

HEALTH U

Transforming Cardiac Care

New advancements offer more treatment options and faster recovery *Page 22*



Hackensack
Meridian *Health*

**HOW TO GET
AN ACCURATE
BLOOD PRESSURE
READING AT HOME**

Page 14

**TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL
COLONOSCOPY PREP**

Page 16

**5 TIPS FOR MANAGING
CHRONIC PAIN**

Page 18

PARA LEER ESTA REVISTA EN ESPAÑOL,
VISITE [HMHforU.org/Spanish3](https://www.HMHforU.org/Spanish3)

Contents *Winter 2025*



22

Innovation *improving health care where it matters the most*

Transforming Cardiac Care

Advancements in heart care provide more treatment options and faster recovery.

HEALTH **U**

**ONLINE
EXCLUSIVES**



Are your kitchen pans making you sick? Learn more about the "Teflon flu" at HMHforU.org/TeflonFlu.



Is it the flu, COVID-19 or allergies? Learn how you can spot the differences at HMHforU.org/Symptoms.



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 Safe Shoveling Tips
Plus: A guide to heart-healthy eating | Embrace a digital detox in the new year | Lentil soup recipe | What's trending?

Doctor Spotlight

10 Get to Know Darshini Shah, M.D.
Family medicine doctor at Clark Health and Wellness Center Primary Care – Clark.

Spotlight on U health topics that matter the most to you

12 Your Knee Replacement Game Plan
Know what you should do before and after surgery. Plus: Avenel woman is ready to dance again after two knee replacements.

14 How Do You Know If You Have High Blood Pressure?
Learn how blood pressure affects your heart health. Plus: Does high blood pressure cause headaches and should you schedule a CT calcium scan?

16 Colonoscopy Prep 101
A colonoscopy is an important screening tool to help identify colon cancer.

18 Coping with Chronic Pain
Our expert offers five tips to manage your pain and improve quality of life.

19 5 Balance Exercises for Seniors
Discover simple exercises you can do at home to reduce your risk of falls.

20 Life After Ozempic
What you need to know about the decision to stop using weight loss injectables. Plus: Healthy hunger hacks to help you feel full longer.

Schedule event and class listings

24 Your Calendar for Winter 2025
Live and virtual events and classes you won't want to miss.

Foundation meaningful gifts from U

26 Therapy Horse Brings Healing and Comfort to Patients
Mike, a 14-year-old therapy horse, helps patients at Carrier Clinic through equine-assisted therapy.

By the Numbers a snapshot view of an important health issue

27 Finding Your Balance
Follow these tips to set health and wellness goals for the year ahead.

On the cover: iStock.com/Natali_Mis



Better Health for Women
Sign up for a six-week email series to guide you to better health! You will receive practical tips and information covering skin care, fitness, sleep, nutrition, managing stress and more.



When an injury happens, the next step isn't always clear. Find out when you actually need to go to the ER at [HMHforU.org/Emergency](https://www.hmhforu.org/emergency).



Tune in to our HealthU podcast!
For more details, visit [HMHforU.org/Podcast](https://www.hmhforu.org/podcast).

Visit [HMHforU.org](https://www.hmhforu.org) for these stories and other great health care content.



Care When and Where You Need It

When it comes to your health and the well-being of your loved ones, the choice of where you go for care truly matters. At Hackensack Meridian Health, we understand that your health care journey is personal, and we are here to support you and ensure you receive the best care every step of the way.

Our people are the heart of our success. We are proud to have a team of talented, compassionate providers who are deeply committed to the health and well-being of all who live and work in our communities. Many of our team members have been with us for years, building trust and meaningful connections with the patients and families they serve.

We believe that quality care should be available to everyone, no matter where they live and work or how busy they are. That's why we are making it easier than ever for patients to connect with the care they need, when they need it. Our new virtual care app, HMH 24/7, launched last fall and offers same-day virtual appointments for primary and urgent care services.

So if you can't get into an urgent care center or your regular doctor, you can use HMH 24/7 to video chat with a doctor 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. With HMH 24/7, you have access to physicians from the Hackensack Meridian Health network and a dedicated care team to support you before and after every visit. Spanish-speaking doctors are also available through the app. Learn more at [HMH247.org](https://hmh247.org).

This year, I invite you to experience the difference at Hackensack Meridian Health. When you choose us, you are choosing a partner that listens, innovates and works tirelessly to meet your needs. 🌟

Robert C. Garrett, FACHE, CEO
Hackensack Meridian Health



It's all about the team. Bob Garrett shares his pride in the Hackensack Meridian Health team as he visits with team members across the network (dogs included)!



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Better U

quick tips to help you live your healthiest life

INSIDE THIS SECTION

- 6 Tips for heart-healthy eating
- 6 Embrace a digital detox
- 7 Lentil soup recipe

Scoop Smarter, Not Harder

Smart tips for safe shoveling this winter.

Shoveling snow may seem like a routine winter task, but it can be an intense workout and pose serious health risks. Before heading out to clear your driveway, it's important to understand the potential risks and take necessary precautions. Our expert, **Craig Van Dien, M.D.**, a sports medicine specialist at **JFK University Medical Center**, shares advice on how to stay safe this winter.

Know the Risks

Shoveling snow may increase your risk of heart attack. If you have a heart condition, you shouldn't shovel snow without checking with your doctor. If you experience chest pain or difficulty breathing while shoveling snow, stop and seek medical care immediately.

Shoveling snow may be too intense for people who are not used to a high level of exercise. Think about hiring others to clear your driveway if you're at risk for heart attack.



Craig Van Dien, M.D.
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Edison



Tips for Safe Shoveling
Heading out to shovel? Follow these tips:

Warm up first, so you're ready to move and lift. A mix of cold weather and exercise may lead to increased risk of heart attack.

Work slowly, taking breaks as needed.

Dress in warm layers; remove a layer if you get too hot.

Shovel with someone else, if possible, to reduce the workload.

Don't twist your back while emptying your shovel; you may injure yourself.

Take small shovelfuls to avoid straining yourself.

Bend at the knees rather than curving your back.

Push snow out of the way with a shovel rather than lifting it.

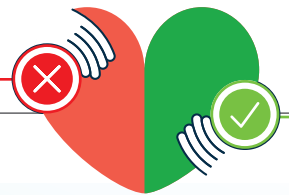
Wear rubber-soled boots or shoes.

Take small, slow, shuffling steps, bending your knees for extra stability.

Go Online

Schedule a heart screening to learn more about your risk of heart attack. Visit HMHforU.org/HeartScreening.

invincible_bulldog/Getty Images



Smart Food Choices for Heart Health

The key to heart health lies in making informed dietary choices. "Prevention is always more effective than treatment," emphasizes Dr. Sahni. "By making strategic food choices today, we can significantly reduce the risk of heart disease and add quality years to our lives."

Foods to limit:

- ▶ Fried foods
- ▶ Red meat
- ▶ Processed meats and foods

Foods to embrace:

- ▶ Avocados
- ▶ Nuts
- ▶ Olive oil

Heart-Healthy Eating

A cardiologist shares her guide to better nutrition.

We all know that fruits and vegetables promote overall well-being, but how exactly does our diet impact heart health? And what specific dietary choices can we make to keep our hearts healthy?

Leading interventional cardiologist **Sheila Sahni, M.D., FACC, FSCAI**, from **JFK University Medical Center**, shares her expert insights on the crucial connection between nutrition and heart health.



Sheila Sahni, M.D.

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Clark

The Heart-Diet Connection

"What many people don't realize is that heart disease is largely preventable through lifestyle choices, with nutrition being one of our most powerful tools," explains Dr. Sahni. "Every meal is an opportunity to invest in your heart's future. Think of your diet as a long-term investment in your cardiovascular health—the returns compound over time."

EMOTIONAL HARMONY *supporting your emotional and mental health*

Resetting for the New Year

Embrace a digital detox to improve your mental health.

Screens have become an integral part of our personal and professional lives. From smartphones to computers to TVs, we are constantly surrounded by digital devices.

It's important to understand how excessive screen time affects mental health and find ways to cut back. This new year, consider a digital detox to improve your well-being.

How Does Screen Time Affect Mental Health?

Vedavani Tiruveedhula, M.D., a psychiatrist at **Old Bridge Medical Center**, says that prolonged screen time can lead to various mental health challenges, including:

- ▶ Depression
- ▶ Anxiety
- ▶ Post traumatic stress disorder

What Are the Benefits of Reduced Screen Time?

Reducing screen time has numerous benefits for your mental health and overall well-being. Some of the main advantages include:

- ▶ Improved sleep
- ▶ Enhanced focus
- ▶ More real-life interactions
- ▶ Boosted mental health

Am I Spending Too Much Time Online or Watching TV?

Research doesn't point to fixed times, but there are certain signs or questions that can help you determine if you could benefit from turning off screens. To assess if your time online could be negatively affecting your well-being, ask yourself these questions:

- ▶ Am I spending more time online or watching TV than I intended?
- ▶ Am I sacrificing important real-world activities for time online or watching TV?
- ▶ Do I feel anxious, restless, nervous or irritable when stepping away from screens?
- ▶ Am I engaging in screen time at inappropriate times, like at work or during time with family or friends?

