of craniosynostosis in which the

suture at the back of the skull closes too early, flattening the back side of the head. It is one of the rarest types of craniosynostosis and requires surgery—a surgery in which Dr. Steineke and oral and maxillofacial surgeon **Kayvon Haghghi, M.D., DDS**, would need to remove the large plate at the back of Layla's skull, reshape it and replace it. It's a six-hour surgery with a risk of life-threatening bleeding.

The doctors took the time to explain the procedure, answer questions and build connections with Stephanie and her husband, Shaun, so they felt as comfortable as possible about the care their daughter would receive. Dr. Haghghi even shared a story about his own child's major surgery.

Following the successful surgery, Layla stayed at the hospital for three nights. Stephanie says the nurses were "wonderful," taking care not just of Layla, but of her, too. They brought her food and coffee, rubbed her back when she needed comforting and stayed with Layla, so she could grab a quick shower or use the restroom.

'Loving Her Little Life'

Layla won't need a medical helmet or therapy, although she will continue to see Dr. Steineke for follow-ups to monitor her brain and skull growth. A toddler now, Layla is completely on schedule developmentally.

"Layla is totally wonderful," Stephanie says. "She's happy and crazy and just loving her little life. It's amazing."

Learn more about care for pediatric neurological conditions at HMHforU.org/KidsNeuro.



Can Physical Therapy Help Your Arthritis?

Depending on your diagnosis and treatment plan, physical therapy can help manage certain arthritis symptoms.

While there's no cure for arthritis, physical therapy may help you manage your symptoms related to mobility and activity, depending on your diagnosis and individualized care plan.

Though there are more than 100 different types of arthritis with their own causes, symptoms and treatments, the most common types of arthritis include:

- ▶ Osteoarthritis
- ▶ Rheumatoid arthritis
- ▶ Psoriatic arthritis



Ofure Luke, M.D.

Physical medicine and rehabilitation specialist

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Edison

If physical therapy is prescribed for you to better manage your arthritic condition, some benefits may include:



Increased range of motion

Stiff joints are a common complaint with arthritis and can make it difficult to bend and straighten. "Gentle stretching and range-of-motion exercises can help maintain the flexibility necessary for daily tasks, such as getting in and out of chairs or reaching overhead," says

Ofure Luke, M.D., physical medicine and rehabilitation specialist at **JFK University Medical Center** and **Raritan Bay Medical Center**.



Strengthened muscles

If the muscles around your joints are weak, they will be under extra stress and can hurt. "Strong muscles can help stabilize a weakened joint and decrease pain," Dr. Luke adds.



Safe and effective use of assistive devices

Assistive devices, such as canes, walkers, crutches, braces and splints, take stress off your joints and muscles, and make it easier to perform certain activities.



Pain management

Physical therapists can teach you the best ways to relieve acute and chronic pain, as well as how to adjust your activities to prevent pain.

What to Expect From Physical Therapy

Your physical therapist will work with you to develop a treatment plan based on your history and goals. This is likely to include:

- ▶ Program of customized exercises
- ▶ Pain relief, using heat or ice packs, electrical stimulation and ultrasound
- ▶ Hands-on joint and soft tissue massage and mobilization
- ▶ Assistive devices

"A critical element of physical therapy is education," Dr. Luke says. "Your physical therapist will help you understand, for example, how to reduce stress on your joints, how to do the exercises in your treatment plan and how to manage pain on your own."

You may need to see your physical therapist weekly to start, or even multiple times a week during a period of acute pain. But as you learn to manage your arthritis, you'll likely see your physical therapist less often, checking in with them every few months to set new goals and update your treatment plan as needed.

"Patients will achieve a better and more sustained outcome when they commit to performing their exercises daily and consistently as part of a home exercise program," says Dr. Luke. "Living with arthritis is not always easy, but certainly incorporating the learned benefits of physical and occupational therapy into one's life is an important part of management."

Physical and occupational therapy may not always be prescribed for treatment of arthritis, depending on the nature and course of the disease. Always seek guidance from your doctor about the best timing and precautions when receiving a therapy program. ☀

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Go Online

Learn more about physical therapy and rehabilitative services at Hackensack Meridian Health at HMHforU.org/PhysicalTherapy.

The Protein-Joint Pain Connection

Certain foods can help fight inflammation, which can exacerbate joint pain. Here's what you should know.

If you experience chronic joint pain from arthritis, different lifestyle habits, like maintaining a healthy weight and exercising regularly, can help improve your discomfort.

