

The background is a light blue surface. In the center is a white clipboard with a silver clip at the top. A silver pen lies diagonally across the top left of the clipboard. A stethoscope with a black tube and silver chest piece is positioned at the bottom, looping around the clipboard. To the right of the clipboard, several blue and white capsules are scattered, and a yellow pill bottle with a white cap is tipped over, spilling more capsules. The text is centered on the white clipboard.

TIMES NEWS
— MEDIA GROUP —

MEDICAL BOOK

February 2024

A SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT TO
TIMES NEWS & **LEHIGH VALLEY PRESS LVP**

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My heart IS IN THE RIGHT HANDS

“ I never thought that I would have a heart attack at my age, but I’m glad that when I was at my worst I turned to the best. Now I feel better than ever, and none of this would have been possible without the extraordinary care from everyone at St. Luke’s.” — *Kim Krug*

When it comes to your heart, you need a team you can trust to provide the highest quality care, no matter how complex or routine the issue. That’s why Kim chose St. Luke’s – the region’s only nationally ranked 50 Top Heart Hospital to help her get back to feeling better than ever. With St. Luke’s, Kim knows her heart is in the right hands. *To learn more, visit sluhn.org/kim or scan the QR code.*



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Marcus Averbach, MD, Andrea Emery, Luis Tejada, MD, Kylie Tartaglia



Not the Kind of Heart Throb Taylor Swift Sang About

Kim Krug was in all her glory last May during a Taylor Swift concert at Lincoln Financial Field.

Kim, from Pennsburg, swayed to the music and traded bracelets with fellow Swifties.

While celebrating that highest of highs, she had no idea what the coming week would bring. Chest pains. Pins and needle feelings. A week after the concert, she knew something was wrong and drove to the St. Luke's Upper Bucks Campus.

"I had awful chest pain and it wasn't going away," said Kim, 51, a Global Director for Johnson & Johnson. "I couldn't fall asleep. I was in so much pain for hours and hours. I couldn't take it anymore, so I drove myself to the ER."

Her EKG was fairly normal, said cardiologist Marcus A. Averbach, MD, who examined Kim in the ER, "but her blood tests showed high levels of troponin, indicating she was having a heart attack."

Kim experienced a non-ST-elevation myocardial infarction (non-STEMI) that happens when the heart's need for oxygen can't be met. Dr. Averbach had Kim transferred by ambulance to St. Luke's Anderson Campus, where an on-call team led by interventional cardiologist Luis A. Tejada, MD, performed an angioplasty and placed a stent to fix a 100 percent blockage in her left anterior descending artery (LAD), the so-called "Widowmaker" blockage.

"It's the most important artery," Dr. Tejada said. "We did the catheterization and it went very well and restored the blood flow with a very good result."

"They saved my life," Kim said. "I mean it. They really saved my life. The second part of the story is that because I waited so long to go in, I had a lot of heart damage ... which is scary."

Kim went home with a LifeVest, a wearable defibrillator, and was referred to cardiac rehabilitation with Andrea Emery at St. Luke's Quakertown in Cardiopulmonary Rehabilita-



tion. There, she found the physical and emotional rehabilitation "absolutely extraordinary!"

"When she first came to me, she was very depressed and was feeling a lot of stress," Emery said. "I told her cardiac rehab is where we can get rid of that LifeVest."

Kim fully committed to the rehab process. She changed her diet, quit smoking, exercised, and learned about cardiac risk factor modification. After "graduating" from cardiac rehab, Kim delights in taking spin classes.

"I put into practice everything I learned in cardiac rehab,

Kim said. "It's also about nutrition, with a clean diet, and I've lost 60 pounds."

That last session with Andrea was something sweet. And Swift. Emery created an entire Taylor Swift playlist for the final session, and Kim absolutely loved it.

Kim thought she was living her best life before that Taylor Swift concert. Today, she really is.

"None of this would have been possible without the extraordinary care from everyone at St. Luke's," Kim said.

To learn more about Kim's story and watch her video, visit sluhn.org/kim.

5 common health conditions that affect women

Women who want to take charge of their health can recognize that various conditions and diseases are more common than others. The following are five common and notable health issues affecting women today.

- **Heart disease:** Heart disease affects more than 60 million women in the United States and is the leading cause of death for women. Heart disease can affect women of all ages. Despite this, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says only 56 percent of women recognize the prevalence of heart disease. In addition, it's important to note that most women between the ages of 40 and 60 have at least one or more risk factors for heart disease and likely do not even realize it.

- **Breast cancer:** Routine mammograms and other breast cancer screenings can help women detect breast cancer at its earliest stage when it is most treatable.

- **Cervical and ovarian cancer:** Cervical cancer originates in the

cervix, which is part of the lower uterus, while ovarian cancer begins in the fallopian tubes and ovaries. Pap smears can detect cervical cancer, but currently there is no screening test for ovarian cancer. A pelvic exam and ultrasound or other imaging may be recommended if doctors suspect the presence of ovarian cancer.

- **Reproductive health issues:** The Orlando Clinical Research Center says that reproductive issues can have a major affect on women's quality of life and overall health. Some common issues include uterine fibroids, gynecological cancers, interstitial cystitis, endometriosis, and polycystic ovary syndrome. Pain, heavy or irregular periods and other discharge may be symptoms of these types of conditions.

- **Mental health concerns:** Rates of anxiety and depression are higher among women than men. The Anxiety Disorders Association of America reports that, from the time a girl reaches puberty until

about the age of 50, she is twice as likely to have an anxiety disorder as a man.

Recognition of the most common health issues to affect women can help them get the care they need to live long, healthy lives.

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How cherries benefit your body

The first image to come to many people's minds when they think of cherries may be one of these tiny stone fruits sitting atop an ice cream sundae. That's an undeniably appealing image, but cherries are more than just a must-have sundae topping.

Cherries benefit the body in various ways. Nutritious and delicious, cherries may find their way into even more people's diets once people recognize the many ways cherries can improve overall health.

· **Cherries and blood sugar:** The American Diabetes Association notes that cherries can help people with diabetes control their blood sugar levels. The glycemic index (GI) is a system that rates foods which contain carbohydrates, and foods with a low GI rating slowly release glucose into a person's blood. Cherries have a low GI and can help anyone living with diabetes manage their blood sugar more easily.

· **Cherries and inflammation:**

Cherries are rich in antioxidants, which means they boast similar anti-inflammatory properties to fruits such as blueberries. Vitamin A, vitamin C and vitamin E are antioxidants present in cherries, and the Cleveland Clinic notes that one study found that consuming 45 cherries per day can reduce inflammation brought on by free radicals. However, anyone considering consuming so many cherries is urged to speak with their physician first, as individuals with sensitivity to salicylates could suffer gastrointestinal issues from consuming cherries.

· **Cherries and sleep:** The Sleep Foundation reports that studies have found that consuming tart cherry juice can promote a better, more restful night's sleep. Tart cherries are a rarity in that they are one of only a handful of natural food sources of melatonin, a hormone that is secreted at certain times of day to facilitate the transition to sleep. The Cleveland Clinic adds that cherries also contain

serotonin, which helps the body make melatonin, and tryptophan, which helps the body produce serotonin. A small glass of tart cherry juice after dinner may help people sleep better.

