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PARA LEER ESTA REVISTA EN ESPAÑOL, VISITE HMHforU.org/Spanish2
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Are you at risk for heart disease? Take our quiz and find out: HMHforU.org/HeartQuiz.

Learn how to prepare for your next doctor’s appointment and download a helpful checklist at HMHforU.org/Prepare.

Why do your ears feel clogged? Find four common causes and treatments at HMHforU.org/CloggedEars.

Tune in to our HealthU podcast!
For more details, visit HMHforU.org/Podcast.

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HealthU is a 2022 APEX Award winner and a 2021 Content Marketing Awards finalist.
Hi.
welcome to this issue of HealthU

Let’s Hear It for the Moms

One day a year is hardly enough to celebrate the mothers with whom my family has been blessed, and I am sure many of you feel the same way. Still, this May, we’ll stop to show our immense gratitude to the moms—birth mothers, adoptive mothers, foster mothers, grandparents, stand-in mothers and mother figures alike—who have impacted every corner of our lives.

Unfortunately, even though moms are largely the health care decision makers for their families, we know they often put off care for themselves. We believe in the airplane adage: You’ve got to put first on your own oxygen mask before you can help others. We encourage all moms to prioritize their own health through healthy eating, exercise and staying up to date on medical appointments and screenings.

In this issue, you can find simple tips for fitting meditation into a busy schedule (see page 6). You can also find an easy five-step recipe for chicken and red rice on page 7 to make any night of the week. Visit HMHforU.org for even more health tips and inspiration.

We’ve also made it easier than ever to get caught up on screenings and appointments. Schedule an appointment online—on the go, any day, any time—at HMHforU.org/Appointment.

Robert C. Garrett, FACHE, CEO Hackensack Meridian Health

At Hackensack Meridian Health, one of the ways we honor mothers is by providing high-quality maternal care that ensures the good health of the mother as well as her newborn. We believe maternal health is particularly important because of the far-reaching impact it has on all families and communities. We are committed to the work of addressing racial and ethnic disparities by using data-driven strategies, improving cultural competencies and reducing inherent bias.

Hackensack Meridian Health has reduced the percentage of C-sections by nearly 40 percent over the past few years throughout the network. Our work to deliver exceptional standards in maternal care was recently recognized by The Joint Commission. Hackensack University Medical Center is the first hospital in the nation to earn The Joint Commission’s Gold Seal of Approval® for Advanced Certification in Perinatal Care, which honors a health care organization’s commitment to providing safe, high-quality patient care.

To all moms and mother figures, whether just at the start of your parenting journey or years into it, thank you for your selflessness, your unrelenting care and your priceless guidance. Happy Mother’s Day!

Running 101

Whether you are new to running or training for your first marathon, get off on the right foot by avoiding common running injuries.

Heed these six tips from Jason Nitche, M.D., orthopaedic surgeon at Southern Ocean Medical Center and Ocean University Medical Center.

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Brick and Forked River

Use the 10 percent rule. Beginners often start running too fast, too early in their run, which often leads to injuries like runner’s knee, shin splints or muscle pull. Increase your weekly mileage in increments of 10 percent. If you are running 10 miles a week, you can increase your mileage by 1 mile each week.

Wear the right running shoes. Wearing the wrong size shoe or worn-out running shoes is one of the most common causes of running injuries. Dr. Nitche recommends going to your local running shoe store and getting fitted by an expert.

Focus on good nutrition. A good nutrition plan will help increase your energy level, prevent dehydration and optimize your recovery time. Carbohydrates, protein and fat are important in a runner’s diet. Dr. Nitche also recommends eating carbohydrate snacks an hour before your run, which will fuel your body.

Stay hydrated. Drinking too much water can lead to stomach slosh, while drinking too little water can lead to dehydration. In general, it is recommended to drink 84 ounces of water every day. Drink water an hour before you run, and if you are running long distances, take a small sip of water every 20 minutes to keep hydrated.

Don’t run through pain. When in pain or discomfort, Dr. Nitche recommends rest, ice, compression and elevation (RICE). Take three days off and consider substituting running with walking or light walking for a while. If you’re not feeling better in two weeks, it’s time to see the doctor.

Warm up before your run. Warming up prepares your body for running, reducing the risk of injury. One of the best forms of warming up is dynamic stretching, which involves active movement of joints and muscles to their full range.

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Runners should listen to their body and consider substituting running with walking or light walking for a while. If you’re not feeling better in two weeks, it’s time to see the doctor.

The 10 percent rule is a good way to increase your weekly mileage. Beginners often start running too fast, too early in their run, which often leads to injuries like runner’s knee, shin splints or muscle pull. Increase your weekly mileage in increments of 10 percent. If you are running 10 miles a week, you can increase your mileage by 1 mile each week.

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Don’t Wait ... Meditate

Five tips to help you fit meditation into a busy schedule.

The idea of meditating during a busy day may seem unrealistic. But the busier you are, the more you may need meditation. "Meditation can reduce stress levels, improve sleep quality, control anxiety, decrease blood pressure and more," says Caroline V. Santoro, BSN, RN, INBN BC, registered nurse at Bayshore Medical Center. "Meditation is a simple practice that can be done anywhere, anytime. You don't need special tools or a place to meditate. All you need is a few minutes from your day."

Here are five ways to squeeze meditation into your daily schedule:

Get up and meditate. The best time to meditate is as soon as you wake up—even if it’s just for five minutes. You might want to set an alarm a little earlier to squeeze this into your daily routine.

Schedule a meeting with yourself. Schedule a 10-minute meditation break for your calendar or take 10 minutes during your lunch break. You can enjoy it at your desk or workspace.

Meditate while waiting. Instead of grabbing your phone and scrolling through social media apps, meditate while waiting at a doctor’s office or in line at the grocery store.

Meditate while commuting. If you take public transportation, putting on your headphones and making use of guided meditation during your commute can be an amazing way to relax before you start your busy day or come home. If you drive to work, take an extra five minutes in the parking lot to use the drive-way to center yourself.

Meditate before bed. If you struggle to find time to meditate during the day, practice meditation before sleeping at night. Night is the perfect time to quiet your mind and body. As a result, you’ll get better sleep.

Take Your Meditation to the Next Level

Use guided meditations to help. There are several apps that offer free guided meditation for beginners.

Don’t worry about how long you should meditate; focus on being consistent and practicing daily. It’s OK for thoughts to enter your mind while meditating. Don’t get discouraged; just keep going.

Start with short meditations and gradually build up over time. It’s OK to meditate for just two minutes. Once you feel comfortable, gradually increase your sessions.

How Long Are Leftovers Good?

After a big meal or party, it’s common to snack on leftovers in the days following. However, leftovers should only be eaten for three to four days after initial preparation. Any longer and you may increase your risk of contracting a foodborne illness, such as salmonella, E. coli or listeria.

We talked to Karen Campbell, RD, CDCES, dietician at Bayshore Medical Center, about best practices for eating leftover food. Here’s what she had to say:

The “sniff test” doesn’t work. After three to four days, bacteria in food can rise to dangerous levels. Many times the bacteria won’t alter the look, taste or smell of the leftover food, so it can be difficult to tell if it’s still safe to eat.

Pathogens grow quickly when food is left at room temperature. Don’t leave food out at room-temperature for more than two hours. Use chafing dishes or cool plates to keep food at the right temperature for longer.

Hot food (over 90 degrees F) should not be left out for more than one hour. It should be refrigerated to 40 degrees F or below within an hour. In the danger zone temperature range between 40–140 degrees F, potentially harmful bacteria can grow.