"Patients often ask why they continue to have some joint pain after completing a new exercise program," says

Anthony Costa, M.D., hip and knee orthopedic surgeon at **Riverview Medical Center**.

"I tell them exercise is only half the battle. As someone who specializes in treating joint pain, I've certainly come to recognize how patients can help themselves by changing their diet."

Your diet can help minimize joint pain in part because a healthy diet can contribute to weight loss. But certain foods can also help fight inflammation, improving overall health.



Anthony Costa, M.D.

Hip and knee orthopedic surgeon

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Red Bank and Morganville



To help support overall health, consider these protein-rich foods:

▶ **Fish rich in omega-3 fatty acids.** Omega 3s have been research-proven to reduce inflammation, so including omega-3-rich fish in your diet may lead to less inflammation-related joint pain over time. Try eating salmon, tuna, sardines, trout or mackerel at least twice a week.

▶ **Nuts.** Almonds, walnuts and other nuts are high in protein, fiber and healthy fats, and they've also been shown to fight inflammation in the body. Choose unsalted, unsweetened varieties rather than smoked, honey-roasted or chocolate-covered options.

▶ **Beans.** They're rich in antioxidants, which may help lower inflammation. Beans are also high in fiber, which is helpful if you're trying to lose weight; fiber helps you feel full for longer periods, encouraging you to eat less often.

▶ **Dairy products (for some people).** There are advantages to consuming low-fat dairy products, which are rich in protein, calcium, vitamin D and other nutrients. Some people experience inflammation and joint pain when they eat dairy, while others don't. If you have joint pain, try an elimination diet with your doctor's assistance to see if dairy products are linked to your discomfort. If they aren't, you can continue to enjoy them.

Consider limiting these protein-rich foods:

▶ **Red meat.** Foods that are high in saturated fat, such as beef, may cause inflammation in the body, which can lead to joint pain. Consider other options when you're choosing what to eat with your joint pain in mind—especially if you cook your steak with butter, another food that's high in saturated fat.

▶ **Dairy products (for some people).** Because dairy products may cause inflammation and joint pain in some people, it's best to limit or avoid them if you've confirmed that they're triggering your discomfort. Don't avoid low-fat dairy products without asking your doctor for help. Try an elimination diet first.

▶ **Gluten.** The term "gluten" may make you think of bread, but it's actually a protein found in wheat, rye and barley. There isn't a direct link between gluten consumption and arthritis, but many people feel better on a gluten-free diet. Ask your doctor if you should try a gluten-elimination diet. ☀

Go Online

Learn how our musculoskeletal and orthopedic experts are committed to helping you maintain optimal health, get moving and live life to the fullest at HMHforU.org/Ortho.

The Facts on ALS

Here are answers to some of the most common questions about ALS, otherwise known as Lou Gehrig's disease.

ALS, or amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, is a debilitating disease that affects motor nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord. This causes a wide variety of symptoms, but most commonly and universally, people with ALS experience progressive muscle weakening and paralysis. As many as 30,000 people in the United States have ALS, and about 5,000 new cases are diagnosed every year.

You may have heard of ALS due to the Ice Bucket Challenge, or even as its previously common name, Lou Gehrig's disease. Here are answers to some of the most common questions asked about ALS.

Can You Prevent ALS?

"Unfortunately there is no way to prevent ALS," says **Mary Sedarous, M.D.**, neuromuscular medicine specialist and co-director of the ALS Center at **Jersey Shore University Medical Center** (one of only two centers in New Jersey to become a certified treatment center by the ALS Association), and assistant professor, Department of Neurology, Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine. "For many people with ALS, there is not a clear cause of the disease." Researchers have studied numerous potential causes, such as diet, lifestyle and environment, but no clear reason has been identified.

For other patients with ALS, the cause is genetic. For about 5–10 percent of people with ALS, there is a clear genetic link to a family member with ALS. This is called familial ALS.

"Genetic testing can be done for ALS," says Dr. Sedarous. "I recommend discussing your options with a genetic counselor before undergoing the testing process."

Will ALS Ever Be Cured?

It's hard to say. Currently there is no cure for ALS, but that is not due to lack of effort from doctors and researchers.