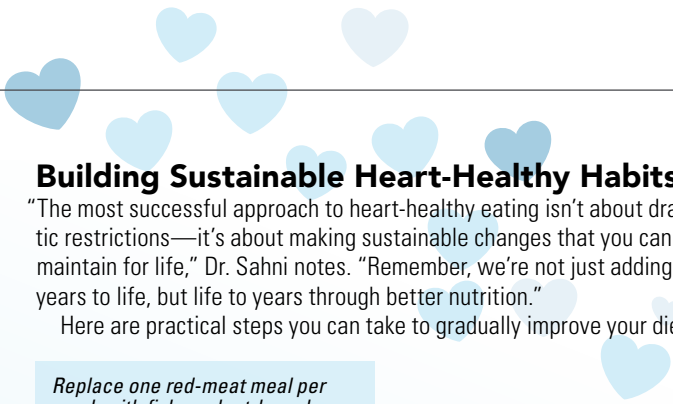


Vedavani Tiruveedhula, M.D.

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Old Bridge and Perth Amboy



Building Sustainable Heart-Healthy Habits

“The most successful approach to heart-healthy eating isn’t about drastic restrictions—it’s about making sustainable changes that you can maintain for life,” Dr. Sahni notes. “Remember, we’re not just adding years to life, but life to years through better nutrition.”

Here are practical steps you can take to gradually improve your diet:

Replace one red-meat meal per week with fish or plant-based alternatives

Gradually reduce added sugar (e.g., start by using one packet of sugar in your coffee instead of two)

Make smarter beverage choices by reducing soda intake or trying seltzer water or water with lemon

Switch from sugary cereals to healthier breakfast options like oatmeal or berries with low-sugar yogurt

Choose whole grains over refined grains by opting for brown rice instead of white rice or selecting quinoa over regular pasta

“Think of these dietary changes as a form of preventive medicine,” Dr. Sahni concludes. “Every heart-healthy choice you make today is a gift to your future self. The science is clear: Investing in your nutrition now can lead to decades of better heart health later.”

To find a cardiologist near you, visit HMHforU.org/HeartDoc.



How Can I Limit Screen Time?

Regain control of your digital habits to promote balance and self-control by:

- ▶ Limiting screen time to set hours of the day
- ▶ Designating device-free zones
- ▶ Establishing a daily routine
- ▶ Using app settings on your smartphone to monitor usage
- ▶ Participating in screen-free activities, like reading, exercise and face-to-face interactions
- ▶ Separating work and personal screen time

“Don’t forget to prioritize the basics: exercise and spending time outdoors,” Dr. Tiruveedhula says. “These are all proven to help improve one’s mental and physical health.”

To find a behavioral health doctor near you, visit HMHforU.org/MentalHealthDoc.



Portuguese Lentil Soup

Serves 6

Ingredients

- ½ pound spicy chicken sausage (about 3 links), sliced into ½-inch pieces
- 1 small onion, diced
- 1 cup lentils, picked over and rinsed
- 3 cups water
- 2 cups low-sodium chicken broth
- ½ bunch kale, collards or Swiss chard, with stems and center ribs discarded, sliced thin (about 2 cups)
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- Fresh ground black pepper

Preparation

- ❶ In a 3-quart heavy saucepan, brown sausage over moderate heat. Add onion and cook until soft and golden.
- ❷ Add lentils, water and broth and bring to a boil. Simmer covered, 30 minutes, or until lentils are almost tender.
- ❸ Add greens and simmer uncovered, about 10 minutes, until lentils are tender.
- ❹ Just before serving, add lemon juice and sprinkle with pepper to taste.

Nutritional Information

Per serving: 233 calories, 16g protein, 25g carbohydrate (11g fiber), 8g fat (2g sat, 6g mono/poly), 328mg sodium

Seasoned Cook

Take advantage of the vast array of winter greens, collards, Swiss chard and escarole in this easy-to-make soup. Make a large batch to enjoy leftovers, freeze or feed a crowd with a green salad and hearty bread.

Find more recipes at HMHforU.org/HealthyEating.

Should I be concerned about a mole?



Adity Bhattacharyya, M.D., weighs in:

What looks like a mole could be a serious melanoma skin cancer, so it's important to know what to look for.

Adity Bhattacharyya, M.D.

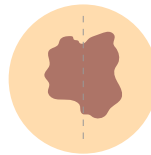
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Know Your 'A, B, C, D, Es'

When you notice a mole on your body, use these guidelines to determine if your mole may be dangerous. A biopsy will determine whether the mole is cancerous or not.



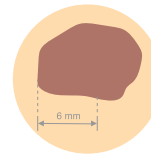
▶ **A = Asymmetrical shape:** Benign or noncancerous moles tend to be symmetrical, meaning each "half" matches the other.



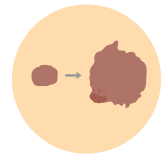
▶ **B = Border:** Benign moles have smooth edges, while melanoma edges can be ragged or uneven.



▶ **C = Color:** This varies, with black, brown, tan, or even white, gray, red, pink or blue. Changing color in a mole is also a concerning sign.



▶ **D = Diameter:** Size increases, with the majority larger than 6 millimeters or ¼-inch wide.



▶ **E = Evolving:** The mole has changed in some way recently. This could include a mole that has started bleeding or itching.

Learn more at [HMHforU.org/Moles](https://www.hmhforu.org/Moles).

How do you know if you are experiencing hearing loss?

Virginia Gural-Toth, AuD, CCC, weighs in:

There are many different signs of hearing loss. They include:

- ▶ Hearing but not understanding
- ▶ Understanding male voices more easily than female voices
- ▶ Difficulty hearing when there is background noise, such as at a restaurant or party
- ▶ Difficulty hearing the TV or radio
- ▶ Difficulty understanding when you can't see the person speaking
- ▶ Difficulty conversing on the phone
- ▶ People seem to mumble or talk too quickly
- ▶ Ringing (tinnitus), ear pain or fullness
- ▶ Frequently asking others to repeat themselves

Untreated hearing loss can lead to communication challenges, impact your quality of life and increase your risk of cognitive decline. If you're having trouble hearing, schedule a visit with an audiologist for hearing testing.

Learn more at [HMHforU.org/HearingLoss](https://www.hmhforu.org/HearingLoss).





Do sugar-free snacks live up to the health hype?

Ritu Anand, M.D., weighs in:

Many packaged foods advertise their sugar-free status, but does this mean they are healthy?

Sugar is essential for our bodies in the right amount. When we eat food, our bodies turn some of it into sugar. That sugar fuels our muscles, brain and organs.

If we eat more sugar than our bodies need to function, the extra turns into fat. Too much stored fat can cause health problems like heart disease and diabetes.

Artificial sweeteners like Stevia and Splenda can decrease calorie content of the food. Unfortunately, their health benefits are not clear, as they may adversely affect the gut microbiome. The best alternative is to decrease the sugar content of the food by making it less sweet or decrease the calorie content by making the portion size small.

Doctor-Approved, Sugar-Free Snacks

Choose snacks low in carbohydrates—especially if you want to lose weight. But don't just look at sugar content alone—a healthy snack should have no more than 18 grams of carbs per serving.



Ritu Anand, M.D.

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Try low-carb snacks, such as:

- ▶ One sugar-free popsicle
- ▶ 10 Goldfish crackers
- ▶ One string cheese stick
- ▶ ¼ cup dried fruit and nut mix (without candy or chocolate pieces)
- ▶ Two rice cakes with 1 tablespoon of peanut butter

Learn more at [HMHforU.org/Sugar](https://www.HMHforU.org/Sugar).

Should I take a daily aspirin to prevent a heart attack?

Brian Salata, M.D., weighs in:

A few years ago, the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force confidently updated its recommendations regarding the preventive use of aspirin. Adults over age 60 should no longer consider taking a daily aspirin to prevent a first heart attack or stroke. For adults age 40 to 59 with elevated risk for cardiovascular disease and no history of such conditions, the Task Force strongly recommends discussing the appropriateness of a daily low-dose aspirin with their doctor.

While aspirin effectively reduces the risk of a first heart attack or stroke, it can also pose potential risks, such as internal bleeding in the stomach, intestines and brain. The risk of these complications increases with age and can be life-threatening.

Individuals age 60 and older should not start a daily aspirin regimen unless they have already been taking it. However, if your doctor has prescribed low-dose aspirin due to a history of heart attack, stroke or other medical reasons, this guidance does not apply to you.

Learn more at [HMHforU.org/Aspirin](https://www.HMHforU.org/Aspirin).



Brian Salata, M.D.

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Doctor Spotlight

DARSHINI SHAH, M.D.

Family medicine doctor

Clark Health and Wellness Center
Primary Care – Clark

When family medicine specialist Darshini Shah, M.D., was growing up, she considered herself a tomboy who loved sports and was “quite competitive.” She played basketball, volleyball and ran track in high school, and says she watched every sport she could. This explains her approach to medicine as “one team.”