Freeze leftovers to make them last. If you’re not able to eat your leftovers within three to four days, freeze them. You’ll have much more time to enjoy the food, typically three to four months.

Freeze food in single-serve portions. You may be more likely to eat your leftovers if meals are quick and easy to defrost.

Chicken with Red Rice and Spice

Ingredients

- 1 cup brown rice
- 1 14-ounce can low-sodium chicken broth, divided (1 cup, 1/2 cup)
- 1 cup water
- 1/2 cup tomato sauce (1/2 of an 8-ounce can)
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 3 garlic cloves, chopped
- 1 large green bell pepper, cut into bite-sized pieces
- 2 large red bell peppers, cut into bite-sized pieces
- 1/2 teaspoons paprika
- 1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper, or more to taste
- 1/2 teaspoons dried oregano
- 1 cup frozen peas, thawed
- 12 oz. skinless, boneless chicken breast, cut into bite-sized pieces
- Black pepper to taste

Steps

Serves 4

- Cook brown rice in 1 cup of the chicken broth, water and tomato sauce for 40–45 minutes, until rice is tender and liquid is absorbed.
- While the rice is cooking, heat oil in a large nonstick skillet. Sauté onions and garlic until translucent.
- Add chicken, bell peppers, paprika, cayenne pepper and oregano to skillet. Add 1/2 cup chicken broth, cover pan and cook 15 minutes, until chicken is cooked through and vegetables are tender.
- Stir in cooked rice, adding a little more of the remaining chicken broth if the mixture seems dry. Adjust seasonings to taste.
- Stir peas into chicken and rice, and cook just until peas are heated through, about two minutes longer.

Nutritional Information

Per serving: 379 calories, 27g protein, 52g carbohydrate (7g fiber), 6g fat (1g sat, 5g mon/poly), 416mg sodium

Seasoned Cook

Make extra servings to have leftovers the next day. Serve with fruit salad, which is a refreshing contrast to the spicy chicken.

Find more recipes and tips for healthy eating at HMHforU.org/HealthyEating
Are canned foods healthy?
Robert Hildebrandt, RDN, CDCES, weighs in:
Canned foods definitely can be healthy and a great way to get key nutrients. Just be mindful to read the nutrition fact labels and look out for extra sodium and added sugars.

How can I manage my spring allergies?
Sonia Guirguis, M.D., weighs in:
Pollen is often the perpetrator behind spring allergy symptoms. These light, dry granules easily find their way to your sinuses, lungs and eyes, making them hard to avoid. Here are some tips that can help:

- Check daily pollen count, and stay indoors when it is high.
- Pollen count varies throughout the day and is usually higher in the morning. So skip that morning walk and instead venture outdoors in the late afternoon.
- Take a shower immediately after working or playing outdoors. This will reduce the spread of pollen on your couch, on your bed and in other common areas in your home.
- Wear a hat and sunglasses outside. A hat and sunglasses will protect your face and eyes from pollen in the air.
- Keep your windows closed. Instead of opening your windows, turn on your air conditioner to circulate the air. This is also recommended in the car.

How do I know if I have a pinched nerve?
Anthony G. Conte, M.D., weighs in:
If you have a pinched nerve, you may experience sudden or progressive pain that can involve your back and radiate down your arms or legs, as well as weakness or numbness. To determine whether you have a pinched nerve or something else, speak with a primary care doctor, neurologist or neurosurgeon. The doctor will ask you questions about your pain and medical history, and do a physical examination to determine if you have a pinched nerve or another issue.

If your doctor suspects a pinched nerve, you will have an MRI, a type of imaging that can highlight where the nerve might be compressed. The pain could be happening for a variety of reasons including peripheral neuropathy, disc herniation or arthritic changes in the spine. Your doctor will look for focused areas of weakness and correlate these areas with the associated nerves, as well as rule out other conditions before diagnosing a pinched nerve.

Does marijuana smoke cause cancer?
Ziad Hanhan, M.D., weighs in:
While researchers are unsure if marijuana smoke causes lung cancer, it undeniably destroys the protective lining of the airway and suppresses the immune system.

Smoke is harmful to lung health—whether from cigarettes, joints or fireplaces—because toxins enter the lungs. Marijuana smokers tend to inhale deeply, which leads to greater exposure to tar. In addition, many of the same toxins in cigarette smoke have been found in cannabis smoke.

Although population-based studies have not shown a direct link between marijuana smoke and lung cancer, it is unequivocally harmful to lung health. With worldwide epidemics and local respiratory illnesses affecting the lungs, it would be beneficial to avoid inhaled smoke in any variety.

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Doctor Spotlight

Emmet Fenichel, M.D., began surfing at age 11. He has surfed all over the world, including in Australia, Morocco and Ireland.

EMMET FENICHEL, M.D.
Primary Care
Hackensack Meridian Medical Group
Primary Care–Point Pleasant

Seeing a patient who hasn’t been to a doctor in decades presents a welcome challenge for Emmet Fenichel, M.D., a primary care doctor at Hackensack Meridian Medical Group Primary Care–Point Pleasant.

“I want to be sure patients are comfortable, and I try to be relatable, so they don’t think I’m just like a robot,” he says. “I try to use my sense of humor to increase their comfort level. Communication is important in any relationship—especially that of a doctor and patient.”

He recalls seeing a doctor when he was 14 years old whom he thought was insensitive. “You see patients in their most vulnerable state, and that discussion can leave a lasting impact,” Dr. Fenichel says. “I try to be a good, empathetic doctor who’s also up-to-date on the latest research.”

When did you decide medicine might be for you?

My experience lifeguarding when I was growing up influenced me, and it made me realize I really wanted to help people. I also looked up to both my father and grandfather who were in medicine.

Tell us about that family history in medicine.

My grandfather served during World War II as a doctor at a prisoner of war hospital in Belgium. He also taught residents and practiced radiology in Philadelphia. My father is a dermatologist who practiced in Absecon, New Jersey.

As a veteran surfer, where have you surfed?

I began surfing at age 11. My current New Jersey surf season is approximately from March to November—I wear a wetsuit and booties—and I surf mainly at Monmouth Beach and Sandy Hook. I am fortunate enough to have surfed in Australia, Morocco, Ireland, Mexico, Costa Rica, Spain, Nicaragua, Barbados, Antigua, Saint Martin and more. My favorite is Donegal, Ireland. The Mentawai Islands, Indonesia, is my dream surf spot.

What are your favorite foods to enjoy?

Admittedly, pizza does still contribute a probably larger-than-it-should space in my food pyramid! Growing up, I delivered pizza for legendary Ocean City establishments like Mario’s and Piccini, as well as food for Rojo’s Tacos—all still around. But my favorite food would have to be Thai food. I could eat drunken noodles for the rest of my life.

To make an appointment with Dr. Fenichel, call 800-822-8905 or visit HMHforU.org/FindADoc.

Spring Clean Your Health

3 habits to toss this spring to get a fresh start on your health

Spending too much time sedentary.

Sitting for more than 7–10 hours a day can lead to obesity, cardiovascular disease, and neck and back pain. At work, try a standing desk for part of the day. At home, stand up and move while watching TV.

Not drinking enough water.

Most men need about 13 cups of fluid a day, while women need about 11 cups, according to the Institute of Medicine. But you’ll need more when you lose fluid through sweat.

Screen time before bed.

Using your phone too close to bedtime can prevent you from getting a good night’s sleep. Put away your phone—or any other electronic screen—at an hour or two before you turn out the lights.