"Research is ongoing, and treatments and medications that help slow the effects of ALS are continually being discovered," says Dr. Thomas. "Today, ALS treatment is an interprofessional undertaking that includes respiratory support, medication, physical therapy, speech therapy, assistive devices and other forms of treatment and support. And at Hackensack, we are pursuing a small phase 1 study that seeks to show that re-educating the bone marrow to produce less neuro-inflammation may be helpful in treating ALS." ☀

Who Is at Risk of ALS?

"Because there is no clear cause for many cases of ALS, it is difficult to pinpoint risk factors," says neurologist **Florian Thomas, M.D., Ph.D.**, co-director of the ALS Center, and professor and founding chair, Department of Neurology, **Hackensack University Medical Center** and Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine. The clearest risk factor is having a family history of ALS.

That being said, Dr. Thomas points to some additional factors to consider:

- ▶ ALS is more common in older people, and your risk of getting ALS increases as you age. It is most common between ages 40 and 70.
- ▶ ALS is 20 percent more common in men than women.



Mary Sedarous, M.D.

Neuromuscular medicine specialist

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Neptune and Red Bank



Florian Thomas, M.D., Ph.D.

Neurologist

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Hackensack

Go Online

Learn more about our interdisciplinary care for ALS patients at HMHforU.org/ALS.

Doctor Spotlight

MICHELLE LOMOTAN, M.D.

Internal Medicine

JFK University Medical Center

For Michelle Lomotan, M.D., health care is a family business. Her mom, a nurse, inspired her to become a doctor.

"I've always wanted to be as caring and wonderful as my mom. She's my hero," says Dr. Lomotan, an internal medicine doctor at **JFK University Medical Center**. "Watching her take care of people and put smiles on their faces made me want to be in a profession where I can help people and make their lives better."

But medicine isn't just about giving care. It's also about finding solutions. "The investigative side of medicine really appeals to me," Dr. Lomotan says. "When somebody comes to see you, they have a problem. I like putting the pieces together to figure out what's wrong. It's like being a detective. You don't always get answers, but you can solve a lot of problems, which is really rewarding."

When she isn't solving problems as a doctor, Dr. Lomotan is solving them in board games, one of her favorite pastimes along with cooking.

You're passionate about healthy eating. What's your best diet advice?

For a well-balanced diet, people should use the healthy plate method, which is dividing your plate into one big section and two little sections. The big section should be fruits and vegetables. Starches should go in one of the small sections, and protein should go in the other.

You're an avid cook. Who's your favorite chef?

Julia Child. I got into cooking in college because I didn't have my mom around to cook for me. I wanted to learn how to cook, and Julia Child came up a lot in reruns on the Food Network. I like her style, which is very homey. She's kind of like a grandmother figure. You feel like you've



Michelle Lomotan, M.D., loves playing board games, an interest she picked up while in college.

Where did your interest in board games come from, and what are your favorite games?

Board games are another thing I picked up in college. They're a great way to get to know people because everyone goes into games with a different thought process and strategy. I really like games where you can work together, because I think those are more interesting than competitive games. My favorite is Pandemic, which is a team-based game where you're trying to prevent a worldwide pandemic. It's really fun, although it's a little hard to play now because it feels so real. ☀



Doctors at Hackensack University Medical Center and Jersey Shore University Medical Center have a new tool in their arsenal to prevent heart disease.

Heart disease kills more than 600,000 people in the U.S. every year. Now, doctors at **Hackensack University Medical Center** and **Jersey Shore University Medical Center** can offer a new procedure to help prevent this disease.

Previous Options for Heart Disease

Until now, doctors had two ways to open up narrow, hardened arteries supplying blood to the heart:

- **Angioplasty**, where a balloon is inflated to help open a blocked artery
- **Atherectomy**, in which tiny rotating blades open the artery through scraping and drilling

After one or both of these procedures are done, a stent—a metal tube that helps keep the vessel open—is usually inserted.

Unfortunately for some patients, neither of these methods is ideal. “Sometimes fatty plaque that has been there for so long goes from being soft and squishy to being hard as a rock,” says **Daniel Kiss, M.D.**, a cardiologist at Jersey Shore. “Because the calcium is hard, plaque can’t move back against the arterial wall, the balloon can’t expand properly and the blockage remains.”

Atherectomy comes with its own difficulties. “When you scrape the wall of the artery, the debris that falls out goes downstream into the microcirculation,” says **Haroon Faraz, M.D.**, interventional cardiologist at Hackensack. Doctors have to scrape enough calcium to unblock the artery—but not so much that they’ll clog the system with the debris.