“If I wasn’t ‘5-foot small,’ I think I would have been in the WNBA,” she says. She left her hoop dreams behind to pursue a psychology major in undergraduate school, and then to obtain her Master of Business Administration (MBA) while receiving her Doctor of Medicine (M.D.) degree.

Now, Dr. Shah practices at Clark Health and Wellness Center Primary Care in Clark, New Jersey, and is affiliated with Hackensack Meridian Health **JFK University Medical Center**. Get to know her better here.

What do you do to welcome patients to your practice?

I want to make them feel comfortable and create a connection that includes reliability and trust. The word that always comes to mind is camaraderie. We are a team and we “tackle” things together. I emphasize that I want my patients to feel heard, because actively listening can make all the difference.

What’s your away time and home life like?

You might find me taking walks with my husband and our 10-month-old puppy, Ollie, who’s a Mini Bernedoodle—a cross between a Bernese Mountain Dog and Miniature Poodle. He’s kept our schedules busy in the best way!

You are a fan of exercise, yes?

Absolutely. I try to exercise three to four times a week for about 30 minutes. My favorite exercises include strength training, playing sports like pickleball and basketball, and running. I also



Darshini Shah, M.D., enjoys playing sports like pickleball and basketball as a form of exercise.

enjoy workout classes like Rumble Boxing, and I’ve been getting more into Pilates and loving it!

Who are two famous people you admire?

Being originally from Houston, there’s no doubt that one of them has to be Beyonce, and there’s an added bonus that she’s a female boss. Alternatively, if I could spend time playing a game of Horse with the late great Kobe Bryant, I’d love that. I’d love to ask him more about the “Mamba Mentality.”

Let’s talk travel. Where do you like to go and where would you like to visit?

I love creating comprehensive itineraries to make the most ideal trip so we can see all the sights

and eat all the bites. Being a foodie, bring on not only the Michelin-star restaurants, but also the hole-in-the-wall street food. My family is from Bombay, India, so I would love to go back to reconnect with my roots. I also want to visit New Zealand for its beautiful scenery and friendly people—home of happiness. 🌟



Make an appointment with Dr. Shah or a doctor near you today.

Spotlight on U

health topics that matter the most to you



Tread Carefully

Practice these tips to avoid slipping and falling on ice this winter.

Slipping while walking on ice is a leading cause of winter injuries that bring people to their doctors, including ankle sprains and fractures of the hip, wrist and elbow. **Jeffrey Charen, M.D.**, an orthopedic surgeon at **Old Bridge Medical Center** and **JFK University Medical Center**, shares tips to reduce your risk of falling during the winter months.

Walk Like a Penguin

If you find yourself having to walk over ice and there is no way around it, think of how penguins walk. Keeping your center of gravity low can help maintain your balance and decrease the chance that your feet will slide out from under you. Studies have shown that walking with a “marching” technique is a safe way to traverse icy areas. Here’s how:

Use short shuffling strides, lifting each leg from the thigh.

As you lift your leg, place your foot down flat rather than landing on your heel out in front of you. This will keep your center of gravity under you.

- ▶ Keep your hands out of your pockets to help you stay balanced.
- ▶ Avoid carrying heavy objects or bags while walking on ice.
- ▶ Wear proper footwear with good traction on the soles.
- ▶ When stepping into or out of your car, look where you are placing your feet and hold onto your car for support.

Learn How to Fall Safely

If you do slip on the ice, falling while keeping your body rigid increases the chance of injury, such as breaking your wrist while bracing your fall. Try to land on your side or shoulder and keep your body loose, allowing yourself to fall rather than trying to resist it. If you fall on your back, tuck your chin to keep your head from hitting the ground.



Jeffrey Charen, M.D.

Orthopedic surgeon

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Old Bridge and Edison

To learn more about orthopedics at Hackensack Meridian Health, visit HMHforU.org/Ortho.

ORTHOPEDICS

Your Knee Replacement Game Plan

Our expert shares what to do before and after knee replacement surgery.



Knee replacement surgery is one of the most common elective surgeries in the United States and has a high success rate.

What To Do Before Your Partial Knee or Full Knee Replacement Surgery

William Baione, M.D., a hip and knee orthopedic surgeon at **Old Bridge Medical Center**, says there are several items to coordinate and complete before your knee replacement procedure.

Get a physical exam and approval from your physician to verify that you can safely undergo anesthesia.

Attend a free preoperative education class to learn what to expect and how to ensure a successful knee replacement recovery.

Obtain pre-admission testing. If required, this appointment takes about an hour and can often be scheduled on the same day as your preoperative education class.

Line up support at home. Find a knee replacement ‘recovery coach,’ such as a family member or close friend who can help at home. Your coach can:

- ▶ Offer motivation and encouragement
- ▶ Help prepare your home for your safe return
- ▶ Help you understand discharge instructions and medications
- ▶ Look for signs of post-knee replacement complications or infection

Prepare your body by eating healthy, strengthening your muscles, quitting tobacco, stopping certain medications as directed by your physician and doing preoperative exercises provided by your orthopedic team.

What To Do After Your Knee Replacement Surgery

“Many patients get discharged to their home and start their recovery with outpatient rehabilitation or home care,” says Dr. Baione. “Make sure to follow your clinical team’s advice.”

Use assistive equipment. Your discharge planner (Care Management) will help you arrange for any necessary assistive equipment you may need, such as a walker, cane or crutches.

Don’t drive. While there is no specific time frame to begin driving after surgery, four to six weeks is average. So, you’ll need to coordinate transportation until your doctor gives you the go-ahead to drive again.

Follow your surgeon’s pain management instructions. As you have less knee pain and discomfort, you’ll decrease how many pain pills you take and how often you take them. Eventually, you will no longer need pain medication. Applying an ice pack to your knee for 20 minutes several times per day can also help the discomfort.

Line up a rehabilitation facility (if necessary). Your surgeon or provider will evaluate your progress and discuss whether you would benefit from rehabilitation services at a facility.

Complete outpatient physical therapy. A physical therapist will continue to focus on improving your knee’s motion, strength and mobility.

The ultimate goal is to help you live your healthiest life and get back to an active lifestyle, doing the things you love. ⚙️



Fosteen Brathwaite had both knees replaced, one in late 2023 and the other in early 2024. Her son, Jeremy, took time off work to help her recover.



Ready to Dance Again

After double knee replacement surgery, Fosteen Brathwaite is back on her feet and free from pain.

"I don't like to sit down," says Fosteen Brathwaite, 69, of Avenel, New Jersey. Before retiring 10 years ago, she spent 26 years on her feet at a residential care facility for individuals with developmental disabilities. "I'm a hard worker, and I was always on my feet."

It wasn't until she stopped working that she began noticing pain in her knees. For seven years, the arthritis in her knees was managed with conservative treatments, like "gel" shots, also called visco supplementation, into her knee joint. But by fall 2023, the pain was so intense, she says, "I couldn't deal with it anymore."

X-rays of her knees revealed the cartilage in her knee joints was gone, and she needed knee replacement surgery.

Ready for Knee Replacements

There are three basic things you need to be a good candidate for knee replacement surgery, says **William Baione, M.D.**, an orthopedic surgeon at **Old Bridge Medical Center** specializing in knee and hip replacement:

- ▶ You have severe arthritis visible on either X-ray or MRI.
- ▶ You've done conservative treatments that are no longer working for you.
- ▶ Pain affects your quality of life.

"By the time Fosteen came to see me," he says, "there wasn't much else to do but surgery."

"When Dr. Baione said I had to have surgery, I was scared because I didn't know what the outcome would be," Fosteen says. "But he made me feel so secure, and that safety is what I want with a doctor. You want to have confidence in the person who is going to touch your knee—or any part of your body."

Preparing for Knee Surgery

Both of Fosteen's knees needed replacement surgery, but Dr. Baione recommended each surgery be done separately.

"If you do one leg, you recover from that, and it literally gives you a good leg to stand on so that when you get to the second knee, you have a strong leg that you can rely on," he says. "You are also psychologically prepared because you've been through it and understand the process."

Fosteen had surgery on her right knee in October 2023 and on her left knee in January 2024 at Old Bridge Medical Center.

"Knee surgery is not something you can take lightly," Fosteen says. "You have to have the courage and the strength to push yourself. If you don't push yourself, you do it for nothing."

Following both surgeries, Fosteen received physical therapy at Old Bridge and at home. "My body is getting used to both knees now," she says. "I'm ready for my first dance and to feel free from pain. It is phenomenal."



Make an appointment with an orthopedic specialist.



William Baione, M.D.

Orthopedic surgeon

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Avenel



How Do You Know If You Have High Blood Pressure?

Understanding blood pressure and how to manage it can improve your heart health.

Blood pressure is a vital indicator of your overall health. It's the force exerted by circulating blood against the walls of your arteries. Abnormal blood pressure that is either too low or too high can lead to serious health issues.