For more inspiration on healthy living, visit HMHforU.org.
Words Matter

The words we speak to our children are critically important. Here are three phrases to avoid and alternatives to better develop a trusting bond with your child.

**“Give them a hug.”**
While it can be customary in certain families or cultures to hug hello or goodbye, it’s important to let children know they have body autonomy.

“We, of course, don’t want our children to be disrespectful to a family member or friend, but we should not be forcing them to have physical contact with someone they may not be comfortable with,” shares Dr. Doumas. “Body autonomy means being in charge of your own body and what happens to it. We want kids to feel safe and confident with their bodies.”

Instead, ask them what they’re comfortable with:

Would you like to give a hug to say goodbye?

If not, would you like to give a high-five instead?

**“You’re such a disappointment.”**
Dr. Doumas recommends going into every conversation with your child with an open mind and without judgment. Be mindful not to shame your child, and approach conversations when you are calm and collected. “If your child was doing something against your family’s values, it’s OK to express that and set boundaries. But you want to make sure your child feels comfortable coming to you to talk about things, if you immediately shut them down and tell them that they’re a horrible person, you don’t open the floor for much conversation,” says Dr. Doumas.

Instead, learn more by being curious about a situation: Tell me why you did that.

**Remember to Wear a Helmet to Set Good Examples for Kids.**
Kids listen to what parents say, but what they see may have greater impact. Wearing a helmet when you bike, skateboard or skate together sends the right message. Tell your kids that helmets are an essential piece of safety equipment, and remember to wear yours when you ride together.

**Helmets Reduce the Risk of Serious Injury or Death.**
Falls from bikes and collisions with cars may cause serious injury or death. Wearing a helmet reduces this risk.

A study published in 2018 found that bike helmets reduced:

- Head injuries by 48%
- Serious head injuries by 60%
- Traumatic brain injuries by 53%
- Injuries to the face by 23%
- Number of seriously injured or killed cyclists by 34%

**Helmets Absorb Some of the Energy Produced by Impact.**
Helmets are designed to absorb some of the power of an impact. Whether your child’s head hits a road, tree or vehicle, they will experience less harm. Helmets have hard exteriors, but the insides are soft, to cushion heads. They can’t prevent concussion but may prevent serious brain injury.

**Helmets Increase Visibility on the Road.**
A brightly colored helmet may make your child stand out more. Drivers may notice them from farther away and give them room when passing by. If your child rides or skates at night, choose a helmet with reflectors, which will help drivers spot them from a distance.
**TV Timeout**  
*Is binge-watching show after show bad for our brains? Here’s why you should give it a break.*

Streaming services make it easy to binge-watch hours upon hours of television. It’s a good way to kill time, but watching too much TV has the potential of becoming an unhealthy habit. While much research has been done on television’s effects on children, adults have often been left out of these data collections. It’s no surprise that the sedentary behavior of binge-watching TV can negatively impact our physical health, but recent studies show it’s also a bad habit for long-term brain health and function.

**TV’s Effect on Cognitive Impairment**

“Researchers have found that moderate high television viewing during midlife is associated with increased memory loss and decreased fine motor skills,” explains Jasdeep S. Hundal, PsyD, ABPP-CN, director of Medical Psychology and Neuropsychology for the Southern Region of Hackensack Meridian Health Medical Group. Studies also have found a link between high television consumption and the onset of depression. As life expectancy in the United States continues to rise, experts believe the population’s risk of developing cognitive impairment or dementia will rise, too. Making a few healthy changes today can help prevent the development of dementia down the line. The neurobiology of dementia begins between ages 45 and 64. Modifying your behaviors and lifestyle during middle-age years can help preserve cognition as you age and decrease your risk of dementia.

“Being more physically and mentally active and avoiding sedentary behaviors, such as binge-watching television, is a necessary lifestyle change for adults to make to maintain their brain health as they get older,” says Dr. Hundal.

**Four M’s of Mental Fitness**

Dr. Hundal suggests that middle-aged adults remember the four M’s of mental fitness: what matters, mobility, mental stimulation and medication. These serve as reminders of simple ways to tend to your mental and cognitive health while minimizing sedentary behaviors.

**What Matters:** Focus on the healthy and beneficial things that matter to you and have a positive impact on your life, like socializing, sleeping well, eating healthy and not smoking or using other substances.

**Mobility:** Get up and get active. A lifestyle that incorporates plenty of exercise will lead to better health outcomes and help you preserve mobility and brain health as you age.

**Mental Stimulation:** Find a fun new hobby that will help fill your free time. Engage in activities that encourage creative thinking, teach you something new or help you relax.

**Medication:** Be careful with the use of high-risk medications, such as sedatives (including over-the-counter sleep medications) and hypnotics. They can disrupt cognitive efficiency and result in problems focusing and remembering.

Every spring brings extra rainfall and warmer temperatures, giving common allergens like mold and pollen the perfect environment to thrive—and drive various allergic reactions. That’s why tackling spring cleaning projects is about more than just improving your home: It’s a great way to prioritize your health and keep your allergy symptoms at bay. “One of the best ways to avoid having a reaction or dealing with symptoms is simply reducing your exposure to allergens,” says Jared Goldfarb, M.D., ear, nose and throat specialist at Bayshore Medical Center, Southern Ocean Medical Center and Jersey Shore University Medical Center. “While in some cases it’s not possible to avoid them entirely, reducing contact is helpful.”

**Dust Everything**

“Dust is a collection of contaminants such as dust mites, skin cells, bacteria, pollen, pieces of plastic and more unpleasant things that we should limit our exposure to,” says Dr. Goldfarb.

- Use a microfiber cloth to trap dust particles.
- Wipe all countertops and shelves.
- Wear a mask to prevent a reaction while cleaning.

**Stop Mold from Growing**

Mold thrives in warm, damp environments—making showers, sinks, bathtubs and toilets a hotspot. Replace moldy items like carpets, insulation or drywall that can’t be washed. Replace moldy items like carpets, insulation or drywall that can’t be washed.

- Clean moldy areas with soap and warm water.
- Remove dust hiding in nooks like ceiling fans, exhaust fan covers and tops of cabinets.
- Jump on home maintenance projects, such as fixing leaks, which can help prevent mold growth.

**Listen to Your Body**

Everyone’s body is different, and reactions to allergens will vary, affecting how you clean your home.

- If mold is the primary issue, open windows to air out your home.
- If dust and pollen are the primary issues, keep your windows closed to ensure outdoor allergens stay there.

**Keep these allergy-prevention tips in mind when spring cleaning this year:**

**Surviving Spring Allergies**

The common can give common allergens the perfect environment to set off allergic reactions. Our allergy-prevention checklist can help.

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Neptune, Manahawkin and Holmdel

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**Go Online**

Learn how geriatric medicine addresses the unique needs of older adults at HMHealthU.org/MemoryHelp.

Are you suffering from allergies? Find an allergist near you: HMHealthU.org/Allergist

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** survivingspringallergies**

HackensackMeridianHealth.org
When it comes to cancer, we know that lifestyle choices, such as smoking and sun exposure, can lead to cancer. “But what many don’t know is that other lifestyle choices, such as how we sleep and what we buy, can indirectly increase our risk,” says Madhurima Anne, M.D., hematologist and oncologist at Jersey Shore University Medical Center and Ocean University Medical Center.

While it’s tough to always avoid carcinogens, Dr. Anne says reducing exposure is key. Here are some everyday household products that may pose cancer risks.