Daniel Kiss, M.D.

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Haroon Faraz, M.D.

Interventional cardiologist

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Teaneck and North Bergen

A New Option Emerges

“[Before.] there really wasn’t a great treatment to clear the way for the stent in patients whose calcium had gotten hard and built-up,” Dr. Kiss says.

Doctors at Hackensack and Jersey Shore now have intravascular lithotripsy (IVL) as a new tool in their arsenal. IVL uses sonic pressure waves, also known as shockwaves, which create a series of microfractures to break up the calcium without affecting the healthy vessel. “The beauty of this technology is that it attacks the calcium but leaves the healthy vessel wall alone,” Dr. Faraz says.

It’s based on the same technology that has been used for decades to safely break up kidney stones.

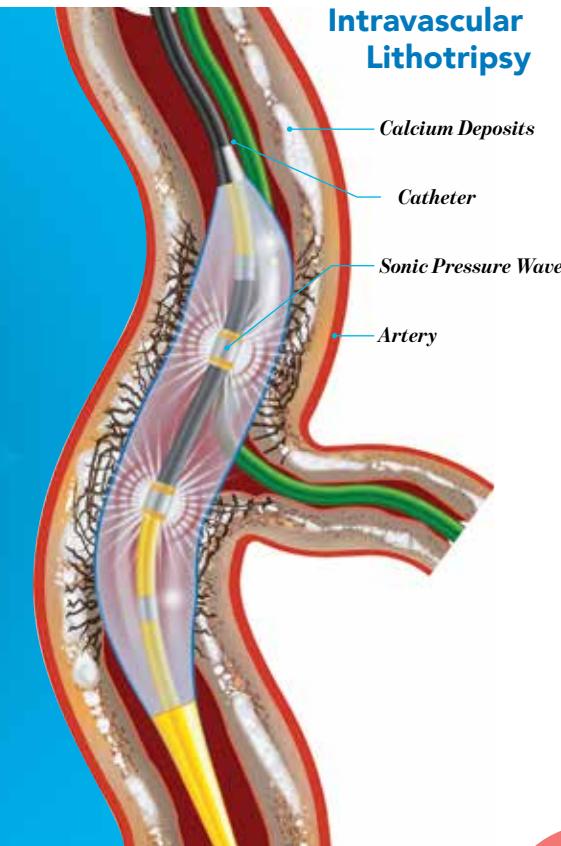
The minimally invasive procedure, which is done under local anesthesia, is performed in conjunction with angioplasty and stenting.

- **First**, the doctor introduces the catheter to the heart through a small incision in the patient’s arm or leg.

- **Then**, IVL emits pressure waves to break up the calcium deposits.

“One big advantage of the shockwave is that you’re not throwing the debris anywhere,” says Dr. Faraz.

After the IVL creates fractures in the calcium, the artery can successfully be expanded at low pressure with the angioplasty balloon. Then the stent can be implanted. “This procedure allows us to use the biggest stent we can the first time. And that should prevent patients from having to come back to the catheterization lab in the future. It’s really about getting the right result in the right patient the first time,” says Dr. Kiss. ☀



What's Your Risk for Heart Disease?

A coronary calcium scan is a specialized test that uses a computed tomography (CT) scan to get a detailed picture of your heart and measure any calcium buildup in the coronary arteries. Make an appointment to get your scan at HMHforU.org/CalciumScan.

Go Online

Learn more about comprehensive cardiac care, close to home, at HMHforU.org/Heart.



We offer a number of programs to help keep our communities healthy. Topics range from general wellness to heart health, stroke, cancer care, women's health and more. View some featured events below.

For a full listing or to register, visit HackensackMeridianHealth.org/Events or call 800-560-9990.

SchedUle

Here are just a few of the events & classes this February through April 2022



Cancer Care

Fresh Start Smoking Cessation This four-session program is available to help you quit smoking. Attendance is required at all four sessions.