How to Read Blood Pressure

Blood pressure is measured in millimeters of mercury (mmHg) and is recorded as two numbers: systolic and diastolic. The systolic number (displayed on top) represents the pressure in your arteries when your heart beats. The diastolic number (displayed on the bottom) measures the pressure in your arteries when your heart rests between beats.

What Is a Healthy Blood Pressure?

Regular monitoring is key to properly classifying and controlling blood pressure. Blood pressure categories help patients and doctors understand the risk levels associated with various readings. This can help guide recommendations for interventions and lifestyle adjustments.

Should You Schedule a CT Calcium Scan?

Amish Patel, D.O., a cardiologist at **JFK University Medical Center**, says the most common tests to help understand heart health include cardiac stress tests and PET scans. But an additional tool used in conjunction with these other tests is the CT calcium scan.

How Does a CT Calcium Scan Work?

CT calcium scans are painless imaging procedures. They take about 10 minutes to complete. They are outpatient procedures that do not use contrast dyes. An electron beam detects and measures the amount of calcium in the heart's arteries.


The results of the scan are given as a score. The more calcium that is present and evidence of artery thickening,

the higher the score. A higher score indicates a greater likelihood of developing heart disease or having a heart attack or stroke. For example, a score of zero means no calcium is seen in the heart; a score greater than 300 is a sign of severe disease and heart attack risk.

The body needs calcium to remain healthy, but calcium in the heart's arteries can be a sign that plaque is building up in coronary arteries and causing narrowing or blockages, which can increase risk of heart attack or stroke.

Who Should Get a CT Calcium Scan?

CT calcium scans may not be beneficial for everyone. The people who benefit most from them have a moderate



Amish Patel, D.O.
 Cardiologist
 800-756-1282
 Clark

Irina_Strelnikova/Getty Images

- ▶ **Normal blood pressure:** Less than 120/80 mmHg
- ▶ **Elevated blood pressure:** 120-129 systolic and less than 80 diastolic
- ▶ **Hypertension stage 1:** 130-139 systolic or 80-89 diastolic
- ▶ **Hypertension stage 2:** 140 or higher systolic or 90 or higher diastolic

How to Lower Blood Pressure

If you have high blood pressure, working to lower it is an essential step in reducing the risk of heart disease and stroke.

Achieving a healthier blood pressure involves making lifestyle changes and, in some cases, incorporating medication. While medication can be an effective tool, you can significantly influence your blood pressure by adopting these habits:

- ▶ **Eat a balanced diet.** Lower your sodium intake and avoid processed foods.
- ▶ **Exercise regularly.** This helps lower blood pressure with strength and aerobic exercise.
- ▶ **Maintain a healthy weight.** This helps lower blood pressure and reduce your risk of developing high blood pressure.
- ▶ **Manage stress.** Use relaxation techniques like yoga to prevent sustained elevated blood pressure.
- ▶ **Avoid smoking and using tobacco.** This helps prevent high blood pressure and other cardiovascular conditions.
- ▶ **Limit alcohol and caffeine.** Both substances can elevate blood pressure when frequently consumed. ⚙️

Go Online

Schedule a cardiovascular screening today at HMHforU.org/HeartScreening.

Can High Blood Pressure Cause Headaches?

High blood pressure, also known as hypertension, often has no noticeable symptoms; however, sometimes people do experience symptoms if the condition is severe enough.

It's better to learn that you have hypertension before you notice signs of it. Symptoms, such as headaches, often arise when the condition has been present for a long time or when the blood pressure becomes significantly elevated.

Brian Gerhardstein, M.D., Ph.D., a headache medicine specialist at **JFK University Medical Center**, warns patients not to wait for symptoms to arise before seeking care.

Various external factors may cause someone's blood pressure to rise temporarily. Common possibilities include:

- ▶ Eating foods high in salt
- ▶ Forgetting to take a blood pressure medication
- ▶ Getting angry or upset
- ▶ Experiencing stress or pain

While it isn't common for hypertension to cause headaches, sometimes headaches arise when there's a change in blood pressure in patients with hypertension, particularly when the blood pressure becomes elevated. If this occurs, seek immediate medical attention, as dangerously high blood pressure can cause serious problems like stroke or bleeding.



Brian Gerhardstein, M.D., Ph.D.

Headache medicine specialist

800-756-1282

Edison

For tips on managing your blood pressure, visit HMHforU.org/BloodPressure.

level of risk for heart disease. Common risk factors for heart disease include:

- ▶ Family history of heart disease
- ▶ Elevated cholesterol levels
- ▶ High blood pressure
- ▶ Diabetes
- ▶ Smoking
- ▶ Obesity
- ▶ Age

CT calcium scans are not recommended if you have few or no risk factors for heart disease, are at high risk for or already have heart disease, or have had a heart attack, stroke, bypass surgery or stents.

What Are the Benefits of a CT Calcium Scan?

CT calcium scans provide additional information for physicians and patients to use to make better personal care decisions, which is ultimately beneficial for long-term health, well-being and patient costs.

To learn more about assessing your risk for heart disease with a CT calcium scan and to schedule an appointment, visit HMHforU.org/CTScore.



Colonoscopy Prep 101

Getting a colonoscopy might not be at the top of your to-do list, but it's an important screening tool to help identify colon cancer, the third most common cancer in the U.S.

The American Cancer Society recommends that people begin getting colonoscopies at age 45, or sooner if they have unusual symptoms or risk factors, such as a family history or predisposing conditions.

The key to a successful colonoscopy is thorough preparation, using laxatives to cleanse and empty your bowel to make it easier for your doctor to see inside your colon and rectum.

Chintan Modi, M.D., a gastroenterologist at **JFK University Medical Center**, says that proper preparation ensures accurate results.

Bowel prep can be unpleasant, but it's important to follow your doctor's instructions. Otherwise, you may need to reschedule or repeat the test—and face the preparation process again.



Chintan Modi, M.D.

Gastroenterologist

800-756-1282

Edison

Choose Your Prep

There are several different laxatives available for colonoscopy prep. Most are liquid, though a pill option is also available. All require consuming a large volume of liquid.

The taste of the laxatives varies. Some have a slight lemon flavor, while others have no flavor but can be sweetened to improve the taste. If you get nauseated easily, tell your doctor so they can prescribe anti-nausea medication.

Some colonoscopy preps are not suited for patients with kidney or cardiac conditions. Your doctor will individualize your prep to ensure it doesn't impact your condition.

Plan for Success

Start planning your prep a few days before your colonoscopy. Make sure you have everything you need, including:

- ▶ The prep kit
- ▶ Approved flavorings or sweeteners to improve taste
- ▶ Clear liquids, such as clear broth, juices and popsicles
- ▶ Soft toilet paper or soothing wet wipes

Start reducing your fiber intake a few days before the procedure. Your doctor may also recommend avoiding certain foods, such as seeds and popcorn.

Time It Right

Stop eating solid food the day before your colonoscopy and switch to a clear liquid-only diet. Your doctor will direct you on when to take the laxative that day, depending on which one you're using and the time of your colonoscopy.

Taking the laxative might not be pleasant, but here are some tips to make it easier:

- ▶ Drink it through a straw
- ▶ Keep it chilled
- ▶ Mix it with a flavoring or add a sweetener
- ▶ Follow it up with a tasty clear liquid, a candy or a lemon wedge

After you take the laxative, you might experience cramps, gas and bloating. If you get nauseous, Dr. Modi recommends slowing down your intake to avoid vomiting.

Once the laxative starts working—anywhere from one to six hours—expect diarrhea and stay close to a bathroom.

It's important to contact your provider if you're experiencing problems such as vomiting or if the prep isn't having a laxative effect. They can troubleshoot the situation with you and may prescribe additional medication.

Stop drinking all liquids four hours before your procedure. When you finish your bowel prep, your stools should be a watery liquid. If they aren't, tell your doctor. 🌀

Scan the QR code to find out when you should be screened for colorectal cancer.



Coping with Chronic Pain

Chronic pain can negatively impact your quality of life. Our expert offers five tips to manage your pain.

No one wants to hurt, but almost 21 percent of American adults experience chronic pain, defined as lasting more than three months, whereas acute pain lasts three months or less.

Everyone's experience with pain is different and can be described in many ways such as throbbing, stinging, shooting, burning or aching.

Ronald Karnaugh, M.D., a fellowship-trained physical medicine and rehabilitation physician who specializes in interventional spine, pain medicine and sports medicine at the Hackensack Meridian Neuroscience Institute at **JFK University Medical Center**, recommends the following five tips for managing pain.



Ronald Karnaugh, M.D.

Interventional spine and sports medicine specialist

800-756-1282

Edison

1 Understand what type of pain you have.

Treatment depends upon the underlying cause of the pain, defined by these categories:

- ▶ Musculoskeletal
- ▶ Nerve or neuropathic
- ▶ Arthritic joints
- ▶ Spine pathology, such as a herniated disc or spinal stenosis
- ▶ Visceral or internal organ pain due to inflammation, disease, damage or injury
- ▶ Psychosomatic due to stress, anxiety or depression
- ▶ Cancer pain



Find a pain management specialist near you.