1. Nonstick Cookware Nonstick cookware can be coated in potentially toxic, To reduce your risk, opt for a cast-iron pan that can last a lifetime, or use nonstick pans at a low heat to lessen the release of these chemicals.

2. Mattresses Manufacturers often add flame retardants to furnish - ings to slow the spread of household fires. Prolonged exposure to flame retardants can lead to cancer. To reduce your risk, look for mattresses made without flame retardants, or increase ventilation in the room for your new mattress to off-gas.

3. Batteries Batteries of all types have toxins, such as cadmium, lead, lithium and sulfurous acid. You can reduce your reliance on batteries by opting for battery-free or rechargeable items when possible for items such as electric toothbrushes, smoke detectors, remote controls and flashlights.

4. Cleaning Products Many household cleaning products contain endocrine disruptors, which can lead to cancer. To reduce your risk, opt for simple ingredients when possible. A simple soap-and-water method often does the trick for cleaning floors, carpets, windows and walls. Saving the harsher stuff for emergencies will reduce exposure.

5. Personal Care Products Cosmetics, skincare and other personal care products can contain harmful chemicals such as:

- Parabens
- Parfum (fragrance ingredients)
- Formaldehyde
- Coal tar dyes
- Butylated hydroxyanisole (BHA) or butylated hydroxy- toluene (BHT)
- Diethanolamine (DEA)
- Dibutyl phthalate glycols
- Petroleum jelly
- Silicones
- Sodium laureth sulfate (SLS)
- Triclosan

If you want to reduce your cancer risk, stick to a minimal routine with products that use simple ingredients.

Finding out you have cancer isn’t one of the momentous experiences you expect in your senior year of high school. But that’s what happened to 18-year-old Freehold Township, New Jersey, resident Michael Mancusi.

An athlete who played baseball and football and lifted weights, Michael first noticed a strange lump in his upper thigh at the beginning of his senior year in high school. He was lifting weights and felt some pain in his groin area. Gently feeling around to see if everything was okay, he saw what looked like a small bug bite. It wasn’t irritated or sore, so he didn’t give it much thought.

However, that innocuous-looking bump grew as time went by. Michael’s girlfriend urged him to tell his parents about it, and after six months, he finally did.

The family made an appointment with Michael’s pediatrician who ordered an ultrasound and referred Michael to Mark Kayton, M.D., a pediatric surgeon who is division chief of pediatric surgery at K. Hovnanian Children’s Hospital, a pediatric surgeon who specializes in treating pediatric sarcomas, cancerous tumors that develop in bone and tissues.

Additional testing, including a sentinel lymph node biopsy, was done to find out if the cancer had spread. This procedure is done commonly in adults but not often in pediatric patients. Only a few pediatric surgical oncologists in the country—Dr. Kayton among them—have significant experience doing them. Testing results showed, fortunately, the cancer had not spread.

A Rare Cancer Finding During their first office visit, Dr. Kayton thought the lump in Michael’s thigh could be cancerous. “Although my hunch wasn’t proven at the time, I had a feeling in my heart that Michael’s coming to me was meant to be,” he says.

A biopsy revealed that Michael had rhabdomyosarcoma, a rare cancer in children and adolescents. Fortunately, resources to treat such a rare cancer were available at the Children’s Hospital. Dr. Kayton assembled a multidisciplinary care team to manage Michael’s chemotherapy treatment, remove the tumor and preserve the appearance of Michael’s leg and his ability to use it fully with advanced reconstructive surgery.

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Key to ensuring the best postsurgical treatment plan for Michael was determining what subtype of rhabdomyosarcoma he had, says pediatric hematologist-oncologist Jessica Scerbo, M.D.

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**HEART HEALTH**

**A Hearty Plate**

Our expert “lettuce” know the top fruits and vegetables to choose for heart health this spring.

“Vegetables in general are good for your heart and rich in vitamins and antioxidants. They’re what we should be filling our plates with,” says Ravi Diwan, M.D., chief of cardiology at Riverview Medical Center. “Any fruit is better than processed foods like cookies or crackers, but some do contain more sugar than others.”

**Here are the top fruits and vegetables he recommends during the springtime:**

**Leafy green vegetables**
These include broccoli, Swiss chard, kale, Brussels sprouts, lettuce, spinach, bok choy and asparagus. “It’s always a good idea to ‘go green’ when it comes to your vegetables,” Dr. Diwan says. “Keep in mind that some leafy green vegetables are high in vitamin K, which can counteract the effects of blood thinners. So consult with your cardiologist before making any big food shifts.”

**Blueberries, blackberries, raspberries**
“Berries are our go-to for heart-healthy fruits. Apples are also a good option and are lower in sugar than fruits like pineapples or bananas,” Dr. Diwan says. “But if it comes down to it, and you’re choosing between a banana and a granola bar, go with the banana.”

**Bell peppers, tomatoes, summer squash, carrots**
“Red, yellow and orange vegetables are full of carotenoids, fiber and vitamins that can improve your heart health,” Dr. Diwan says.

**When Fresh Isn’t Possible**
If you aren’t able to choose fresh fruits and vegetables, you can still make heart-healthy choices at the grocery store or market. Dr. Diwan offers a few tips:

**Preparation matters.** “Leafy greens are a great choice, but try not to dress them in oil and butter,” he says. “Protein shakes are a great option for these greens.”

**Look out for sodium in prepared or canned foods.** “Unfortunately, things that are convenient are typically bad for you. Frozen, canned or takeout meals are an easy way to get veggies, but they negate that cardiovascular benefit because of the amount of sodium,” advises Dr. Diwan. “Pay attention to the sodium content on the package.”

**Keep an eye on sugar content.** “Particularly for fruits that are dried, look at their sugar content,” adds Dr. Diwan. “For example, dried apricots have much more sugar than fresh; frozen apricots are a better option.”

**Don’t forget to look at portion sizes.** Portion sizes can be misleading on packaging, which can lead you to overindulge and negate the benefit that food brings. “Nothing should be consumed in excess. Make those choices part of a balanced diet instead of overindulging in one type of fruit or vegetable,” concludes Dr. Diwan.

**Why Your Heart Rate Is High**
Your heart rate rises when you exercise and drops when you’re lying in bed. But does your heart rate ever feel elevated for no apparent reason?

Having an increased heart rate isn’t a health condition in and of itself; it’s a symptom caused by any number of circumstances. It may be a reaction to something that’s happening in your life, or it may be caused by a health condition.

“When you feel your heart pounding in your chest unexpectedly, don’t jump to conclusions that there’s something wrong with your heart. But if the problem continues without an explanation and simple cause, see a doctor to discuss your concerns,” says Ali Mosavi, M.D., interventional cardiologist at Jersey Shore University Medical Center and Ocean University Medical Center. Dr. Mosavi offers six reasons, unrelated to your heart, why your heart rate might be high:

- **Stress.** When your body responds to something stressful, frightening or upsetting, you may get a jolt of adrenaline, which increases your heart rate.
- **Thyroid issues (hyperthyroidism).** Having too much thyroid hormone in your system makes your heart beat faster than it should, increasing your heart rate.
- **Anemia.** If you have anemia, you don’t have enough red blood cells to carry oxygen to your organs. Your heart may beat more rapidly to compensate.
- **Medication side effects.** A number of drugs may cause your heart rate to increase, including some medications that treat colds, asthma, anxiety, depression and high blood pressure.
- **Addictive substances.** Caffeine, cigarettes and high levels of alcohol may cause your heart rate to rise after you use these substances. Additionally, illegal drugs like cocaine may also have this effect on your heart rate.
- **Strenuous physical activity.** When you exert more than your body is prepared for, your heart rate increases to meet the higher demand.