Feb. 4, 11, 18 & 25, Mar. 4, 11, 18 & 25, Apr. 1, 4, 8 & 11, 10–11 a.m., Riverview Rechnitz Conference Center, 5th floor

Mar. 15, 17, 22 & 24, 6–7:30 p.m., Ocean Conference Room B, East Wing Conference Center

► **Thriving and Surviving Cancer Survivor Workshop** Stanford University six-week, evidence-based cancer support. Feb. 3, 10, 17 & 24 and Mar. 3 & 10, 1–3 p.m., virtual event

► **Stop Smoking With Hypnosis** Mar. 9, 7–8 p.m., virtual event

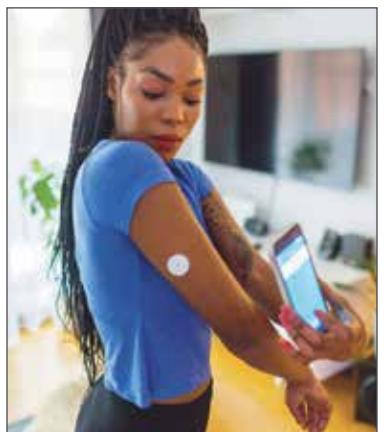
► **Prevention, Screening and Surveillance of Colon and Rectal Cancer** Learn the risk factors, prevention and treatment options for colon cancer and how early detection can save your life. Free colorectal take-home kits available during registration. Speaker: Steven Tizio, M.D. Mar. 9, 11 a.m.–noon, virtual event

► **Optimizing Well-being for the Patient With Cancer** Achieving a high level of well-being can be challenging for cancer survivors. David Leopold, M.D., will examine how nonpharmacologic interventions can play a role in improving well-being and quality of life for patients with cancer, at any stage of treatment, and for cancer survivors. Feb. 28, noon, virtual event

HOSPITAL LOCATIONS							
Bayshore Medical Center 727 North Beers St., Holmdel	Carrier Clinic and Blake Recovery Center 252 County Rd. 601 Belle Mead	Jersey Shore University Medical Center and K. Hovnanian Children's Hospital 1945 Route 33 Neptune	JFK University Medical Center 65 James St. Edison	Ocean University Medical Center 425 Jack Martin Blvd., Brick	Old Bridge Medical Center 1 Hospital Plaza Old Bridge	Raritan Bay Medical Center 530 New Brunswick Ave. Perth Amboy	Riverview Medical Center 1 Riverview Plaza Red Bank
							Southern Ocean Medical Center 1140 Route 72 West Manahawkin

Behavioral Health

Letting Go of Stress: How to Adapt, Cope & Thrive
Join Kelly Briggs, MBA, RN, NE-BC, and learn about types of stress, effective coping skills and relaxation techniques you can do to reduce stress.
Mar. 10, 6 p.m., virtual event



Diabetes

Complications of Diabetes Join our certified diabetes educator and learn how to manage your diabetes to prevent complications.

Feb. 10, 2 p.m., Riverview Booker Cancer Building, Community Room

Jersey Shore University Medical Center and K. Hovnanian Children's Hospital 1945 Route 33 Neptune	JFK University Medical Center 65 James St. Edison	Ocean University Medical Center 425 Jack Martin Blvd., Brick	Old Bridge Medical Center 1 Hospital Plaza Old Bridge	Raritan Bay Medical Center 530 New Brunswick Ave. Perth Amboy
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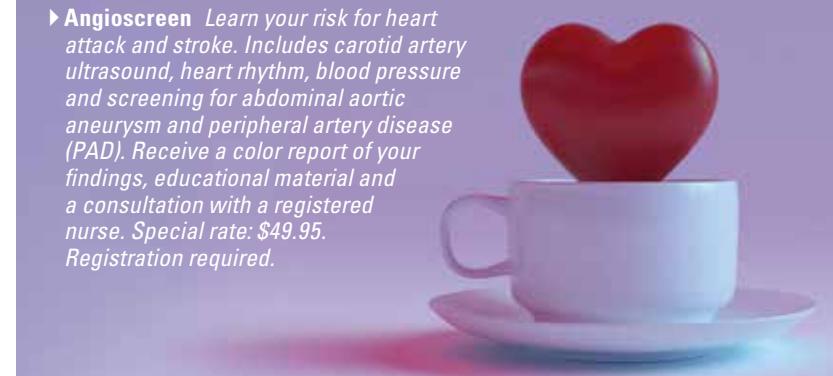
Heart Health

Joyful Heart Tea Join us for a cup of tea as we discuss ways women can keep their hearts healthy.

Feb. 15, 11 a.m.–noon, Brick Community Outreach Conference Center

► **Cooking with Heart** Join the food and nutrition team at Riverview, and learn all about keeping your heart healthy, as well as how to cook a heart-healthy meal! Live cooking demo. Feb. 17, 11 a.m., virtual event

► **Angioscreen** Learn your risk for heart attack and stroke. Includes carotid artery ultrasound, heart rhythm, blood pressure and screening for abdominal aortic aneurysm and peripheral artery disease (PAD). Receive a color report of your findings, educational material and a consultation with a registered nurse. Special rate: \$49.95. Registration required.