· **Cherries and arthritis and gout:** The Arthritis Foundation® reports that studies have found that cherries may help to alleviate joint pain in people with osteoarthritis and lower the risk of flare-ups in individuals with gout. Some people with arthritis look to non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as Advil®, to alleviate the pain associated with their conditions. The Arthritis Foundation® reports that some researchers have compared the anti-inflammatory benefits of cherries with those provided by NSAIDs.

Cherries are more than just sundae toppings. A closer look at the benefits of cherries reveals that they help the body in various ways.

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How to bake healthier treats

Baking can be a relaxing and rewarding pastime that parents can share with their children. Baking promotes a variety of skills, including the ability to follow instructions and make measurements. Baking also employs mathematics, making baking a rather delicious science experiment. Perhaps one of the few pitfalls of baking is indulging in too many sweet treats when taste testing and then enjoying the fruits of your labors.

But bakers concerned about their health can substitute healthy ingredients when recipes call for foods bakers would prefer to avoid. The following ingredients can make healthy additions to baked-good recipes without sacrificing flavor.

- **Whole wheat flour:** Flour is at the heart of many baking recipes, including those for cakes, cookies and pies. Refined white flour may not be the healthiest ingredient, so try whole wheat flour, which is full of nutrients and an extra dose of fiber. Fiber can help lower the risk for heart disease and diabetes. Try slightly less than one cup of whole wheat flour for regular flour as a swap if a recipe calls for one cup of flour.

- **Fruit puree:** When a recipe calls for oil, margarine, butter or shortening, consider replacing such ingredients with fruit purees, which often add moisture and texture just as well but without the same amount of calories. Applesauce and prunes can be helpful in chocolate dishes. Pumpkin or sweet potato are other purees that can add a nutritional boost as well.

- **Greek yogurt:** Greek yogurt is a powerhouse of protein and flavor with relatively few calories per serving. It can make a super substitution in recipes for things like sour cream, buttermilk or even cream cheese.

- **Applesauce:** Believe it or not, unsweetened applesauce also can replace some or all of the sugar in a recipe. When doing a 1:1 ratio swap, reduce the amount of liquid in the recipe by 1/4 cup.

- **Marshmallow or meringue:** Ever check the nutritional information for many store-bought cake frostings? They pack a considerable amount of calories, sugar and fat. Some also are made with hydrogenated oils. Consider using a marshmallow fluff or homemade meringue to top cupcakes or decorate cookies.

- **Stevia:** Stevia is an herbal plant that grows primarily in South America. Stevia has a long history as a sweetener in that area, and now has become a popular sugar substitute elsewhere. Stevia is an all-natural, no-calorie, no-carbohydrate sweetener. The FDA approved only the purified form of stevia, called stevioside. Remember to check each brand's sugar-to-stevia ratio to make sure you get the right measurements for your recipe.

- **Egg whites:** Replace a whole egg in a recipe with two egg whites or 1/4 cup of egg substitute.

- **Chocolate nibs:** Nibs are processed morsels that do not have the same amount of added sugar as many chocolate chips. Dark chocolate nibs can provide a healthy dose of antioxidants as well.

- **Evaporated skim milk:** Try evaporated skim milk in place of heavy cream to make whipped cream for a low-fat option.

Baking brings family together, and the treats prepare can make an enjoyable finale to a great meal. With healthy substitutions, any recipe can be altered for the better.

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What to know about becoming a blood donor

Hospitals have an urgent need for blood donations, as demand continues to outpace blood supplies, according to the American Red Cross. The organization says fewer donors contributed to the blood supply over the summer in 2023, creating a national blood shortage. As of the fall of 2023, donors of all types were urgently needed, and there was an emergency need for platelet donors and type O blood.

Canada also has encountered issues regarding its blood supply. Ron Vezina, vice-president of public affairs with the nonprofit organization Canadian Blood Services, said the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, extreme weather that included wildfires, and more Canadians traveling abroad has left a deficit of appointments within the blood-donation network.

Individuals who are considering giving blood are urged to do so. Most people are eligible to give blood if they are in good health, although there are some basic eligibility guidelines, says the World Health Organization.

- Individuals between the ages of 18 and 65 often can give blood. Some countries make exemptions for younger and older donors if consent is obtained or at the discretion of responsible physicians.

- A person must weigh at least 50 kg (110 lbs.).

- One must feel well on the day of the donation, and should not have a cold, flu, sore throat, cold sore, stomach bug, or any other infection.

Cedars-Sinai says there are some reasons why people may be excluded from giving blood. These may vary depending on the state, province or country, so it's best to get clarification on the rules from a local donation organization. People who may be excluded include:

- Individuals taking antibiotics for an infection.

- Individuals who are currently using certain medications like anti-platelet agents, anticoagulants, acne treatments, drugs to treat rheumatoid arthritis, hair loss remedy or prostate symptom products, immunosuppressants, HIV prevention drugs, and more. A certain period of time between last usage and blood donation may need to pass, and more information can be obtained by speaking with a doctor.

- Individuals who have undergone dental surgery in the last 72 hours.

- Individuals with a history of HIV/AIDS.

- Individuals who have hepatitis or have come into close contact with hepatitis.

- Individuals who have used illegal IV drugs.



- Individuals who have experienced an unintentional needle stick.

- Individuals who, in the three months prior to donating, have traveled to an area where malaria is common.

- Individuals who spent a combined total of three months or more in the United Kingdom between 1980 and 1996.

- Individuals who spent a combined total of five years or more in France or Ireland between 1980 and 2001.

- Individuals who have gotten a tattoo in the last three months.

It is not advisable to give blood while pregnant or while breastfeeding.

Giving blood can be a life-saving gesture. Even if a person is not eligible to give blood, he or she can still volunteer with a blood collection organization and spread the word about blood donation.

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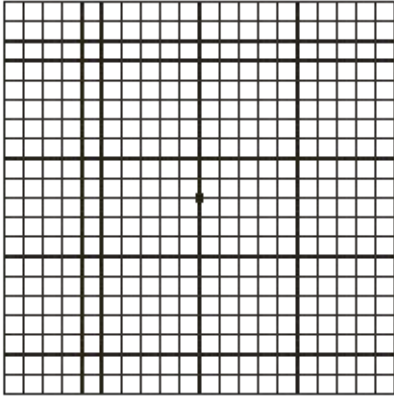
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3. Are there any "holes" (missing areas) or dark areas in the grid?
4. Can you see all corners and sides of the grid (while keeping your eye on the central dot)?

- Switch to the other eye and repeat.

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The long-term effects of proper childhood dental care

Parents of young children are undoubtedly familiar with the morning and nighttime ritual of getting kids to brush their teeth. Kids may or may not embrace that routine no matter how hard parents try to relate the benefits of proper oral hygiene, but moms and dads can take solace in the knowledge that childhood dental care can have a positive and lasting effect on kids' overall health.

Dental care and heart disease

Harvard Health Publishing notes that numerous studies have now shown that people with poor oral health exhibit higher rates of cardiovascular issues, including heart attack and stroke. The reason behind that remains something of a medical mystery, but some theorize that bacteria that infects gums and causes conditions such as gingivitis and periodontitis trigger an immune response, inflammation, that then contributes to vascular damage.

Dental care and Alzheimer's disease

The National Institute on Ag-

ing reports that a recent analysis published in the *Journal of Alzheimer's Disease* noted the bacteria that cause gum disease are also linked with the development of Alzheimer's disease. That analysis found that older adults with signs of periodontitis, a condition marked by inflammation of tissue around the teeth that can cause loosening of the teeth, were more likely to develop Alzheimer's disease. Additional research is necessary before more concrete conclusions about the link between dental care and Alzheimer's disease can be made, but dental care that protects the gums could very well reduce individuals' risk for dementia.