**Heart Conditions That Cause a High Heart Rate**
Heart conditions that may cause an elevated heart rate include:

- Heart failure
- Heart rhythm problems
- Heart valve problems
- Coronary artery disease
- Scar tissue that forms after heart surgery

If you have been diagnosed with a heart condition and you’ve noticed that your heart rate has become higher than usual, make an appointment to talk to your doctor about the change.

**When to Seek Emergency Care**
Get immediate medical help if your heart rate seems too high and you have these symptoms:

- Shortness of breath
- Feeling dizzy or lightheaded
- Weakness
- Feeling faint or fainting
- Chest pain or discomfort

**Go Online**
Are you at risk of heart disease? Schedule a screening at HMHealth.org/HeartScreen.
Do you have tight hips? Here are four ways to test your hip mobility.

Whether it's from sitting too long during the work day, weak core muscles or not properly stretching, tight hips can cause a number of aches and pains. “Everything in the body works together and is connected. If you have joint pain in one area, that doesn’t mean it is the only joint involved or causing that issue,” says Raisa Bakshiyyev, M.D., physical medicine and rehabilitation specialist at Johnson Rehabilitation Institute at University Medical Center Hackensack University Medical Center. “For example, if you have back pain, it could be from tightness in the hip muscles.”

Is the Hip Mobility Challenge Safe?

The “Hip Mobility Challenge” is a viral TikTok and social media challenge where participants move through a variety of stretches and exercises to test their flexibility and strength.

“If you’re interested in trying it out, I’d recommend doing it with a friend nearby for safety and using a soft surface, like a yoga mat, in case you lose your balance,” says Dr. Bakshiyyev. “If you’ve had a hip replacement, I wouldn’t recommend trying it without guidance from a physician or your surgeon, as you have an increased risk of dislocating your hip.”

Dr. Bakshiyyev says the challenge is a good benchmark to see truly how flexible and strong your hips are: For those who can complete it, it shows that your hip joints have more flexibility in your hips,” says Dr. Bakshiyyev. “Strengthening exercises are important, too. You don’t need weights; you can try body weight squats, lunges and deadlifts—anything that would strengthen the hip muscles and core.”

If you’re not finding relief from stretching, a pain management specialist can come up with a proper treatment plan.

For Rodger Ward, orthopedic surgery at K. Hovnanian Children’s Hospital prevents a possible permanent disability.

When Rodger Ward took a bad fall during a soccer game, the 11-year-old faced the possibility that the broken femur in his right leg could end his future as a promising soccer player.

Rodger’s mother, Cynthia Obando, a Spanish teacher, remembers that day in June 2018 like it was yesterday. At first, she thought it was just another childhood accident; a few weeks in a cast and he’d be as good as new. Then she met Evan M. Curatolo, M.D., a pediatric orthopedic specialist at K. Hovnanian Children’s Hospital at Jersey Shore University Medical Center, who examined her son and determined that the break in his leg involved the growth plate of the bone. “Rodger fractured the growth plate in his femur,” says Dr. Curatolo. “Fractures at this location are at a high risk for future growth arrest, a condition that affects the growth plates.” In order to treat this fracture and allow his leg to continue to grow normally, Rodger would need surgery.

Hard Work and Dedication to Healing

A native of Ecuador, Cynthia remembers how kind and patient Dr. Curatolo was helping her understand the seriousness of Rodger’s injury and the need for surgery—that without it, Rodger potentially faced serious, crippling problems in his future.

On June 18, Dr. Curatolo performed the surgery, positioning the bones of his hip in their proper places and securing them with screws. Then Rodger was placed in a long leg cast that extended from his hip to his toes to keep his leg stable while it healed. Fortunately, the surgery was minimally invasive—involving only a small incision and faster recovery.

After surgery, Rodger and Cynthia received training on how to do everyday activities such as moving and bathing. During his recovery, Rodger remained optimistic about quickly returning to the soccer field. But five weeks after the surgery, when the cast was removed and he felt how weak his leg was, he broke into tears.

That’s when his athlete’s heart took over. “He won a champ,” Dr. Curatolo says. “He needed physical therapy multiple times a week and daily exercises at home multiple times a day. He put in the effort and work, and it paid off.”

Securing His Future

Knowing how dedicated the young soccer player was, Dr. Curatolo estimated that Rodger would be able to begin gentle soccer training within three months of surgery. Because of his hard work, Rodger was cleared to start working out two weeks earlier than that.

Rodger has continued to develop as a soccer player. He attends St. Joseph High School in Metuchen, New Jersey, where his soccer skills earned him a full scholarship. “I’ve only seen videos of Rodger playing soccer. But I look forward to seeing him in the Olympics—he won’t remember me, but I’ll remember him!” Dr. Curatolo says.
Life With One Kidney

Can you live with just one kidney? Our expert weighs in.

The truth is, life with one kidney is not that different from living with two. According to the National Kidney Foundation: “Most people live normal, healthy lives with one kidney. However, staying as healthy as possible and protecting your only kidney is crucial.”

Living with one kidney isn’t uncommon. Some people are born with one kidney, while others may be born with just a single working one. Others may have a kidney removed due to a medical injury or disease, while others may have donated one to someone needing a transplant.

“The majority of people we see with one kidney typically live healthy, normal lives, with few issues related to it,” says Azeez Naqvi, M.D., nephrologist at Bayshore Medical Center and Riverview Medical Center. “Basically, single healthy kidney can be just as good as having two.”

But a normal lifestyle doesn’t mean taking zero precautions. It’s vital to cautiously protect the one kidney the person still has.

Are There Exercise Considerations With One Kidney?

Physical exercise is healthy and good for everyone. But high-contact sports such as football, boxing, hockey or wrestling may pose extra risk, though not a high risk, kidneys can be injured when someone is hit in the area of the kidney, causing a bruise or cut to the kidney.

“If you or your child is considering a contact sport, it’s important to understand that while extra padding and safety gear lessen the risks of injury, it still doesn’t take the risk away,” says Dr. Naqvi. “Make sure you’re considering the risks involved, and talk to your health care provider to see if there are other solutions.”

Do You Have to Follow a Special Diet?

It’s always recommended to follow a healthy diet of whole grains, fruits and vegetables, and that’s the same for most people living with one healthy, functioning kidney. Particularly for those with one kidney, it’s important to not intake too much salt, stay hydrated and maintain a healthy weight.

“Taking care of your overall health is how you can keep your one kidney functioning well,” says Dr. Naqvi. “In addition, you should not consume excess protein such as that contained in shakes and other supplements. This can put a greater strain on the one kidney.”

As with anyone trying to maintain a healthy lifestyle, people with one kidney need to stay on top of their doctor’s appointments, take prescribed medications and have a healthy diet and exercise routine.

College athlete Kali Grayson benefits from robotic surgery after painful blockage in her ureter.

Throwing javelin at the collegiate level requires her to carry on with her busy schedule of classes and athletic meets at Liberty University in Virginia.

But the pain's comeback brought Kali to the bladder—attached to Kali’s left kidney. Feeling pressed for time, Kali opted for pain medication and inserted a nephrostomy tube, draining urine from kidneys to the bladder—attached to Kali’s left kidney. Feeling pressed for time, Kali opted for pain medication and inserted a nephrostomy tube.