2 Determine the source and underlying cause of your pain.

A thorough medical history and physical exam are the most important tools to determine the cause of your pain and should assess how the pain affects your function and quality of life. Correlating the history and physical exam findings with pertinent imaging findings is key to making an accurate diagnosis to implement a highly specific treatment plan, such as an image guided injection procedure. Doctors may recommend diagnostic imaging tests, such as X-ray or MRI, to confirm the diagnosis and guide treatment.

3 Consider conservative and nonsurgical treatments first.

Prior to taking medications, these steps may help:

- ▶ Adjust your diet to lose weight
- ▶ Exercise
- ▶ Decrease alcohol consumption
- ▶ Quit smoking
- ▶ Try physical and occupational therapy
- ▶ Mindfulness

4 Ask about injections to decrease your pain.

Types of injections for chronic pain include:

- ▶ Joint injections
- ▶ Epidural steroid injections
- ▶ Nerve blocks
- ▶ Radiofrequency ablation

5 Discuss surgical options for pain relief.

“Most therapies and medications are not permanent solutions. Injection procedures for the correct diagnosis that are performed accurately can provide long-term relief,” says Dr. Karnaugh. “When it comes to chronic pain, our goal is to improve your quality of life and ability to do the activities you love.”

It may be time to consider surgical options if pain is unmanageable despite less invasive treatments, especially if you're experiencing neurological deficits (weakness, balance or bowel/bladder incontinence). ❄️

5 Balance Exercises for Seniors

Discover simple, effective exercises you can do at home to improve your stability and reduce your risk of falls.

We tend to think of good balance as a nice perk and not something that is vital to overall health. However, as we age, our balance deteriorates, and this can lead to health concerns. The good news is that just doing a few simple exercises can help keep you upright and steady.

Why Balance Matters

“When people age, they become less active, and this leads to weakness, which makes people less stable when they move,” says Lauren Karpinski, manager of the Health and Fitness Center at **JFK University Medical Center**. This weakness and lack of stability increases the likelihood of a fall, which could lead to serious health consequences, such as a broken hip or head injury.

How to Improve Balance

Your balance can be indirectly improved by strength training three to four nonconsecutive days per week. For those with good muscle tone, training to maintain muscles can be done twice per week.

However, balance-specific exercises can be done daily. Here are five exercises Lauren recommends to help improve your stability:

1 Closed Stance

Holding on to the back of a chair, stand as tall and straight as possible with your feet together.

2 Weight Shifts

Holding on to the back of a chair, stand with your feet about hip width apart, and shift your weight from side to side.

3 Single Leg Stance Hold

Holding on to the back of a chair, shift your weight onto one foot as you lift your other foot off the floor. Hold for a few seconds, then place your foot down and repeat on the other side. “Ideally you want to work up to holding each lift for 30 seconds or more,” Lauren says.

4 Tandem Stance Hold

Standing next to a chair, place your right foot in front with the toes of your left foot almost touching the heels of your right. Hold on to the chair for safety. Hold the position for 30 seconds. Switch your feet, stepping your right foot back.

5 Standing with Eyes Closed

Hold on to the back of a chair with your feet about shoulder width apart, and close your eyes.

How to Exercise Safely

Working to improve your balance is great, but it needs to be done in a safe environment.

- ▶ Have a clean, clear space. “There should be nothing on the floor in any direction for about three feet,” says Lauren.
- ▶ Use the back of a chair or a countertop for support.
- ▶ It’s best to do these exercises on a hardwood floor.
- ▶ “Also wear supportive shoes with rubber soles—no slippers,” Lauren says.

Additionally, talk to your doctor about any new exercise program you want to begin. If you are having balance issues, your doctor can verify that your problem isn’t caused by medication or vision problems. 🌟



Go Online

Visit [HMHforU.org/Geriatrics](https://www.hackensackmeridianhealth.org/geriatrics) to learn more about geriatric medicine at Hackensack Meridian Health.

Life After Ozempic

What you need to know about the decision to stop using weight loss injectables.

The list of programs, diets and methods of weight loss is endless. The latest trend is injectable medications.

The results can be remarkable, but weight loss drugs like Ozempic might not be something you want to take forever. Our weight loss expert explains what to expect when you stop taking Ozempic and how to maintain your new healthy weight.

What Is Ozempic, and How Does It Work?

Oluseun “Seun” Sowemimo, M.D., a bariatric surgeon at **Old Bridge Medical Center**, says that Ozempic is an injectable originally approved for those with diabetes. One positive side effect of the medication is weight loss.

Ozempic mimics a gastrointestinal hormone called GLP-1, which helps to reduce hunger and cravings. It also regulates insulin response.



Oluseun “Seun” Sowemimo, M.D.

Bariatric surgeon

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Freehold, Old Bridge and Jackson

Healthy Hunger Hacks

You don't need to eat processed foods to feel full.

Brian Fertig, M.D., an endocrinologist at **JFK University Medical Center**, shares healthy yet satisfying ways to ward off hunger and keep you feeling full longer.

Is Snacking Good or Not?

Aim for three full meals per day. But if you have diabetes or take diabetes medicine, you may benefit from light, healthy snacks between meals.

Blood sugar is less likely to spike if you strike a balance between three types of nutrients:

- ▶ Protein to satisfy your appetite
- ▶ Healthy fats for pleasure that won't fade fast
- ▶ Fiber to add bulk and slow transit time



Almonds Are a Superfood

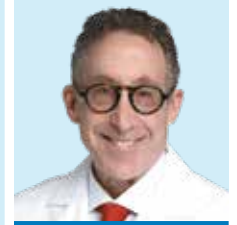
Almonds are loaded with calories. But that's not all. Just 1 ounce yields:

- ▶ 6 grams of protein
- ▶ 3.54 grams of dietary fiber
- ▶ 76 mg of bone-boosting calcium

What Other Healthy Foods Can Make You Feel Full?

Dr. Fertig recommends snacking on beans, peas and legumes, such as soybeans and black-eyed peas.

Try buying them frozen, cooking them in advance and throwing them in meals—including salads. Navy beans or chickpeas add nuttiness while green peas add sweetness. All deliver a fuller feeling.



Brian Fertig, M.D.

Endocrinologist

800-756-1282

Piscataway

For more healthy eating tips, visit [HMHforU.org/Nutrition](https://www.HMHforU.org/Nutrition).

What Happens When You Stop Ozempic?

Ozempic is injected once a week. So about a week after stopping the medicine, you will start to notice that your hunger and cravings will return. You won't feel as full for as long.

While Ozempic doesn't usually have withdrawal symptoms, people with type 2 diabetes may experience high blood sugar levels. This may lead to symptoms like:

- ▶ Excessive thirst and urination
- ▶ Fatigue
- ▶ Headaches
- ▶ Blurry vision

Due to the return of hunger and cravings, you may experience what has been called "Ozempic rebound." This is when you start to regain the weight you lost.

According to one study published in *Diabetes, Obesity and Metabolism*, stopping Ozempic or other weight loss drugs led to most of the weight being regained within one year. Studies like these show that obesity is a chronic disease that may need continued treatment.

But this rebound effect is not unique to Ozempic. It can happen with any weight loss tool you suddenly stop using.

Why Would You Stop Ozempic?

Ozempic has positive and proven results, so why would someone stop using it? Dr. Sowemimo says

there are generally four reasons you may need to stop using Ozempic:

- ▶ **Side effects.** About 15 percent of people have significant side effects. These generally include nausea, constipation or abdominal pain.
- ▶ **Shortage.** Ozempic is popular. The manufacturer cannot meet demand, so some pharmacies are running out and unable to fill prescriptions for it.
- ▶ **Achieved weight goal.** Once you've achieved your weight goal, you may no longer need the medication. However, you may need to continue the medication to maintain the goal weight.
- ▶ **Change in insurance coverage** for the medication.