Dental care and cancer risk

Cancer is among the leading causes of death across the globe, affecting people from all walks of life. Researchers at Harvard's T.H. Chan School of Public Health discovered a link between dental care and cancer risk. In a letter published in the journal *Gut* in 2020, researchers reported that they found that people with a history of



gum disease have a higher risk of stomach and esophageal cancers than people with no such history. And that risk was not exactly minimal, as researchers reported a 43 percent higher risk for esophageal cancer and a 52 percent higher risk for stomach cancer.

An emphasis on lifelong oral hygiene in childhood could pay lasting dividends, potentially reducing kids' risk for various diseases when they reach adulthood.

Oral Health Impacts Overall Health

Many people know that poor oral hygiene can lead to gum disease, tooth decay and even lost teeth. But are you aware that failing to brush or visit the dentist regularly also can lead to more serious health issues? Recent research suggests that there may be an association between oral infections, particularly gum disease, and cardiovascular disease and preterm birth. Gum disease also may make diabetes more difficult to control, since infections may cause insulin resistance and disrupt blood sugar.

Your mouth also can serve as an infection source elsewhere in the body. Bacteria from your mouth can enter the bloodstream through infection sites in the gums. If your immune system is healthy, there should not be any adverse effects. However, if your immune system is compromised, these bacteria can flow to other areas of the body where they can cause infection. An example of this is oral bacteria sticking to the lining of diseased heart valves.

An important step in maintaining good overall health is to include dental care in your list of preventative measures. Visit the dentist for biannual cleanings or as determined by the doctor. Do not ignore any abnormalities in the mouth. Maintain good oral hygiene at home by brushing twice a day and flossing at least once per day. Mouthwashes and rinses also may help keep teeth and gums healthy.

Oral health and other systems of the body seem to be linked. Taking care of your teeth promotes overall health.

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What to know about Multiple Sclerosis

The 2024 Emmy Awards ceremony was not without its memorable moments, perhaps none more so than the appearance of actress Christina Applegate. In 2021, Applegate, known for notable roles on “Married. With Children,” “Samantha Who?” and “Dead To Me,” among other projects, shared that she had been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS). Applegate was using a cane during her Emmys appearance, at which she received a standing ovation.

Applegate’s courageous appearance undoubtedly prompted curiosity about MS, cases of which rose by a considerable amount between 2013 and 2023. According to the Atlas of MS, a worldwide study of the epidemiology of MS, the number of people diagnosed with MS increased from 2.3 million in 2013 to 2.9 million in 2023. Such figures may spark greater curiosity about MS and what can be done to combat it.

What is MS?

The National Multiple Sclerosis Society characterizes MS as a disease that affects the brain, spinal cord and optic nerves, which make up the central nervous system and controls everything a person does.

What causes MS?

The NMSS notes that the cause

of MS remains unknown. However, researchers have confirmed that MS occurs when something triggers the immune system to attack the central nervous system. That attack causes damage to the myelin, which serves an insulating sheath around many nerve fibers. Damage to the myelin disrupts signals to and from the brain.

What are some symptoms of MS?

The organization MS Australia notes that symptoms of MS can be variable and unpredictable. No two people will experience exactly the same symptoms, which can vary depending on the part of the body MS affects (the brain, optic nerve or spinal cord). The United Kingdom-based MS Society indicates that one of the more obvious initial signs of the disease is optic neuritis, a vision problem caused by damage to the optic nerve. Pain with eye movement and temporary vision loss in one eye are common symptoms of optic neuritis, according to the Mayo Clinic. Numbness and tingling also may indicate MS, but these symptoms are more vague than those associated with optic neuritis. Numbness and tingling also may indicate other conditions and are not necessarily a byproduct of MS.

Additional symptoms of MS

may include:

- Fatigue
- Loss of balance and dizziness
- Stiffness or spasms
- Tremor
- Pain
- Bladder problems, including issues with storage and emptying the bladder
- Bowel problems, such as constipation and incontinence
- Problems with memory and thinking

It’s notable that these symptoms are not exclusive to MS nor are they a confirmation of the presence of MS. Each can indicate the presence of another disease or condition. That underscores the importance of bringing the presence of any of these symptoms to the attention of a physician immediately.

Is MS fatal?

The NMSS notes that the life expectancy of individuals diagnosed with MS has increased over time. Complications related to MS are preventable or manageable. Individuals diagnosed with MS who commit to health and wellness can reduce their risk of developing other conditions that can adversely affect their life expectancy.

MS is a serious disease. More information can be found at nationalmssociety.org.

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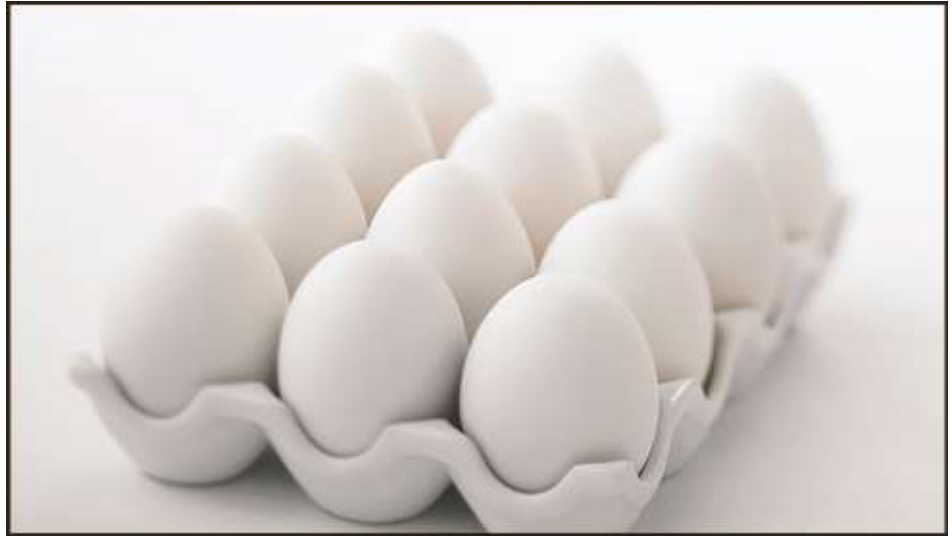
Listen. Get your life back.

5 foods that promote long-term eye health

A nutritious diet is often touted in relation to its link to maintaining a healthy weight and reducing risk for chronic disease. Though healthy foods certainly provide each of those benefits, a nutritious diet also can protect vision.

The World Health Organization estimates that at least 2.2 billion people have a near or distance vision impairment, and roughly half of those instances could have been prevented or have yet to be addressed. Vision loss is often characterized as a natural byproduct of aging, and the National Institute on Aging notes that it's normal for individuals to notice changes in their vision as they age. But it's a mistake to think there's little people can do to protect their long-term vision. In fact, a nutritious diet can be a great ally as individuals aspire to protect their long-term eye health. According to the Optometrists Network, a collective that includes clinical optometrists and respected researchers, the following are five foods that can help people protect their eyes.