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Go Online

Hackensack Meridian Health’s Kidney Transplant Program is among the fastest growing in the nation. Learn more at HMHforU.org/KidneyTransplant.

Hackensack Meridian Health Urology & Nephrology

Mark Perlmutter, M.D.
Urologist
800-822-8905
Hackensack, Jackson and Brick

Kali Grayson is now 22 and thriving in public health at college. The athlete had removed her tube of the medical field.

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Clear Benefits

Kali’s repeat kidney scan showed her left kidney function had dramatically rebounded to 31 percent, far past the threshold for keeping the organ. Dr. Perlmutter performed a robotic pyeloplasty, minimally invasive surgery cutting out the ureter blockage and restoring healthy kidney drainage.

“This is one of those surgeries that offers a clear benefit and a long lasting, satisfying result,” he says. “We don’t expect Kali to have any future issues.”

For Kali, now 22 and a senior in college minoring in public health, the diligent care she received “reignited my love of the medical field.”

“I felt my nurses and doctors cared about me as an individual and heard me when I had worries,” she says. “It reminded me of what I want to do with my life.”
To Nap or Not to Nap?

Naps may not be good for your heart. Here’s what our experts want you to know.

You may love to nap, but a recent study suggests that your heart doesn’t. The study published in the Journal of the American Heart Association shows that poor sleep patterns, such as not getting the right amount of sleep or napping during the day, may increase your risk of high blood pressure and stroke.

You are more at risk for cardiovascular diseases if you have these poor sleep patterns or behaviors:
- Sleeping for too little or too much time at night (less than seven hours or more than ten hours)
- Staying up late, often known as being a “night owl”
- Frequent or chronic insomnia
- Heavy snoring habits
- Regularly feeling sleepy during the day
- Having these too late in the day can make it harder to fall asleep.
- Avoid drinking alcohol or caffeine before bedtime. Having these too late in the day can make it harder to fall asleep.
- Stop using electronic devices. The lights, notifi-
cations, and this routine will help you sleep better overall.

How long should I sleep?

Shortened periods of sleeping and irregular sleep patterns can be bad for your health. Depending on your age, there are different recommended periods of sleep that should be maintained for optimal health:
- Newborns, up three months: 14–17 hours
- Infants, four to 12 months: 12–16 hours
- Toddlers, one to two years: 11–14 hours
- Preschoolers, three to five years: 10–13 hours
- School age, six to 12 years: 9–12 hours
- Teens, 13–18 years: 8–10 hours
- Adults, 18–60 years: 7+ hours
- Adults, 61–64 years: 7–9 hours
- Adults, 65 years and over: 7–8 hours

How can I improve my sleep?

“Sleep hygiene has been proven to play an important role in your overall health,” says Rana Ali, M.D., pulmonology sleep expert at Riverview Medical Center. “Improving your sleep habits is a crucial part of your health.”

“Sleep recharges your body, so too little sleep makes it harder to function,” says Walter Wynkoop, M.D., pulmonology sleep expert at Southern Ocean Medical Center and Ocean University Medical Center. “Ample sleep helps you regulate emotions.”

Sleep and Mental Health

Do you feel cranky if you stay up too late and wake up early? One night may sour your mood, but chronic sleep loss may contribute to mental health disorders.

People who don’t get enough sleep are at increased risk of depression and anxiety. “Sleep recharges your body, so too little sleep makes it harder to function,” says Walter Wynkoop, M.D., pulmonology sleep expert at Southern Ocean Medical Center and Ocean University Medical Center. “Ample sleep helps you regulate emotions.”

Reasons to Get More Sleep

Sleep deprivation may trigger or exacerbate depression, anxiety or other mental health conditions. In addition, sleep-deprived people may get stressed more easily and worry when they should be asleep.

“People who sleep too much may feel groggy when they wake up,” Dr. Wynkoop says. “You may feel more self-doubt or lowered self-esteem, which contributes to stress levels.”

If you’re sleep-deprived, you may experience:
- Difficulty concentrating on tasks
- Memory problems
- Reduced attention span
- More dramatic mood changes
- Irritability
- Impatience
- Tendency to make poor decisions

Reasons to Avoid Too Much Sleep

Sometimes you may need extra sleep after an illness, physical exertion or stressful life event. But chronically sleeping 10 or more hours a night suggests a health problem.

“People who sleep too much may feel groggy when they wake up,” Dr. Wynkoop says. “Sleeping more than the recommended amount might be linked to depression or sleep disorders.”

Getting too much sleep per night may be a sign of:
- Depression
- Sleep apnea
- Narcolepsy
- Restless leg syndrome
- If you regularly sleep nine-plus hours and wake up tired, see your doctor. They may recommend a sleep study to diagnose a sleep disorder.

For more information about our expert team, visit HMHealthU.org/SleepHelp.
What Does Your Poop Mean?

We have a lot of names for it, but we rarely actually talk about bowel movements. Kunal Gupta, M.D., gastroenterologist at Bayshore Medical Center, answers all of your questions.

How often should you poop?
There is no specific answer. Some people go three times a day, while others go every other day. “Everybody is different in terms of what we eat, meal timing, the motility of our digestive system and the medications we may be taking,” says Dr. Gupta.

What color is normal?
A healthy bowel movement is usually a medium to dark brown color. Other shades could signal an issue. Some include:

- **Black** stool can come from bismuth preparations (like what you find in Pepto-Bismol and Kaopectate) or iron supplements. Or it could be a sign of bleeding in the upper part of the intestinal tract, such as the stomach, esophagus or duodenum.

- **Red** stool could come from eating or drinking something with strong red coloring (like gelatin, cherries, beets or a sports drink), or it could signal bleeding from something like a hemorrhoid or a fissure in the lower part of the intestine, or from something higher up like diverticulosis, colitis or possibly cancer.

- **Light** or colorless stool usually means your stool lacks bile, which could be blamed on a bile duct obstruction or some sort of infection in the liver, gallbladder or pancreas.

- **Greasy** stool could be a sign that things are moving rapidly through the intestines due to an infection or a medication you’ve take—or it could be a result of eating certain colored foods.

What about size and shape?
Shape can range from loose and watery (which means your stool is going through the digestive tract so fast that it doesn’t have time to firm up) to small, hard pellets (which means you’re constipated and need more fiber and/or more water).

“The ‘ideal’ poop profile looks like a hot dog or sausage, and can be either smooth or have lines or cracks on the surface. The “ideal” poop profile looks like a hot dog or sausage, and can be either smooth or have lines or cracks on the surface. The “ideal” poop profile looks like a hot dog or sausage, and can be either smooth or have lines or cracks on the surface. The “ideal” poop profile looks like a hot dog or sausage, and can be either smooth or have lines or cracks on the surface. The “ideal” poop profile looks like a hot dog or sausage, and can be either smooth or have lines or cracks on the surface. After your baby starts eating solid foods, bowel movements may change, and you’ll see a wide range of color and consistency, depending on what the baby eats and how the digestive tract works,” says Lena Gottesman-Katz, M.D., pediatric gastroenterologist at Jersey Shore University Medical Center. “Call your doctor if anything changes drastically or you think your baby is uncomfortable.”

What Does Your Baby’s Poop Mean?
If you’re concerned about what’s in your baby’s diaper, here is what you should pay attention to.