How to Maintain Post-Ozempic Weight

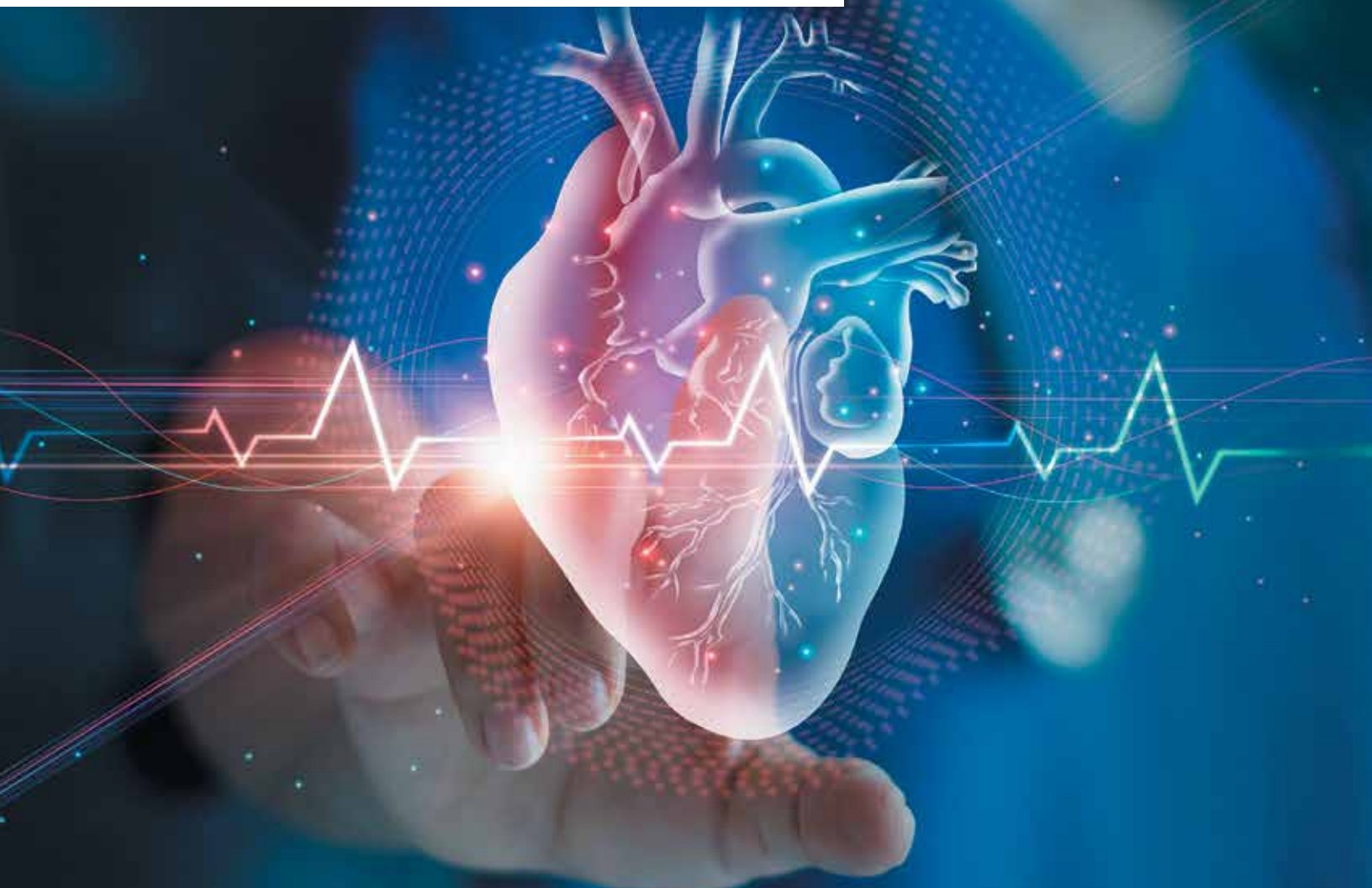
Just because you stop Ozempic doesn't mean you will gain the weight back. "Ozempic, like any weight loss program, also requires permanent lifestyle changes to maintain results," says Dr. Sowemimo.

While Ozempic may feel like magic, you need to put the work and effort in while you're on it, so when you stop, you can maintain a healthy weight. Try preparing by eating healthy foods and anticipating that you will feel more hunger and cravings. It is also advisable to try to slowly wean off the medication rather than stopping cold turkey.

Weight loss surgery is a safe, long-term solution for obesity that avoids weekly injections to maintain. This allows you to focus on making the necessary healthy lifestyle changes. ❄



Thinking about weight loss surgery? Take our health risk assessment to find out if you might be a candidate.



Transforming Cardiac Care

*Advancements in heart care provide more
treatment options and faster recovery.*

Across New Jersey, Hackensack Meridian Health is advancing cardiovascular care—offering new minimally invasive procedures, technology and clinical trials that improve patient outcomes.

“With three high-volume cardiac care hubs across the state, including Hackensack University Medical Center, JFK University Medical Center and Jersey Shore University Medical Center, everyone can access leading-edge cardiac care closer to where they live and work,” says Elizabeth A. Maiorana, MBA, MSN, R.N., vice president, Cardiovascular Care Transformation Services, Hackensack Meridian Health.

Leading New Jersey in Cardiac Surgery Options and Expertise

Hackensack University Medical Center has a longstanding reputation as one of the region’s highest-volume centers for minimally invasive cardiac surgery. The team’s experience and expertise have expanded into robotic cardiac surgery. This less-invasive technique for valve replacement or repair, and coronary artery bypass graft (CABG) surgery, provides new treatment options for patients with valvular heart and coronary artery disease.

“We evaluate each of our patients to determine whether they might be a candidate for minimally invasive cardiac surgery,” says Mark Anderson, M.D., chair of cardiac surgery at Hackensack University Medical Center. “Research has shown that with minimally invasive and robotic cardiac procedures, patients experience less trauma to the

body, which results in improved mobility and a faster recovery after surgery.”

Hackensack University Medical Center cardiac surgeons are leveraging the hospital’s robust robotic surgery capabilities and its history of early adoption and innovation to now offer robotic CABG and valve procedures for their cardiac surgical patients.

New Hope for Tricuspid Valve Disease

Until recently, the only treatment option for people with tricuspid valve disease was open heart surgery to repair or replace their valve. Patients who were too ill or frail to have open heart surgery—or who didn’t want to have an invasive procedure with a lengthy recovery—had no options at all.

In 2024, Hackensack Meridian Health began offering TriClip—a tiny clip inserted through a small incision that can now repair your tricuspid valve, avoiding open heart surgery. The procedure is offered at Hackensack University Medical Center and Jersey Shore University Medical Center.

In 2025, Jersey Shore University Medical Center and Hackensack University Medical Center will be among the first hospitals in the nation to offer the new EVOQUE device, which replaces the tricuspid valve using catheter-based techniques.

“As high-volume centers with extensive experience in catheter-based mitral valve repair and replacement, Jersey Shore University Medical Center and Hackensack University Medical Center were selected as

two of only a few sites in the U.S. to be part of the early commercial launch of EVOQUE,” says Matthew Saybolt, M.D., medical director of the Structural Heart Disease Program at Jersey Shore. “Our programs have the technology, capacity and infrastructure to support this innovative

new treatment option, and we are proud to be able to offer it to our patients before it becomes widely available.”

Renal Denervation: A New Frontier in High Blood Pressure Management

People who have high blood pressure that has not responded to other treatments now have access to a new treatment option called renal denervation (RDN).

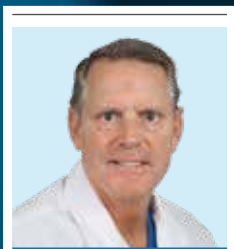
Recently approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the Symplicity Spyral™ RDN system is a minimally invasive procedure that targets nerves near the kidneys that can become overactive and cause high blood pressure. The procedure—also known as the Symplicity™ blood pressure procedure—is approved for use as an additional treatment in patients with high blood pressure when lifestyle changes and medications do not provide adequate control.

Hackensack University Medical Center cardiac experts treated their first patient with the Symplicity blood pressure procedure on July 30, 2024, and was the second hospital in New Jersey to provide the procedure. JFK University Medical Center performed its first case in November 2024, and Jersey Shore University Medical Center has launched its program.

“The Symplicity blood pressure procedure is clinically proven to help reduce hypertension, which can lower the risk of serious health problems,” says Saleem Husain, M.D., director of the Cardiac Cath Lab and Chest Pain medical director at JFK University Medical Center. “After mild sedation, we insert a very thin tube into the artery leading to the kidney. Then, we use radiofrequency energy to damage overactive nerves connected to the kidney before removing the tube, leaving no implant behind.”

“We look forward to offering an interventional therapy to help patients lower their blood pressure in addition to medicines, and perhaps help patients decrease their medication burden,” Dr. Saybolt says. 🌟

Learn more about our heart and vascular services at [HMHforU.org/HeartCare](https://www.HMHforU.org/HeartCare).

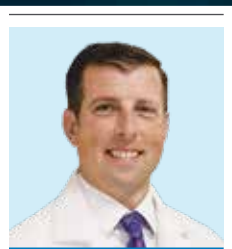


Mark Anderson, M.D.

Cardiac surgeon

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Hackensack and Edison



Matthew Saybolt, M.D.

Interventional cardiologist

800-756-1282

Eatontown, Freehold and Monroe Township



Saleem Husain, M.D.

Interventional cardiologist

800-756-1282

Plainfield



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 HMHforU.org/Events or call 800-756-1282.

SchedUle

Here are just a few of the events & classes this January 2025 through May 2025

Special Events

February is American Heart Month, which raises awareness about heart disease. Join us for our programs and learn how you can take steps to improve your heart health.

Is It Anxiety or Heart Attack?

Learn about the signs and symptoms of heart attack, the similarities between anxiety and heart attack and how you can differentiate between the two.

Feb. 11, 11 a.m.–noon, Edison Library, Clara Barton Branch, 141 Hoover Ave.

Heart-Healthy Eating Join our executive chef and registered dietitian as they provide a live cooking demonstration and discuss foods that can help your heart health and long-term healthy eating. Samples and recipes provided.