1. Fish high in omega-3 fatty acids: Omega-3 fatty acids help with vision development and can reduce a person's risk of developing dry eye, a condition marked by chronically dry eyes that either don't produce enough tears or produce tears that cannot adequately lubricate the eyes. Various types of fish, including salmon, anchovies, herring, and trout, among others, are high in omega-3 fatty acids. Individuals who don't like eating fish can consider various nuts and legumes, such as walnuts, lentils and peanuts, which all contain omega-3



fatty acids as well.

2. Seeds: Flax seeds, chia seeds, hemp seeds, and sunflower seeds contain either omega-3 fatty acids or vitamin E, which the Optometrists Network notes can help to prevent age-related macular degeneration and cataracts.

3. Leafy green vegetables: WebMD reports that lutein and zeaxanthin are potent antioxidants that can help to prevent age-related eye disease and protect the eyes from the harmful effects of exposure to ultraviolet rays in sunlight. Leafy green vegetables such as collards, kale and spinach are high in lutein and zeaxanthin.

xanthin.

4. Sweet potatoes: Though their popularity spikes in fall, sweet potatoes are available year-round. That's good news for sweet potato aficionados hoping to use diet to protect their eyes, as the Optometrists Network reports that sweet potatoes are high in beta carotene, which helps the eyes adjust to darkness. Sweet potatoes also are high in vitamin C, which may help individuals reduce their risk for cataracts.

5. Eggs: Like leafy green vegetables, eggs are high in lutein and zeaxanthin. The Optometrists Network also reports that eggs are rich in vitamins

C and E and a good source of zinc. The presence of zinc is notable in relation to eye health, as it's been shown to help the body utilize lutein and zeaxanthin found in the yolk. Zinc also has been found to protect the retina from potentially harmful blue light and helps to increase the amount of protective pigment in the macula.

Many benefits associated with a nutritious diet are widely known. But even the most devoted healthy eaters may not recognize how much certain foods are helping to maintain their long-term eye health.



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Exercising when you have high blood pressure

Hypertension, also known as high blood pressure, is a serious medical condition and a risk factor for cardiovascular disease. The National Library of Medicine National Center for Biotechnology Information offers that hypertension is responsible for the majority of cardiovascular mortality. Hypertension is associated with an inactive lifestyle, so becoming more active can prevent or even reverse a hypertension diagnosis.

Hypertension is blood pressure that is 140 or higher on the systolic (upper) number and 90 or higher on the diastolic (lower) number. Exercise can help lower high blood pressure and may provide an energy boost and relieve stress.

For people adopting a more active lifestyle after a hypertension diagnosis, it is preferential to start off gradually. WebMD says in the event of hypertension, any activity that enables one to breathe harder and make the heart beat a little faster can be sufficient; it is not necessary to purchase a gym membership, but doing so may provide the motivation some need to commit to a workout regimen. Activi-



ties like swimming, jogging, brisk walking, biking, or doing rigorous yard work also can help lower blood pressure.

The American Heart Association says for most people, 150 minutes per week of moderate-intensity physical activity is recommended. This amount of exercise can be broken up any way a person desires, like 30 minutes per day, though the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services advises exercising over the course of sev-

eral days each week. People should make time for stretching and muscle-strengthening as well. Regular physical activity can lower blood pressure by anywhere from five to eight mm Hg. By keeping active, a person can prevent blood pressure from creeping up again.

Exercise is a vital component of addressing hypertension. After receiving such a diagnosis, individuals can work with their physicians to devise a safe and effective fitness regimen.

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Tips for seniors to safeguard their mental health

The wide-ranging impact and reach of mental health issues garnered much attention during the Covid-19 pandemic, when the virus and mandates designed to reduce its spread led to increased feelings of anxiety and isolation. Since then, life has returned to normal for billions of people, but many people, including seniors, continue to experience mental health issues.

The Pan American Health Organization reports that at least one in four older adults experiences a mental disorder such as depression, anxiety or dementia. And those figures will likely grow, as population estimates indicate seniors will make up a greater percentage of the global population in the years to come. Seniors dealing with mental health issues may feel helpless, but there's much they can do to safeguard their mental health.

- **Socialize regularly.** A 2019 study published in *The Journals of Gerontology, Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences* found that older adults who socialized with people beyond their circle of family and close friends were more likely to have greater positive moods and fewer negative feelings. Unfortunately, a significant percentage of older adults report feeling isolated from others. According to the University of Michigan National Poll on Healthy Aging that was conducted in January 2023, one in three older adults reported infrequent contact (once a



week or less) with people from outside their home.

- **Speak with a mental health professional.** Among the more troubling aspects of the mental health crisis affecting seniors is that the PAHO reports two-thirds of older adults with mental health problems don't get the treatment they need. Speaking with a mental health professional can help older adults in myriad ways. Such professionals can identify the issue that is prompting seniors to seek help and offer suggestions that can improve overall health and quality of life. Roundstone Insurance notes that reliance on digital behavioral health tools, including telehealth, was turned to both during the pandemic and ever since, and seniors can utilize such services if they have limited mobility and/or no one to help them make it to in-person appointments.

- **Volunteer.** Many older adults are retired, and while ample free time may have seemed like the

ultimate reward after a lifetime of working, many retirees experience a void once their life no longer has the structure that work can provide. According to the independent nonprofit HelpGuide.org, retirement depression can compel retirees to feel as though they miss the sense of identity, meaning and purpose that came with their jobs, which can make some feel depressed, aimless and isolated. Volunteering can help fill the void created by retirement, and the positive mental health effects of volunteering are well-documented. According to the Mayo Clinic, studies have shown volunteering increases positive, relaxed feelings and gives volunteers a sense of meaning and appreciation.

No one is immune to mental health issues, including seniors. But older adults can take various steps to address their mental health and improve their overall health as a result.

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The nutritional benefits of sweet potatoes

Sweet potatoes are enjoyed throughout the year, but their popularity may peak during fall and winter when they are an important part of holiday meals. Sweet potatoes were cultivated in Central or South America at least 5,000 years ago. They eventually were introduced to Europeans by explorers like Christopher Columbus, and soon these bright-orange delights became staples of diets across the globe.

According to WebMD, sweet potatoes are not potatoes, but sweet roots in the morning glory family. There are hundreds of varieties of sweet potatoes. While the most common have bright orange pulp, other varieties are yellow, red or purple.

There are many good reasons to enjoy sweet potatoes regularly. According to Healthline, sweet potatoes offer a host of nutritional benefits that make them worthy of inclusion on any dinner table.

- **Low in calories:** A one cup serving of sweet potatoes is around 180 calories with negligible fat content, 41 grams of carbohydrates,

and 6.6 grams of fiber.

- **Help stabilize blood sugar:** Sweet potatoes are higher in fiber than white potatoes, which can provide more stability for blood glucose, says Everyday Health. The fiber in the sweet potatoes helps slow the digestion of sugar from the food, resulting in a steadier rise and fall in blood sugar.

- **Loads of vitamin A per serving:** Sweet potatoes contain 213 percent of the Daily Value of vitamin A. Vitamin A is important for eye health and can boost the immune system. It's also good for organs like the heart and kidneys. The vitamin A in the potatoes can reduce the risk of macular degeneration and age-related cataracts.

- **Beta-carotene connection:** Sweet potatoes also are high in beta-carotene, which is a carotenoid that can be converted to vitamin A. Along with other carotenoids, beta-carotene helps with macular health and could sharpen vision.

- **Promote gut health:** The fiber and antioxidants in sweet potatoes are important for digestion. Sweet potatoes contain soluble and in-




soluble fiber which can help move stool along. The fiber also can be fermented by digestive bacteria to create a healthy digestive biome that keeps the intestines healthy, according to Healthline.