**Color**
- First 1–2 days, expect black or tar green. This is called meconium.
- Depending on diet, breast milk or formula, these colors are normal:
  - Contact your pediatrician for these colors of concern:

**Frequency**
- Babies can poop as frequently as every feeding or as rarely as every 5–7 days.

**Consistency**
- Constipated: pellet-like
- Normal: soft, running, pasty or seedy
- Diarrhea: very watery

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Go Online
Make an appointment with a gastroenterologist near you at HMHealthU.org/GI.
Walk to Remember

It’s commonly known that physical activity is good for your heart and maintaining a healthy weight. But did you know that it may also lower your dementia risk?

Physical activity has an important impact on brain health. “Being active doesn’t just benefit your body; it can improve your brain health and mood,” says Jasdeep S. Hundal, Psy.D, ABPP-CN, director of Medical Psychology and Neuropsychology for the Southern Region of Hackensack Meridian Health Medical Group.

A recent study found that getting 9,800 steps daily decreased dementia risk in adults. The study also found that pace matters: Walking at least 40 steps per minute was associated with lowered risk.

**How Does Walking Lower Dementia Risk?**

Exercise helps protect your ability to remember things and think clearly. Getting a high daily step count may help:

- Improve blood flow to the brain, which benefits memory and cognition.
- Lower the impact of stress on the hippocampus, a brain region associated with storing new memories.
- Encourage the brain to enhance internal connections that allow you to retain memories.
- Reduce chronic inflammation, which is associated with dementia.

“There’s no downside to walking more,” Dr. Hundal says. “You may improve your brain health, heart health, overall health and mood.”

**How to Get More Steps**

Are you eager to increase your step count? Try these ideas:

- Track your movement with a wearable activity tracker or smartphone pedometer app. Seeing how much you move may motivate you to increase your daily number.
- Don’t expect to boost your number overnight if it’s low. Make small changes to your routine, increasing by 500 or 1,000 steps weekly.
- Find small ways to be more active. Choose a far-away parking spot and take the stairs.
- Swap sedentary habits for active ones. Walk with friends instead of sitting; watch TV from a treadmill, not the couch.
- Go for a walk at a set time, such as after dinner. Make the activity part of your regular routine.
- Schedule short walks into your day like meetings, and honor the appointments.
- If you have a dog, take a longer walk together once a day.
- Listen to music or a podcast that you love while you walk. It may inspire you to go further, so you can keep listening.
- Buddy up with a friend or partner to make walking a social occasion. You may go more consistently if you have a regular walking date.

Learn about our comprehensive treatment for dementia and memory disorders at HMforU.org/HelpMemory.

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**Innovation**

transforming medical research into treatments

For the 1 million people living with Parkinson’s disease in the U.S., shaking, stiffness, and difficulty walking and talking become a daily reality. Living well with this progressive neurological condition takes a village. The following inpatient and outpatient services can help patients control symptoms and maximize their abilities.

**PingPongParkinson**

What It Is: PingPongParkinson is a nonprofit organization with local chapters that host weekly ping-pong exercise groups for people living with Parkinson’s disease. It provides opportunities for physical, cognitive, and social engagement.

Why It Helps: Ping-pong (or table tennis) can help people with Parkinson’s disease maintain their coordination and fine motor skills. The idea is based on the concept of neuroplasticity, the brain’s ability to make new nerve cells and connections through challenging exercise. Although medication remains the main treatment focus for Parkinson’s, compelling evidence suggests regular exercise significantly helps manage the disease.

**Parkinson’s Wellness Program**

What It Is: The Parkinson’s Wellness Program, a unique two-week inpatient rehabilitation program at JFK Health

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Learn about our comprehensive treatment for dementia and memory disorders at HMforU.org/HelpMemory.

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**Additional Information**

Learn more about "It Takes a Village" and other support services for Parkinson’s disease patients at HMforU.org/Parkinson.

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Learn about our comprehensive treatment for dementia and memory disorders at HMforU.org/HelpMemory.
Innovation

Rehabilitation Institute: helps patients actively address any decline or required medication changes to enhance as much functionality as possible. After completing the inpatient admission, patients may transition to outpatient services that include the SPEAK OUT! and LOUD Crowd programs, which help patients regain voice diminished by the disease by combining education, speech therapy, daily home practice and group sessions.

Why It Helps: Rock Steady Boxing promotes accountability, camaraderie and encouragement through group sessions.

What It Is: Rock Steady Boxing is a nonprofit Parkinson’s wellness exercise program that uses a surprising technique—noncontact boxing—to support people with Parkinson’s disease.

Its regimen was largely adapted from boxing drills, helping patients beat back the “opponent” with rigorous exercises. Why It Helps: The exercises focus on improving speed, agility, hand-eye coordination, footwork and overall strength to empower people with Parkinson’s and instill a renewed sense of hope.

ParkinSINGS

What It Is: Through a Parkinson’s Foundation community grant, JFK Johnson Rehabilitation Institute offers the ParkinSINGS choir that brings together Parkinson’s patients for fun and vocal fitness.

Why It Helps: Parkinson’s disease can impact speaking and swallowing, but research shows that singing can help maintain the muscles involved in these key tasks. Plus, the choir also promotes camaraderie and social interaction.

Support Groups

What It Is: Hackensack Meridian Health runs support groups at hospitals throughout the network that meet on various days and at different times. Some of the groups also meet virtually.

Why It Helps: Parkinson’s patients, along with their caregivers, benefit from sharing their challenges and triumphs with others going through the same experience.

New Hope for Parkinson’s

Learn about innovative new technologies for diagnosing and treating patients with Parkinson’s disease.

There may be no cure for Parkinson’s disease to date, but we’ve certainly entered a new era with innovative treatments and technologies for diagnosing and treating this progressive neurological condition. These tools offer Parkinson’s patients the best chance to live and function more normally, helping them thrive.

DaTscan

An accurate diagnosis is crucial to determine the best treatment options. Since no single blood or imaging test is available that can definitively detect Parkinson’s disease, DaTscan can help. Patients who have tremors might have Parkinsonism syndrome (a group of related diseases dominated by Parkinson’s) or another movement disorder called essential tremor. DaTscan often can distinguish between the two, especially when used in combination with a patient’s physical exam and reported symptoms.

Here’s how it works:

- **DaTscan Imaging:** A dose of DaTscan is injected into the bloodstream. It travels to the brain and attaches to the dopamine transporters.
- **Visualization of Dopamine Levels:** A few hours later, a special camera is used to help doctors visualize brain levels of dopamine, a chemical in the brain that sends signals between nerves. Dopamine levels often decrease dramatically in people with Parkinson’s disease.
- **Diagnosis Confirmation:** The scan can detect the drop in nerve cells and dopamine that characterize Parkinson’s and help doctors confirm a diagnosis.

Smartphone Apps

What It Is: Working with Abbott Laboratories, Hackensack Meridian Health uses a wireless app to remotely adjust electronic stimulation levels for patients who have undergone deep brain stimulation (DBS) surgery, which implants a pacemaker-like device in the brain to control tremors, stiffness and other Parkinson’s symptoms.

Another partnership, with medical device company Medtronic and Rune Labs, offers Parkinson’s patients a free Apple watch smartphone app that can help monitor symptoms and tweak certain therapies.

Deep Brain Stimulation

Deep brain stimulation (DBS) involves implanting a device that emits electrical impulses to control a variety of Parkinson’s symptoms, including tremors, stiffness and slow movement. It can help patients with Parkinson’s whose symptoms have become difficult to manage with medication alone or who have drug-related side effects. It can also be performed to help those with essential tremor, dystonia and epilepsy.