Feb. 13, 11 a.m.–12:30 p.m., Bayshore Medical Center

AngioScreen® Learn your risk for heart attack and stroke. Special rate: \$49.95. Registration required. Call for dates, times and locations.

Walk with a Doc Join our heart health expert as we stroll around the track to discuss the risk factors associated with hypertension and cholesterol and what we can do to better manage it.

Feb. 26, noon–1 p.m., Piscataway YMCA, 520 Hoes Ln.

Stress, Diet & Your Heart Join Marian VanDyck-Acquah, M.D., as she discusses how stress and diet can affect your heart and what you can do to make sure you are living a heart-healthy lifestyle.

Feb. 20, 6:30–7:30 p.m., virtual event

Joyful Heart Tea Learn how heart disease affects women differently than men, as well as signs, symptoms, risk factors, prevention and treatment options. Light refreshments provided.

Feb. 27, 2–3 p.m., Woodbridge Library, Henry Inman Branch, 607 Inman Ave., Colonia

Bayshore Medical Center
727 North Beers St.
Holmdel

Carrier Clinic and Blake Recovery Center
252 County Rd. 601
Belle Mead

Diabetes

Prediabetes Join our registered dietitians to learn the risk factors for diabetes and what you can do to prevent it.

Mar. 18, 10–11 a.m., PRAHD, 56 Brighton Ave., Perth Amboy

► **Understanding Diabetes and Diabetic Complications** Feb. 18, 11 a.m.–noon, The Center for Support, Success and Prosperity, 392 Smith St., Perth Amboy

► **Take Control of Your Health: Diabetes** Six-week evidence-based program. Wednesdays, Mar. 19–Apr. 23, 11:30 a.m.–1:30 p.m., Hansen Senior Housing, 415 Fayette St., Perth Amboy



Cancer Care

Colon Cancer Awareness Month
How Healthy Is Your Colon?

Glenn Parker, M.D., will discuss the risk factors and treatment options for colon cancer and how early detection can save your life. Free at-home colorectal screening kits available when you register.

Mar. 18, 6–7 p.m., virtual event

► **Pancreatic Cancer Speaker:** Gregory Tiesi, M.D. Feb. 13, noon–1 p.m., virtual event

► **Stop Smoking with Hypnosis** Mar. 12 and May 14, 7–8 p.m., virtual event

► **Hereditary Cancers Speaker:** Elias Obeid, M.D. Mar. 24, noon–1 p.m., virtual event

► **Head and Neck Cancer Awareness Speaker:** Matin Imanguli, M.D. Apr. 7, noon–1 p.m., virtual event

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

HOSPITAL LOCATIONS

Riverview Medical Center
1 Riverview Plaza
Red Bank

Southern Ocean Medical Center
1140 Route 72 West
Manahawkin



Pediatrics

Parent/Guardian Talks

Let's Sleep! Join Chee Chun Tan, M.D., Pakkay Ngai, M.D., and Stacey D. Elkhatib Smidt, M.D., and learn how to survive different sleep distractions such as daylight saving time, holidays, technology and more.
Feb. 27, noon–1 p.m., virtual event

▶ **Headaches and Seizures: What You Need to Know** Join Felicia Glikzman, D.O., and Rachel Penn, M.D., and learn about headaches and seizures, when to worry and how to get help.
Mar. 27, noon–1 p.m., virtual event

▶ **Understanding Applied Behavior Analysis for a New Autism Diagnosis** *Feb. 4 & April 1, noon–1 p.m., and May 6, 7–8 p.m., virtual events*

▶ **Maternity/Parenting Classes** To learn more about classes being offered near you, visit [HMHforU.org/MaternityEvents](https://www.hmhforu.org/MaternityEvents).

▶ **Safe Sitter** Visit [HMHforU.org/Events](https://www.hmhforu.org/Events) for upcoming dates. Fee \$40.

▶ **Safe at Home by Safe Sitter** Visit [HMHforU.org/Events](https://www.hmhforu.org/Events) for upcoming dates. Fee \$15.

Heart Health

Heart-Healthy Eating on a Budget Join our registered dietitian and learn how cooking for one can be fun, fast and affordable. Sample recipes provided.

Mar. 12, 1–2 p.m., Spotswood Office on Aging, 1 Arlington Ave. #401

Mar. 27, noon–1 p.m., Edison Library Main Branch, 341 Plainfield Ave.

▶ **Heart Failure and You** *Speaker: Jesus Almendral, M.D. Feb. 19, 5–6 p.m., virtual event*

▶ **Heart Health: Men vs. Women—What Are the Differences?** *Feb. 20, 12:30–1:30 p.m., Old Bridge Family YMCA, 1 Mannino Park Dr.; Mar. 28, 10–11 a.m., Sayreville Senior Center, 423 Main St.*

▶ **Women's Heart Health: Mediterranean and Dash Diets** *Apr. 12, 12:30–1:30 p.m., Old Bridge Family YMCA, 1 Mannino Park Dr.*



Neurosciences

Understanding Memory Loss: Keep Your Brain Sharp! Join us to learn more about memory loss and learn useful tips on how to keep your brain sharp.

Apr. 8, 10–11 a.m., PRAHD, 56 Brighton Ave., Perth Amboy

▶ **Stroke: Am I at Risk?** *Feb. 19, noon–1 p.m., PRAHD, 56 Brighton Ave., Perth Amboy; Mar. 10, 6–7 p.m., Sayreville Public Library, 1050 Washington Rd.; Apr. 16, 1–2 p.m., Spotswood Office on Aging, 1 Arlington Ave. #401*

▶ **Parkinson's and Sleep** *Apr. 14, 6–7 p.m., Sayreville Public Library, 1050 Washington Rd.*

Behavioral Health

Stress Management Join our team of experts to learn causes of increased stress and anxiety. Learn how to recognize distress and use effective coping skills and techniques to reduce stress.

Feb. 5, 11:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m., East Brunswick Senior Center, 3 Jean Walling, Civic Center Dr.

Feb. 10, 6–7 p.m., Sayreville Public Library, 1050 Washington Rd.

Mar. 3, 10–11 a.m., Perth Amboy Office on Aging, 1 Olive St.

▶ **Stress Less for Better Health** *Only open to seniors ages 65+.* *Jan. 30, 10:30–11:30 a.m., Edison Senior Center, 2963 Woodbridge Ave.*

▶ **Depression and Reiki** *Apr. 1, 1–2 p.m., Woodbridge Library, 1 George Frederick Plaza*

▶ **Holistic Healing for the Mind, Body and Soul** *Mar. 19, 6–7 p.m., Woodbridge High School, 1 Samuel Lupu Pl.*

General Wellness

Free Health & Wellness Screenings Blood pressure, cholesterol, glucose, pulse, body mass index and stroke risk assessment (all non-fasting).

Feb. 25, noon–2 p.m., The Center for Support, Success and Prosperity, 392 Smith St., Perth Amboy

Feb. 25, 10 a.m.–1 p.m., East Brunswick Public Library, 2 Jean Walling, Civic Center Dr.

Mar. 19, 8–11 a.m., Old Bridge Family YMCA, 1 Mannino Park Dr.

Mar. 28, 10 a.m.–1 p.m., Sayreville Senior Center, 423 Main St.

Apr. 24, 10 a.m.–1 p.m., Perth Amboy Office on Aging, 1 Olive St.

Fall Prevention and Balance Screenings

Mar. 5, 12:30–2 p.m., James J. Cullen Center, 1776 Union Ave., Hazlet

Apr. 10, 11:30 a.m.–1:30 p.m., Hansen Senior Housing, 415 Fayette St., Perth Amboy

▶ **Understanding Advance Directives** *Mar. 13, 10:30–11:30 a.m., Edison Senior Center, 2963 Woodbridge Ave.*

▶ **All About Dieting—What's the Best Approach for Me?** *Mar. 27, 1–2 p.m., Woodbridge Public Library, 1 George Frederick Plaza*

▶ **Exercising 101: How to Get Started** *Apr. 24, 10–11 a.m., Perth Amboy Office on Aging, 1 Olive St.*



Therapy Horse Brings Healing and Comfort to Patients

Thanks to a generous donation, Mike, a gentle 14-year-old therapy horse, is helping patients at Carrier Clinic through equine-assisted therapy.

One of Hackensack Meridian *Health's* newest hires seems to be fitting in just fine. He gets along great with team members and patients at **Carrier Clinic**, which provides mental health and addiction treatment. In fact, Mike, the 14-year-old quarter horse donated by a family in Chester County, Pennsylvania, might just be a model employee.

"Mike is the perfect therapy animal ... he's way past gentle," says Ravenell Williams IV, the barn care coordinator at the Belle Mead campus.

To expand its equine therapy sessions for patients, Mike was chosen to join the Carrier Equine Assisted Therapy program in summer 2024 after team members reviewed a number of candidates, visiting the horses and assessing their temperaments.

The donor family gifted Mike to Carrier, where he now resides in the barn on the southwest end of the campus along with another horse, two miniature donkeys and two goats.