- **Might reduce inflammation:** Consuming the beta-carotene in sweet potatoes may do more than just boost vision. Some researchers believe this antioxidant can clean the body of free radicals that may cause inflammation in the body. Some studies indicate low levels of beta-carotene is associated with higher risk of heart disease.

These are just some of the benefits of including sweet potatoes in your dietary regimen.

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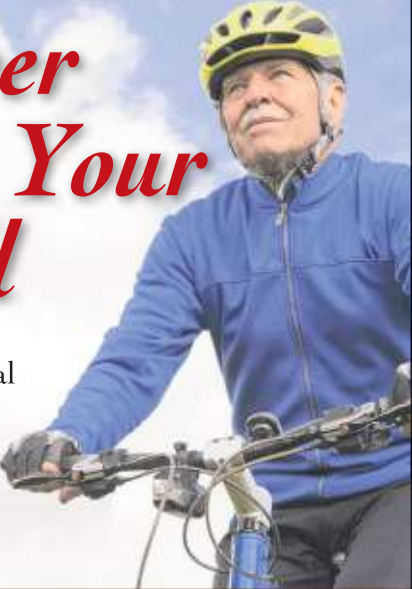
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Seniors can backstroke their way to improved health

Exercise provides a number of measureable benefits for people of all ages, including older adults. Swimming is one exercise that may be especially beneficial for seniors.

Many people learn to swim in childhood and sharpen that skill as they get older. Though swimming devotees may get in the water for fun rather than fitness, this popular, joyful and relaxing pastime may be the ideal exercise for seniors looking to improve their overall health, particularly because it is very low-impact.

Because the water provides buoyancy while swimming, there is little risk of injury and minimal strain on the body. Water exercises, including swimming, work all the muscle groups, so it can be a complete exercise, says American Senior Communities. Swimming also is a great cardiovascular exercise that can strengthen the heart muscle and improve lung function and endurance. Because it lowers blood pressure and improves circu-

lation, swimming is a great way to get the heart pumping.

A gentle, 30-minute swim can burn up to 200 calories, which is more than walking. A faster swim can burn calories more quickly than running or cycling. However, since water supports up to 90 percent of the body's weight, this activity will put less stress on muscles and joints while one is exercising.

Individuals with mobility issues or arthritis pain may find that swimming helps relieve discomfort and improves range of motion. Again, because the water is doing much of the work holding up the body, it will take the stress off of joints, helping a person to feel better while stretching and moving gently in the water.

Even seniors who don't know how to swim can still reap the benefits of water exercise. Walking in shallow water, or using a kickboard to stay above the water can be effective. Using foam dumbbells

or even pushing and pulling one's arms through the water can serve as a great resistance exercise that builds strength.

Swimming and additional water activities are great ways for seniors to stay in shape. As always, individuals should speak with their doctors before beginning any exercise regimen to ensure that it is safe.

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What does caffeine do to the body?

Around 80 percent of the United States population consumes caffeine regularly, according to data from the U.S. Food & Drug Administration. Caffeine is found in coffee, tea, energy drinks, and some headache medications.

The National Center for Biotechnology Information says caffeine is the most widely consumed nervous system stimulant. Caffeine is considered a psychoactive drug. That means it alters the mind. Caffeine can change the way people think and feel. Healthline says the stimulating effects of caffeine contribute to its popularity. Caffeine will cause immediate alertness and temporarily relieve fatigue. Caffeine also may help enhance mood, and Healthline reports that one study found caffeine was linked to a 45 percent reduced risk of suicide in participants.

Moderate amounts of caffeine may help increase focus and attention, according to the mental health and substance abuse resource Here

to Help. It also may help boost endurance while playing sports or engaging in other physical activities.

Generally speaking, when caffeine is used in low to moderate amounts, it could prove beneficial. It's when too much caffeine is consumed that people can get in trouble. The following are some of the detrimental effects of caffeine.

- Confusion and overstimulation can occur.
- Headaches can happen from too much caffeine or from withdrawal.
- Irritability also may be a symptom of withdrawal when the body becomes accustomed to caffeine.
- Caffeine may help keep a person regular, but too much can do the opposite and lead to diarrhea.
- Excessive caffeine can prevent calcium absorption in the bones, which may increase risk for osteoporosis and bone fractures.
- Some women who consume too much caffeine may have trouble conceiving a baby, and if caffeine is



consumed in high amounts during pregnancy, there's a risk of developmental issues in newborns or possibly miscarriage.

• Increased blood pressure also may result from consuming caffeine in high amounts.

Caffeine can have many effects on the body. It's important to understand both the positive and negative impact of caffeine on the body and brain.

Personal Care vs Independent Living

As we age we often find ourselves facing decisions on our living situations. More often than not, we begin to think about our future living arrangements after the death of a spouse or a medical scare. There are many different options when it comes to senior living and knowing your options is important.

Independent Living

Independent living allows many seniors the ability to live independently in a more social environment amongst peers with less household upkeep. Independent living communities offer active seniors the opportunity to socialize with peers and others who have common interests. These seniors do not have to worry about the upkeep of a house or chores like mowing the lawn or shoveling snow. Because these communities are geared toward independent seniors, their living accommodations are private. Seniors living in independent living communities tend to their own medical and personal care needs as well as their medication with no support from others.

Personal Care

Personal care is essentially a bridge between independent living and a skilled nursing home, however in some personal care homes there are accommodations in place that allow seniors to age in place. Personal care homes assist seniors who may be physically or cognitively unable to live alone. Seniors who choose personal care may have chronic health conditions such as heart disease, diabetes or dementia. In personal care, seniors have their own living space (may be private or semi-private), while having 24/7 staff available to assist them with medical and personal care needs as well as administer medications as needed. Personal care also has a very social setting with community events, activities and programs that seniors may participate in.

Finding the right fit for your needs is important. The biggest difference between independent living and personal care is the full-time supervision and care options that are included in personal care. Additionally, some amenities such as meals and housekeeping services are included in the cost of personal care; whereas, it may be an option with an additional cost for independent living. In the end, deciding on your living arrangements as you age comes down to your needs.