Neuroscience

Stroke: How Do I Know if I am at Risk? Join Tayla K. Fleming, M.D., FAAPMR, to learn what to do if someone is having a stroke, the signs/symptoms and special risk factors associated with communities of color.

Mar. 16, 2–3 p.m., virtual event

► **Integrative Medicine and Parkinson's Disease: Facts and Fiction** Feb. 10, 11 a.m., virtual event



Pediatrics

Safe Sitter Virtual Program Babysitter training for boys and girls ages 11–14. The class includes handling emergencies, childcare skills and first aid. Must attend both sessions. Fee: \$25.

Virtual event. Visit HackensackMeridianHealth.org/Events for upcoming dates

► **Safe at Home by Safe Sitter** Prepares students in grades 4–6 to be safe when they are home alone, including how to prevent unsafe situations and what to do when faced with dangers. Fee: \$10. Virtual event. Visit HackensackMeridianHealth.org/Events for upcoming dates

Parent/Guardian Talks:

► **Rheumatology** Join Anna Gironella, M.D., and learn the signs, symptoms and treatment options of different rheumatic diseases. Feb. 10, 12:30 p.m., virtual event

► **Helping Kids of All Ages Sleep Better** Join Stacey Elkhateeb Smidt, M.D., and learn about the importance of sleep for kids' health and tips for a better night's rest. Mar. 24, 12:30 p.m., virtual event

General Wellness

Weight-loss Surgery To learn more about weight-loss surgery, attend a free seminar.

To find a seminar near you, visit HackensackMeridianHealth.org/WeightLoss.

► **Living with Arthritis** Learn about the different types of arthritis, and diagnosis and treatment options. Mar. 4, 11:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m., Bay Ave. Community Center, 775 E. Bay Ave., Stafford Township

Funding Education

Barry and Carol Anne Cawley Weshnak's generous gift will fund a nursing position dedicated to substance use disorder services, as well as education for team members on behavioral health and addiction care.

For Point Pleasant, New Jersey, residents Barry and Carol Anne Cawley Weshnak, a casual post-checkup chat with their primary care doctor spurred a generous gift to boost behavioral health and addiction services at **Raritan Bay Medical Center**.

The grandparents of three and trustees of the Morris and Clara Weshnak Family Foundation—named for Barry's late parents—decided their latest pledge should recognize the stellar care they've received from **Mayer Ezer, M.D.**, the internal medicine program director at Raritan Bay and a steadfast behavioral health advocate.

Over three years, the couple's \$300,000 donation will fund a nursing position dedicated to substance use disorder services for patients and their families, as well as continuing education for staff on behavioral health and addiction care. "Like many, our family has had some addiction issues," says Barry, a real estate developer whose many charitable and civic affiliations include serving on the **K. Hovnanian Children's Hospital** Committee and the Corporate Realty Board. "Dr. Ezer is a part of these clinical efforts for Raritan Bay, and for that reason, we very much wanted to be part of it."

The Weshnaks' prior gifts to Hackensack Meridian Health have focused on services for youth, including \$350,000 toward the Pediatric Palliative Care Program at the Children's Hospital. They also fund an annual pediatric



Barry and Carol Anne Cawley Weshnak

nursing scholarship award, a nod to Carol's longtime profession as a registered nurse.

"Because so many addiction issues affect younger people, we feel this gift is in line with our family foundation's core mission: the health and education of children," Barry says. "There's a drug epidemic that's not going away, and it's adversely affecting the lives of numerous people, including many young people."

This awareness aligns with Dr. Ezer's passion for behavioral and addiction health. He hopes the newly created substance use disorder nursing position can educate staff members, including new doctors, "so they are more comfortable treating behavioral health and addiction issues," says Dr. Ezer, who is also associate professor and vice chair of medicine at Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine. "By educating providers, it multiplies the Weshnaks' gift."

Melissa Magyar, executive director of the Raritan Bay Medical Center Foundation, says donors like the Weshnaks allow Hackensack Meridian Health to invest in different priorities across the network. "This gift will help us provide additional resources for patients as they're on the road to finding additional support for treatment and recovery," she says. "Having this community support certainly helps us make a difference."

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