Here’s how it works:

- **Implantation:** First, two metal wires are placed in the brain and an extension wire is threaded through the neck that leads to a battery implanted over the chest wall, all under the skin.
- **Blocks Out Faulty Nerve Signals:** When the stimulator device, often described as a pacemaker for the brain, is switched on, it sends a controlled electric current—allowing patients to feel tremors and other Parkinson’s symptoms are silenced by a type of “white noise” that interrupts faulty nerve signals.

DBS is the most commonly performed surgical treatment for Parkinson’s. Because they’re moving more easily, patients often report improvements in mood and sleep, as well. Due to its success, DBS is also being researched for a variety of other conditions, including epilepsy, Tourette syndrome, Huntington’s disease, cluster headaches and chronic pain.

HIFU (High-intensity Focused Ultrasound or FUS)

Medications for Parkinson’s disease are always the first treatments offered. But sometimes drug therapies don’t work well enough to control tremors, or they leave patients with severe side effects. These patients may find relief from HIFU, which uses sound waves to target areas in the brain responsible for tremors. Hackensack Meridian Health is the only network in New Jersey to offer HIFU for treatment of Parkinson’s disease. Hackensack University Medical Center offers its Jersey Shore University Medical Center will begin offering it in summer 2023, and patients may be evaluated at JFK University Medical Center to see if they are candidates.

Here’s how it works:

- **MRI Imaging:** While patients lie on an MRI table, doctors use MRI images to guide the therapy.
- **Sound Waves:** HIFU destroys areas in the brain responsible for tremors by aiming about 1,000 sources of ultrasound at them, raising the temperature of the tissue and short-circuiting tremor signals.
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- **Tremor Reduction:** This inci-

sion-free form of surgery can instantly and dramatically reduce or stop tremors for patients with Parkinson’s disease as well as essential tremor. When HIFU was first approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), patients could only have the procedure performed on one side of their brain, leaving them with tremors on the untreated side. But the FDA recently approved HIFU for use on the second side of the brain nine months after the first procedure, so Parkinson’s patients will have the chance to eventually become tremor-free.

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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 800-560-9999.

Cancer Care
Plant-Based Eating and Cancer This program provides an overview of the health benefits of eating more plants and simple guidelines for doing so, including resources to make the journey easy and delicious.
May 18, 2-3 p.m., virtual event

Stroke: The Latest Treatments and Technologies May is National Stroke Month. Learn how to B.E.F.A.S.T. and know the signs, symptoms and latest technologies.
May 2, 2-3 p.m., Lavallette Library, May 4, 11 a.m.-noon, virtual event

Mental Health Month Webinar: Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT) Join Eric Alcena, M.D., and Muhammed Abbas, M.D., for a lively, enlightening presentation about the most misunderstood treatment in the field of mental health and psychiatry.
May 11, 5-6 p.m., virtual event

Health Care
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. Call for dates, times and locations.
May 11, 10-11 a.m., Stafford Library, 129 N. Main St., Manahawkin

Free Wellness Screenings Blood pressure, cholesterol, glucose and more (non-fasting), Apr. 26, 7-8 p.m., Bay Ave. Community Center, 775 East Bay Ave., Manahawkin
Living with Arthritis May 9, 9-4 p.m., Community Outreach Conf. Center, 1800 Riv., Brick

Free Wellness Screenings, Demos and More Apr. 30, 11 a.m.-2 p.m., 1904 Atlantic Ave., Manasquan

Weight Loss Surgery To learn more about weight-loss surgery, attend a free seminar. To find a seminar near you, visit HMHforU.org/WeightLoss.

Parent/Guardian Talks
Body Image & Hot Topics Join Heather L. Appelbaum, M.D., and Jennifer L. Northridge, M.D., as they discuss your preteen’s and teen’s bodies and body image, focusing on the body as a whole. They will share tips on how to have those challenging but necessary conversations.
May 18, 11 a.m.-2 p.m., 1904 Atlantic Ave., Manasquan

Heart Health
Healthy Cooking on a Budget Apr. 19, noon-1 p.m., Southern Ocean Conf. Rms. 1 & 2
Chest Pain and Risk Factors June 8, 11 a.m.-noon, virtual event

Weight Management
Managing Diabetes June 7, 11 a.m.-noon, virtual event

Financial Wellness
Fresh Start Smoking Cessation May 10 & July 12, 7-8 p.m., virtual event

Behavioral Health
Strengthen the Mind Body Connection Learn about the connections between our mental and physical health and how we can improve our overall well-being.
May 24, 7-8 p.m., virtual event

Heart-healthy Cooking on a Budget Apr. 19, noon-1 p.m., Community Outreach Conf. Center, 1800 Riv., Brick

Spring Wellness Series with the Atlantic Club Diabetes 101 Apr. 26, 7-8 p.m., virtual event
Free Wellness Screenings, Demos and More Apr. 30, 11 a.m.-2 p.m., 1904 Atlantic Ave., Manasquan
Weight Loss Surgery To learn more about weight-loss surgery, attend a free seminar. To find a seminar near you, visit HMHforU.org/WeightLoss.

Support Groups Hackensack Meridian Health offers regular support group meetings. Learn more at HMHforU.org/SupportGroups.
A Life of Service and Beyond

**Former Riverview Medical Center nurse Susan St. Peter’s compassionate and generous legacy will carry on long after her death.**

Susan St. Peter’s link to Riverview Medical Center spanned nearly seven decades and began the day she was born. The connection continued when Sue went on to have a nursing career at the very same place where she, her five sisters and her three children were born. In the 1970s, Sue began working as a candy striper and assisting nurses. Over the years, she worked her way to become a corporate trainer.

"Hackensack Meridian Health provided Mom with a flourishing career in which she was able to pursue her dream of becoming a nurse," says her son Chris St. Peter.

In October 2022, Sue passed away after a two-year battle with ovarian cancer. She cared deeply not only for her patients over the years but for the nursing staff, as well. To keep her legacy alive, Sue’s family set up a scholarship in her name with the help of Riverview nursing manager Margaret Valenti and the Riverview Medical Center Foundation. Upon Sue’s passing, in lieu of flowers, her family asked for donations to be sent to Riverview Medical Center Foundation. To date, 65 donations have totaled more than $12,000.

"These funds will allow the Riverview Medical Center Foundation to award nursing scholarships for continuing education and various certifications for nurses," says Todd Shellenberger, executive director of Riverview Medical Center Foundation.

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May Is Mental Health Awareness Month!

Learn about the most misunderstood treatment in the field of mental health and psychiatry: electroconvulsive therapy (ECT).

**Webinar: Electroconvulsive Therapy** The not-so-scary truth about a life-changing therapy for treatment-resistant depression, mood disorders and severe forms of autism. Join Eric Alcera, M.D., and Muhammed Abbas, M.D., as they discuss ECT and neuromodulation in plain language. Hear from a young woman who found ECT to be life-saving for her severe depression, and a mom who found hope after years of misdiagnoses in discovering ECT for her son, who has a severe form of catatonic autism. To learn more or register, visit [HMHforU.org/Events](http://HMHforU.org/Events) or call **800-560-9990**.

May 11, 5–6 p.m., virtual event

**Is Electroconvulsive Therapy Painful?** Shailaja Shah, M.D., psychiatrist and associate medical director of ECT at Carrier Clinic, provides guidance on ECT, including whether it’s painful, if it causes side effects and when this therapy is recommended. Read more at [HMHforU.org/ECT](http://HMHforU.org/ECT).

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:**

For a complete listing of our hospitals, services and locations, visit [HMHforU.org/Locations](http://HMHforU.org/Locations).

[Map of hospitals](http://HMHforU.org/locations)