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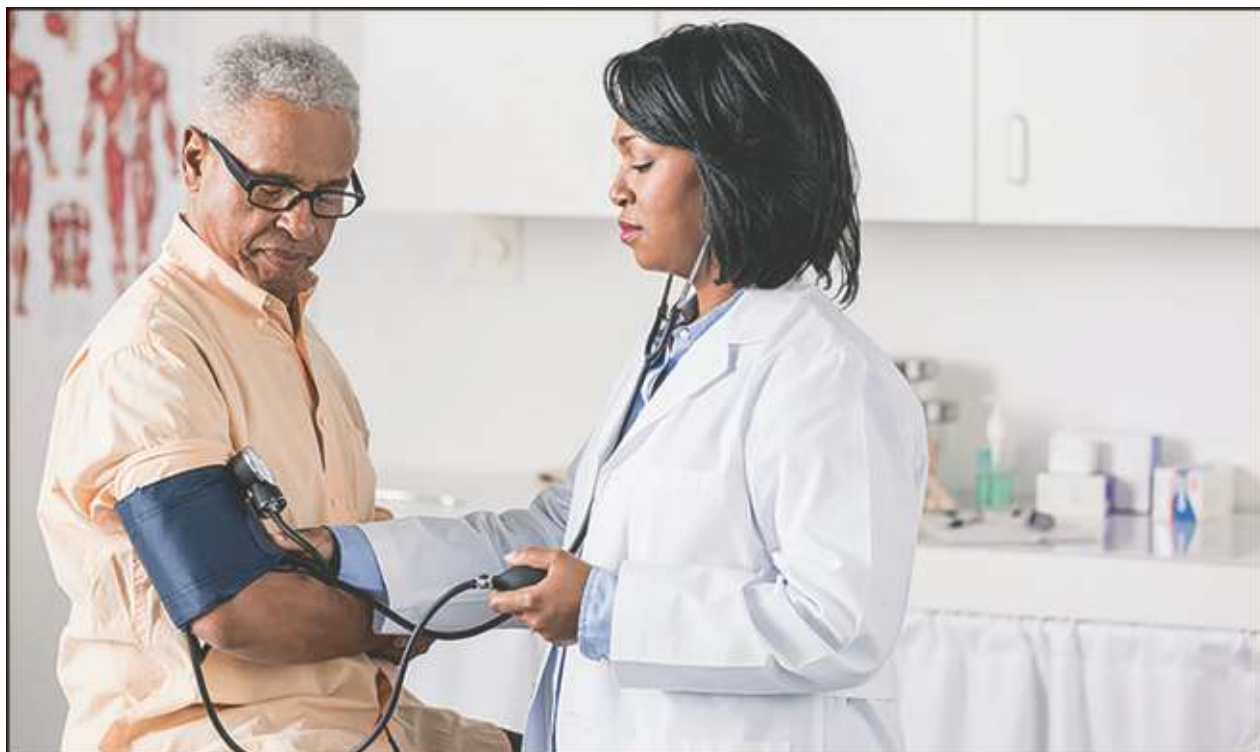
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What seniors should know about prediabetes

Most seniors recognize that routine visits to their physicians are an important component of preventive health care. Annual physicals are important for everyone, but they're especially important for individuals 65 and older who may be more vulnerable to disease and various other health conditions than younger adults.

The National Institute on Aging reports that millions of individuals 65 and older have visited their physicians and learned they have a condition known as prediabetes. For some, the day they receive a prediabetes diagnosis also marks the first time they've heard of the condition. Since so many seniors are affected by prediabetes, it can behoove anyone to learn more about it.

What is prediabetes?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notes that prediabetes is a serious health condition characterized by higher than normal blood sugar levels. When a person has prediabetes, his or her blood sugar levels are not yet high enough to indicate type 2 diabetes, but that could change if prediabetes patients do not make changes to prevent such a progression.

How common is prediabetes?

A 2023 study published in the journal *Diabetes Care* indicates that 464 million individuals across the globe had impaired glucose tolerance (IGT) and 298 million had impaired fasting glucose (IFG) in 2021. Each of those conditions are hallmarks of prediabetes, cases of which the study indicates are expected to rise significantly by 2045.

What causes prediabetes?

The CDC notes that when a person has prediabetes, the cells in his or her body do not respond normally to insulin, which is a hormone produced by the pancreas that enables blood sugar to enter cells, which then use it for energy. The pancreas then makes more insulin to get cells to respond, but eventually the pancreas cannot keep up, resulting in a rise in blood sugar.

Does prediabetes produce symptoms?

Many people have prediabetes for years and do not know it. In fact, the CDC reports that more than 80 percent of the 98 million American adults who have prediabetes are unaware that they do.

How can I determine if I have prediabetes?

The sheer volume of people who

have prediabetes but are unaware that they do begs the question of what individuals can do to learn if they have the condition before they develop type 2 diabetes. Recognition of the risk factors for prediabetes is a good start. The CDC urges anyone who has any of the following risk factors to speak with their doctor about having their blood sugar tested:

- Being overweight
- Being 45 or older
- Having a parent, brother or sister with type 2 diabetes
- Being physically active less than three times per week
- A history of diabetes during pregnancy (gestational diabetes) or giving birth to a baby who weighed more than nine pounds
- Having polycystic ovary syndrome
- Being African American, Hispanic/Latino American, American Indian, or Pacific Islander. Some Asian Americans also are at greater risk for prediabetes.

Prediabetes can be a precursor to type 2 diabetes, which only highlights how important it is that older adults recognize their risk for the condition.

8 things women should know about stress

Stress can be paradoxical. A certain amount of stress can motivate people to get things done. But having too much can cause a person to resist doing anything at all. The Cleveland Clinic says stress is the body's response to daily events that occur in life. When stress becomes chronic, it can be negative and destructive, making it hard to adapt and cope.

Chronic stress is a concern for many women. The Office on Women's Health says women are more likely than men to report symptoms of stress, including headaches and upset stomach. They're also more likely to have mental health conditions that are exacerbated by stress, including anxiety and depression.

Learning the facts about stress can help women care for their mental well-being. Here are eight things to know.

1. Stress can manifest in emo-

tional, cognitive or physical symptoms. Notable physical symptoms include muscle tension and headaches as well as fatigue and low energy. Emotional symptoms may include increased worry, mood swings or irritability.

2. Stress can lead to unhealthy habits. Women have higher risk of overeating due to stress, and may become inactive or smoke to cope with stress, says the American Heart Association.

3. Common causes of long-term stress include poverty and financial worries. Women in poverty who care for children or other family members may develop more severe stress, says the Office of Assistant Secretary for Health.

4. Women respond to stress differently. Healthline indicates women have a higher percentage of perception of stress than men, and also are more apt to realize they must manage it. Seventy percent of

women have tried to reduce stress over the past five years.

5. Research reported on by the American Psychological Association says women are more likely to internalize stress, leading more readily to both physical and mental disorders. Men tend to be better at disassociating from stress.

6. Women are more likely to cancel plans due to stress than men, despite realizing they could use more social support.

7. Stress can disrupt hormonal balance in women, leading to menstrual irregularities.

8. Stress can trigger increased pain sensitivity, making women more prone to tension headaches and migraine attacks.

Stress can take its toll on anyone, including women. Recognizing help is needed, setting measurable targets and being realistic about managing stress can help women feel better.



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Safely manage multiple medications

Individuals who are 60 and older are accustomed to making routine trips to the pharmacy to fill prescriptions. In fact, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notes that roughly 84 percent of adults between the ages of 60 and 79 use one or more prescription medications.

Prescription medications prolong individuals' lives and can make their daily lives more comfortable and manageable. As individuals age, their doctors may recommend various prescriptions, some of which they may need to take long-term. Managing multiple medications at once can be difficult, as it can be easy to lose track of which medications have been taken when individuals are prescribed more than one. In recognition of that difficulty, the National Institutes of Health offers the following tips to help individuals safely manage multiple medications.

- Maintain an updated list of

all medications you take. The NIH notes a medication list should include both prescription and over-the-counter medications. OTC medicines include vitamins, supplements and herbal products.

- Share your medication list with family or close friends. A medication list should be accessible, and seniors can even share it with close family members, who can then advise medical professionals like EMTs, nurses and emergency room doctors which medicines you are taking in emergency situations when you may not be conscious.

- Routinely review your medicine list with health care providers and pharmacists. The NIH recommends individuals discuss their medicines with their physicians during each appointment. Ask if all medicines still need to be taken and if dosages should be changed. When visiting specialists, be sure to provide a list of all medications you are currently taking.