The therapy horses aren't ridden, rather clients interact with them in different ways, helping to groom, feed and lead the animals. Equine-assisted therapy is thought to provide a calming effect and help with a

variety of mental health and behavioral issues, including addiction, anxiety and depression.

Working with horses also helps build confidence and trust in the adolescents and adults who participate at Carrier. "Mike has the personality to be a therapy animal. He's very affectionate," Ravenell says.

Mike is in his prime, and the generosity of the donor family provides the opportunity to offer equine-assisted therapy to more patients and residents.

"Philanthropy has been important in helping Carrier offer nontraditional therapies that can't be billed through insurance," says Michael Loch, director of development for behavioral health at Hackensack Meridian *Health Foundation*.

"Having a horse for our program allows us to offer unique therapeutic experiences that complement traditional mental health treatments. It's what differentiates Carrier. We're able to provide a holistic approach to therapy," he says.

We know that Mike the horse will help many patients at Carrier Clinic and wish him the best of luck at his important role! 🌟



Be the Difference. In 2024, the Hackensack Meridian *Health Foundation* launched the Be The Difference campaign, with a \$1 billion goal to transform health care to meet the needs of the patients of today and tomorrow. Make a gift to Be The Difference and support high-quality care for your family, friends and neighbors. Every dollar helps.

Finding Your Balance

Maintaining a balanced lifestyle takes intention. Use these tips to set health and wellness goals for the year ahead.



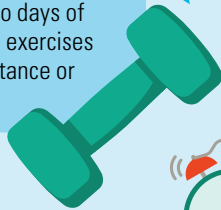
30 Minutes of Exercise

Adults should complete at least **30 minutes** of physical activity, five days per week, or **150 minutes weekly**.

3 Moderate-Intensity Activities to Try

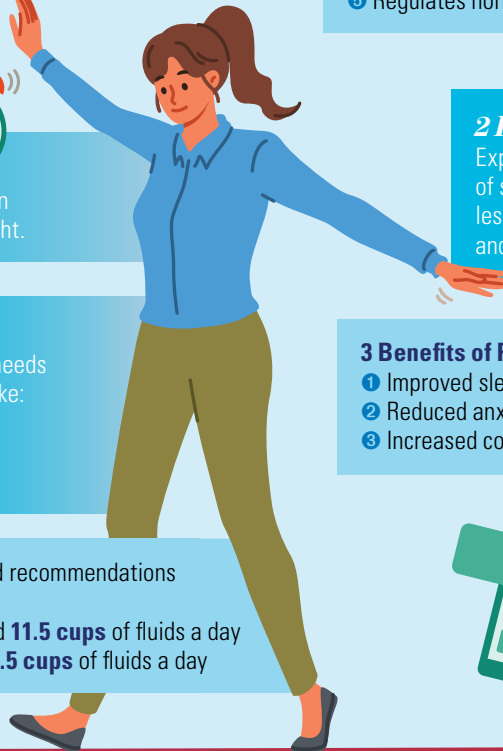
- ▶ Walking
- ▶ Swimming
- ▶ Biking

For a balanced workout routine, try adding at least two days of muscle strengthening exercises a week, such as resistance or weight training.



Rest and Recharge

The amount of sleep each person needs depends on their age. Adults should get **7 or more hours** a night.

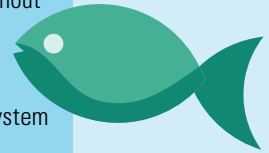


1-2 Servings of Protein

Try to eat one to two servings, or **5 ½ ounces**, of protein a day. Get creative with eggs, chicken, fish, beans and low-fat yogurt.

5 Functions of Protein

- 1 Builds and repairs bones, tissues, hair and skin
- 2 Carries nutrients throughout the body
- 3 Aids digestion with enzyme creation
- 4 Supports the immune system
- 5 Regulates hormones



2 Hours of Screen Time

Experts recommend, at most, **two hours** of screen time a day outside of work, and less is better. Try using screen-time limits and reminders built into your devices.

3 Benefits of Reduced Screen Time

- 1 Improved sleep
- 2 Reduced anxiety and depression
- 3 Increased concentration



Fill Up on Fluids

How much water your body needs depends on various factors like:

- ▶ Activity level
- ▶ Environment
- ▶ Health

However, standard recommendations are as follows:

- ▶ **Women:** Around **11.5 cups** of fluids a day
- ▶ **Men:** Around **15.5 cups** of fluids a day



Go Online

Timely health screenings are an important part of the wellness equation. Find a convenient time to get age-appropriate screenings with one of our primary care providers at [HMHforU.org/PrimaryCare](https://www.HMHforU.org/PrimaryCare).



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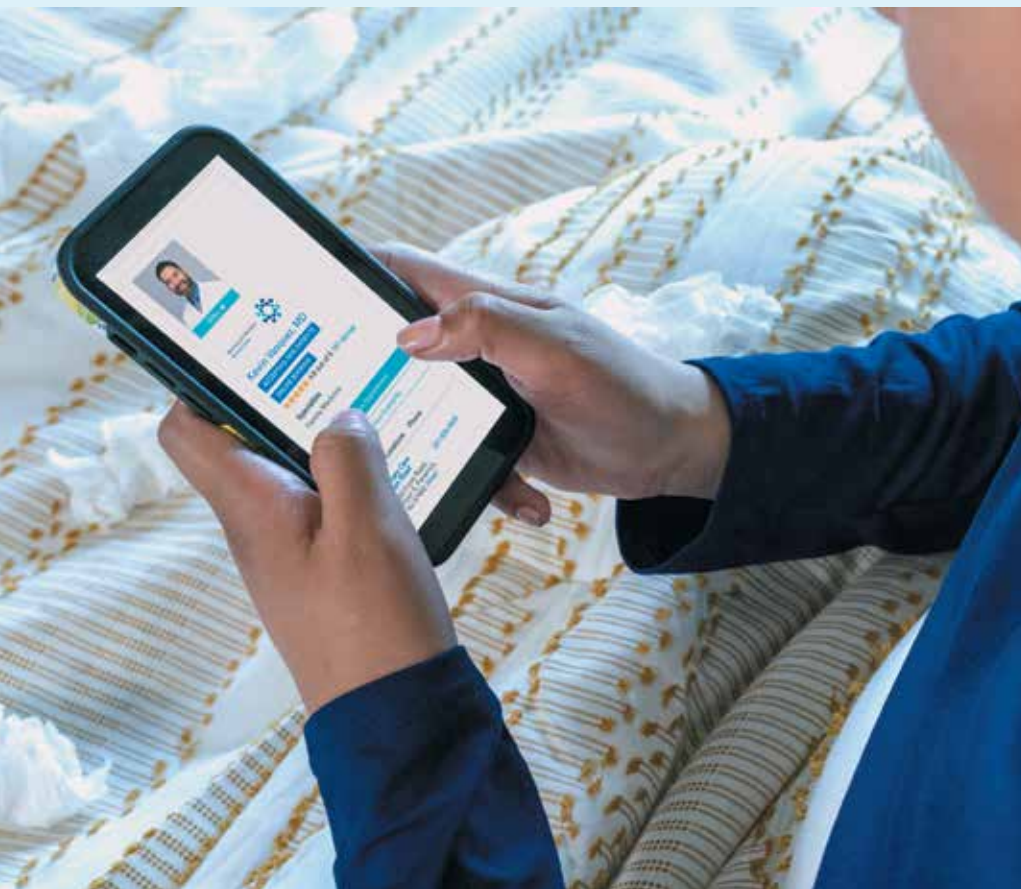
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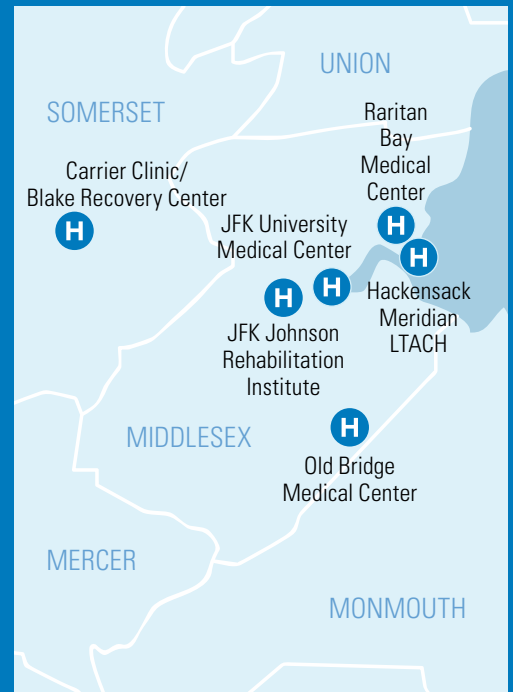
SCHEDULING ON YOUR SCHEDULE FEELS BETTER.

Online appointment scheduling now available.



As the state's largest, most comprehensive health network, Hackensack Meridian Health is made up of 7,000 physicians, 18 hospitals and more than 500 locations.

Our hospitals near you:



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