- Ask questions about newly prescribed medications. Drug interactions can be dangerous, so it's important to ask if and how any newly prescribed medications may interact with drugs, vitamins or supplements you are already taking.

- Alert health care providers to any new side effects. Immediately contact your physician if any new side effects present. The NIH recommends individuals continue to take their medications unless their doctor says otherwise.

- Use a pill organizer. A pill organizer makes it easy to manage multiple medications and can help individuals remember which pills they have taken.

Millions of individuals 60 and older take more than one medicine each day. Some simple strategies can ensure seniors safely manage their medications.

Fill up on healthy eating pointers

Diet and exercise are key components of maintaining a healthy weight and protecting yourself against chronic disease. According to the Missouri Department of Health & Senior Services, eating smart and being active have similar effects, including reducing risk for heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, some cancers, and diabetes. In addition, these healthy living strategies can improve personal appearance and improve overall well-being - helping people live longer and maintain their independence.

People may wonder how to eat better when faced with many diets, each of which promises great results. It can be confusing when navigating all of the options, and there is no magic formula to eating better. Common sense can come into play when attempting to eat better, and individuals also can consider these strategies to make diet work for them as they seek to live healthier.

- Eat colorful, varied, nutritionally dense foods. Medical News Today says each meal should be 50 percent fruit and vegetables, 25 percent whole grains, and 25 percent protein. Select an array of colorful foods that will provide most of the nutrients needed.

- Choose fiber-rich foods. Fresh fruits and

vegetables, whole grains, nuts, and legumes are good sources of fiber. Fiber helps people maintain digestive health and can help you to feel fuller longer, reducing the potential for overeating, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

- Note how you feel after eating. Create a food journal where you jot down notes about how you feel after eating certain foods. If you notice that certain foods or ingredients trigger adverse reactions, it may be worth avoiding that type of food or looking for an alternative. Stomach upset or bloating after eating dairy, for example, may indicate an intolerance for lactose.

- Explore the Mediterranean diet. While you should avoid fad diets that often produce short-term but unsustainable results, a Mediterranean diet has stood the test of time. According to the authors of a new study published in JAMA Network Open in October 2023, middle-aged and older adults with overweight or obesity and metabolic syndrome lost visceral fat (belly fat) and showed a greater reduction in the percentage of total fat while adhering to a Mediterranean diet. They also had delayed loss of lean body mass, which often comes with aging. Mediterranean diets prioritize



legumes, seafood, vegetables, and “good” fats like olive oil.

- Control portion sizes. Sometimes it’s not what you eat but how much you eat that affects health. Weighing and measuring food can help you control portions and understand how many calories you’re consuming each day. The National Institutes of Health says eating plans that favor 1,200 to 1,500 cal-

ories per day for women and 1,500 to 1,800 for men are good targets to lose weight at a healthy pace when combined with moderate exercise.

Balanced eating is a major component of a healthy lifestyle. While there are many fad diets, eating plans with a proven track record that are supported by the medical community may be your best bet.

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Warning signs of concussions

No athlete, professional or amateur or otherwise, is immune from injury. Most athletes recognize the risk for injury is always present, but the thrill of competition and challenging oneself physically is enough to relegate injury concerns to the back burner.

Sports injuries may be part of the competitive athletics equation, but that does not make them any easier to handle when they occur. One of the more serious injuries that can occur when playing sports does not involve fractures or sprains. Concussions are brain injuries that can cause temporary loss of normal brain function. The American Association of Neurological Surgeons reports that concussions are caused by direct trauma to the head. Potential causes of such trauma can be a fall or a blow to the head. Involvement in a motor vehicle accident also can cause concussion.

Concussions affect non-athletes as well as athletes, which is important for people from all walks of life to recognize. However, athletes who compete in contact sports like football, ice hockey, rugby, and soccer should be especially mindful of concussions. That's because contact sports tend to have the highest concussion rates. Concussion rates can be hard to tabulate, as many athletes may suffer mild concussions and never report any issues to parents or coaches. However, a 2019 study published in the journal *Pediatrics* found that, between the 2013-14 and 2017-18 school years, the three sports with the highest concussion rates were boys' football, girls' soccer and boys' ice hockey. Of course, adult athletes also can suffer concussions, which under-



scores how important it is that all individuals, and especially athletes competing in contact sports, learn to recognize the symptoms of a concussion. With that in mind, the AANS notes these are some common symptoms of concussion:

- Confusion
- Headache
- Vision disturbances (double or blurry vision)
- Dizziness or imbalance
- Nausea or vomiting
- Memory loss
- Ringing ears
- Difficulty concentrating
- Sensitivity to light
- Loss of smell or taste
- Trouble falling asleep

Concussions should be taken seriously, and it's important to note that most people fully recover after a concussion. However, the AANS urges people to seek immediate medical attention if symptoms have not gone away within 10 to 14 days. In addition, certain situa-

tions that can arise after suffering a concussion should be brought to the attention of a physician. Such situations include:

- Headache worsens or does not go away
- Speech is slurred, and feelings of weakness, numbness or decreased coordination present
- Significant nausea or repeated vomiting
- Seizures
- Loss of consciousness
- Inability to wake up
- Symptoms worsen at any time
- History of multiple concussions

Concussions are serious brain injuries that should not be taken lightly. Athletes and parents of young athletes should discuss concussion prevention strategies with coaches and report any issues to a physician immediately. More information about concussions can be found at aans.org.

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Preventive care guidelines for women 40 and older

It may seem like adolescence is the time in a woman's life when most of the biological changes she will experience take place. After all, puberty brings with it hormone fluctuations that can affect both physical and emotional health in various ways. However, as a woman enters mid-life and beyond, she may notice that she has to re-evaluate her lifestyle to accommodate the evolution of her body and health. Preventive health screenings and additional strategies can keep women fit and well as they reach age 40 and beyond.

Annual mammograms

Most doctors now recommend that women get annual mammograms starting at age 40. Mammograms can detect breast cancer early on at its most treatable stage. Manual breast exams conducted at home and by a doctor also can be vital tools.

Colorectal cancer screenings

A colonoscopy is recommended for all women between the ages of 45 and 50 (on the earlier side of that spectrum for African American women). This test can reveal the presence of polyps and cancerous growths.

Vision

Annual eye exams should be a part of everyone's vision care strategy. The American Optometric Association says that, between ages 41 and 60, people may notice differences in their vision. Some changes may happen more frequently, requiring new prescription eyeglasses. Therefore, it helps to visit an eye care professional to take corrective steps. It's also important to note that, as one ages, the vitreous (clear jelly) in the eye can thicken, leading to increased



floaters and flashes that should be checked by an ophthalmologist, as they may lead to retinal tears or detachment that can threaten vision.

Cholesterol screening

Heart disease is the leading cause of death among women, says the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Cholesterol screening and other cardiovascular screenings can detect the presence of heart disease or indicate a person's risk for it. Annual physical exams likely will include cholesterol checks as well as tests investigating other lipids in the blood.

Vitamin D check

Deficiency in vitamin D is a recognized pandemic. People are not naturally producing enough vitamin D from sun exposure, nor absorbing enough from the foods they eat. Vitamin D deficiency can be a serious concern in adult women, particularly those above the age of 40. Vitamin D deficiency can adversely affect mood, and an article published in 2018 in the Journal of Family Medicine and Primary Care found vitamin D determines

the pattern of post-menopausal bone loss and age-related osteoporosis. Verywell Health also says vitamin D is an important nutrient for preventing diabetes, cancer and age-related weight gain.

Routine gynecological screening and Pap/HPV testing

The American College of Obstetrics and Gynecologists say that it is important to visit a gynecologist annually for a woman's health checkup. New guidelines emerged some time ago that indicate it is not necessary to get a Pap test at each visit. The recent guidance indicates women between the ages of 30 and 65 can opt for both a Pap and HPV test every five years; have a Pap test alone every three years; or only get the HPV test every five years. After age 65, cervical cancer screenings can cease if there has never been an indication suggesting the presence of abnormal cervical cells.

Moving into middle age brings about changes. Women should evolve health care plans accordingly to stay as healthy as possible.

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Start preventing osteoporosis now

Osteoporosis is a condition that weakens bones weakened to a point of making them brittle. It may only take a small bump or fall for bones affected by osteoporosis to fracture. The National Institute on Aging says osteoporosis is a “silent disease” because people who develop it may not notice any changes until a bone breaks. Typically a hip, spine or wrist are the areas of the body where these fractures occur.

Johns Hopkins Medicine says that 50 percent of women in the United States age 50 or older will break a bone due to osteoporosis, and about 55 million Americans have the condition. Osteoporosis affects women more often than men, particularly because women have lower bone density than men. Loss of estrogen in the later years of life can increase a woman’s risk for osteoporosis.

The good news is that osteoporosis is largely preventable, and proper bone health that begins early and lasts throughout life can help.

· Sufficient calcium intake: Women age 50 and younger should consume 1,000 mg of calcium each day (1,200 mg of calcium each day is recommended for women over the age of 51). Calcium can come from foods, beverages and supplements.

· Proper protein intake: Protein also is a necessary nutrient for bone health, says the International Osteoporosis

Foundation. Choose lean protein sources.

· Get enough vitamin D: Vitamin D is made in the skin after exposure to the sun, but the average person does not get enough. Supplementation often is the answer to ensure healthy levels of vitamin D and by eating foods rich in vitamin D, such as eggs, mushrooms and fortified dairy foods or juices.

· Keep active: It is important to engage in reg-

ular weight-bearing and muscle-strengthening activities, which also helps to strengthen bones.

· Maintain a healthy weight: Maintaining a healthy weight also is important, as being too thin or having a BMI under 19 is harmful to bone health.

· Prevent falls: Take steps to reduce falls. This includes removing slippery rugs and installing grab bars in the bathroom. In addition, engage in activities that can im-

prove balance, posture and coordination to prevent fall risk.

· Get screened for bone density: A bone mineral density test is a special X-ray capable of detecting bone loss.

Women who are concerned about osteoporosis are urged to speak with their doctors to learn more about prevention and treatment.

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Top Workplaces 2023

St. Luke's University Health Network has been named a Top Workplaces 2023 by the Morning Call. In addition, St. Luke's has been named a Top Workplace nationally, in the Philadelphia region, and in New Jersey. St. Luke's is the ONLY healthcare institution in Pennsylvania and the third-highest ranked healthcare entity in the nation to be deemed a Top Workplace in 2023.

Of the 42,000 organizations that participated nationally, only a fraction earn a Top Workplaces designation. The list is based solely on employee feedback gathered through a confidential third-party survey administered by Energage LLC, an employee engagement technology company. The survey measures 15 culture drivers that are critical to the success of any organization, including alignment, execution, and connection.

“Earning a Top Workplaces award is a badge of honor for companies, especially because it comes authentically from their employees,” said Eric Rubino, Energage CEO. “That’s something to be proud of. In today’s market, leaders must ensure they’re allowing employees to have a voice and be heard. That’s paramount. Top Workplaces do this, and it pays dividends.”

“Very few healthcare organizations meet or exceed our achievements in quality, outstanding care, and culture,” said St. Luke's President & CEO Rick Anderson. “We celebrate these achievements because of our incredible employees and outstanding culture.”

Seeking Best Choice for Carotid Artery Surgery

Tom Lisella doled out plenty of advice over a 42-year legal career, but one of his most important pieces of guidance can't be found in any law book.

"You have to be your own health advocate," the retired estate and real estate attorney says.

For Tom, that included researching Lehigh Valley Heart and Vascular Institute vascular surgeons to determine who he wanted to address plaque in both of his carotid (pronounced kuh-rot-id) arteries, one of which was nearly 80 percent blocked by plaque, a substance that can build up on artery walls. In this case, the plaque can potentially break off and cause a stroke.

Your carotid arteries, located on each side of your neck, are about a quarter-inch wide and carry blood and oxygen to your brain. They can become clogged with plaque just like your coronary arteries and need to be addressed to prevent a future stroke.

Carotid artery disease causes up to one-third of all strokes. Lisella, 74, of Hometown, Schuylkill County, was a smoker for 30 years and smoking is a risk factor for both carotid and coronary artery disease.

Doing his homework

A founding partner of Bowe, Lisella & Bowe in Tamaqua,

Lisella says he wanted a vascular surgeon to perform the necessary procedures on the carotid arteries in his neck. "I started looking at Lehigh Valley Heart and Vascular Institute vascular surgeons and then I looked at their published works," he says.

He chose Mila Ju, MD. "I was very impressed with her publications," he says.

Lisella had stenting done to address the plaque in his carotid arteries instead of open surgery. Dr. Ju says the physical location of Lisella's blockages – near his jaw – made stenting the safer option. In a stenting procedure, a surgeon uses a short hollow tube to help place an expandable mesh tube in the plaque area to prevent plaque from breaking off and leading to a stroke. "Stenting has very favorable results," Dr. Ju says.

"Deciding on which option to pursue comes down to a number of factors, including the extent of the carotid artery disease and patient preference," Dr. Ju says.

Left, then right

Lisella's left carotid artery was stented in February 2021. While waiting for that to heal before addressing the right carotid artery, Lisella scheduled a colonoscopy. But just before he was to undergo that procedure, he suffered a mini stroke, also known as transient ischemic



attack (TIA). He recalls being asked his name, but not being able to respond. "I turned my head and looked at my wife. I thought I was speaking, but I'm now convinced I wasn't. I've had morphine before, and it was like being under the influence of morphine."

Lisella says he was quickly taken to the emergency room and given clot-busting medication. He was discharged a brief time later, and in December 2021 he had his right carotid artery stented.

Lisella, chairman of the board of directors for Mauch Chunk Trust Company, said he was impressed by Dr. Ju and all the staff who supported him. "The entire staff had such respect for Dr. Ju. I just felt confident in her care," Lisella says.

Lisella continues to do well on the carotid artery front. Dr. Ju monitors his carotid arteries and is also monitoring a small aortic aneurysm.

Staying positive

"It's more than a new lease on life. It really affects your outlook," Lisella says. "When

you're 74, you're looking down the tunnel. You don't want to get there, but you can see the end of it. Knowing you're doing the most you can for your health improves your outlook on life. I've seen people my age who've neglected their health and their life experience has been diminished."

Lisella averages about three days a week working for the bank. He's the father of four and the grandfather of five. He and his wife, Dianne, have a love of travel and have been to 38 countries so far. He'll no doubt continue to take his own advice and advocate for his health.

"Helping someone avoid a potentially catastrophic stroke, improving their quality of life, that's what's so satisfying about what we do in these cases," Dr. Ju says. "Partnering with you to get the best results is who we are. We'll always advocate for what's right for you."

CTA: Learn more about carotid artery disease options at LVHN.org/vascular



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