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# MEDICAL BOOK

-2025-

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# The importance of wellness exams after 50

Seniors are a growing and increasingly prosperous demographic. As the their population increases, more emphasis must be placed on keeping healthy. Wellness checks are important at any age, but are more significance as individuals grow older.

Age brings many things, including experience and wisdom. But it also brings an increased risk for health problems. Aging populations are vulnerable to chronic conditions like heart disease, COPD, cancer, and arthritis. It's noteworthy that many don't have any symptoms until they reach a point where treatment is difficult.

Annual wellness exams can help seniors take charge of their health and stay as healthy as possible. It's possible for a person to preserve their health (and possibly life) with check-ups and easy tests. Here are some common screenings and health recommendations for older adults.

- **Colorectal cancer screening:** A colon cancer screening is recommended for everyone at age 45. Colon cancer is the second-leading cause of cancer deaths in the United States, and risk increases at age 45. Although people seldom look forward to a colonoscopy and the required prep, putting off this test due to a little discomfort may

result in missing colon cancer at its earliest stage when it is most treatable.

- **Cholesterol screening:** This simple blood test can help evaluate the risk for heart disease. High cholesterol can contribute to the build-up of plaque in the arteries, making them narrower and less flexible, according to Sharecare, Inc.

- **Mammogram:** Most health organizations recommend annual mammogram screenings from age 40 until menopause. Then it's possible to have a mammogram every other year for those who are at average risk. It is important for women to discuss mammogram frequency with their doctors, particularly if there is a family history of breast cancer.

- **Diabetes:** ChenMed says diabetes may be more common in older adults, so regular screenings for this illness can enable early diagnosis and management.

- **Testicular cancer screening:** This test generally is not recommended without symptoms. Some organizations suggest men with a family history or other risk factors consider performing self-examinations.

- **Vaccination needs:** Doctors can recommend vaccines during wellness exams. Seniors should receive an annual flu shot and updated



COVID-19 vaccination as available. Pneumococcal vaccine can protect against pneumococcal disease that can lead to pneumonia, meningitis and bloodstream infections. Adults over 50 also should receive a vaccination for shingles, which can occur in older age in those who have previously experienced chickenpox.

There are additional advantages to routine health checkups. Doctors can inquire about fitness routines, stress, sleep, and diet to see if patients are within the guidelines for healthy living.

Older age may make a person wiser, but the risk for various health issues and certain diseases increases. Routine health checkups can keep doctors and patients on the same page.

**Richard J. Lizak, DO**  
**Michael Obert, CRNP**

**St. Luke's Hospital  
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Dr. Richard Lizak is board certified in Internal Medicine and has been practicing in the community for over 25 years. Michael Obert, CRNP has been practicing with Dr. Lizak and in the community for over 10 years. They are affiliated with both Lehigh Valley Health Network and St. Luke's Health Network and specialize in geriatric medicine; preventative screening and wellness exams; chronic disease management for diabetes, hypertension and hyperlipidemia; and complex collaborative care and treatment in patients with cancer, coronary artery disease, infectious diseases, depression and anxiety.

# Tips to quiet colic

Crying is a normal outlet for babies to express what they cannot verbalize. Infants cry when they are hungry, uncomfortable, tired, and/or have soiled diapers. But for some babies, crying may be something that seemingly does not end no matter what frazzled parents do. In such instances, an infant may be experiencing colic.

Colic can fluster new parents. A baby that cries for hours on end can exact an emotional and physical toll and interrupt parents' schedules and sleep. Connecticut Children's Pediatric Health System says newborns are diagnosed with colic if they cry for more than three hours a day; the crying lasts for more than three days a week; and this pattern has been going on for more than three weeks. Babies experiencing colic often clench fists or curl their legs while crying. Babies' bellies often are tight and their faces can redden as well.

Managing colic can add to the stress new parents already feel. Although colic is a phase that infants typically outgrow, parents may wonder if there's anything they can do to quiet the crying. Although colic can't be avoided, there may be some ways to avoid colic triggers.

- Food diary: Breast-

feeding mothers should realize that everything they eat and drink gets passed on to the baby and can affect them through breastmilk. Caffeine and chocolate can act as stimulants, and dairy products and nuts may be causing allergies. Certain medicines also can cause reactions in children. Keeping track of what you consume and the response it causes in your newborn may offer a clue about what to avoid to make the baby less fussy.

- Formula changes: If you are formula feeding, experimenting with another brand might help. Babies can be sensitive to certain proteins in formulas. Also, slow down feedings by using a nipple with a smaller hole. Feeding the baby smaller meals more often also might help with colic.

- Car ride: Sometimes the soothing hum of the engine and the tires on the road can help settle a

newborn. This tactic also has a secondary benefit of getting you and the baby out of the house for a change of scenery.

- Change of position: Sometimes holding a baby differently can alleviate a colic episode. Lay baby across your arm or lap while you massage your child's back. If you suspect colic is from gas, hold your baby upright or rock the child using an infant swing.

- Take a break: Family-Doctor.org says although colic can seem scary, it doesn't cause any short- or long-term problems for

your baby. Placing your newborn in a crib or another safe space and letting the crying fit go on for a bit while you take a break is fine. Parents also can seek help from a friend or loved one and go out for some time to escape the crying.

Colic can affect any baby and often seems like it will never end. Fortunately, it's usually a temporary condition that resolves by age four months, and parents can try various strategies to cope until colic is a distant memory.



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### 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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PERSONAL CARE RESPITE CARE INDEPENDENT LIVING

# What parents should know about mental health issues and children

Mental health issues were once stigmatized to such an extent that many people dealing with problems like anxiety and depression felt uncomfortable speaking about them or even seeking help. Though some may still find it difficult to acknowledge their mental health issues, society has made great strides in regard to destigmatizing mental health conditions and recognizing how common such problems are.

Parents may be surprised to learn that many mental health issues begin in childhood. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, anxiety disorders, depression and other mood disorders can start to develop long before children leave for college. Recognition of that reality may compel parents to learn more about children and mental health, including signs of potential issues and how to determine if certain behaviors are indicative of a burgeoning issue or a part of normal development.

## Identifying mental health issues in children

The NIMH notes the difficulty in distinguishing between behaviors that are a normal part of a child's development and those that suggest a potential mental health problem. Parents know that children's behaviors and emotions can be challenging to deal with, but that's often a normal part of a child's development that youngsters outgrow with age. The NIMH notes that time is a potential indicator of a mental health problem, and encourages parents to seek help if a



child's challenging behavior or emotions persist for weeks or longer. Kids will not outgrow negative behaviors overnight, but persistent problems that extend for weeks or months could be indicative of something beyond normal developmental hurdles.

Behaviors and emotions that cause distress for a child or the child's family are another potential indicator of a mental health issue. In addition, behaviors or emotions that interfere with a child's ability to function, be it at school or at home or among friends, may indicate the presence of a mental health issue.

## What if signs suggestive of mental health issues are present?

The NIMH advises parents to be proactive if they notice signs of mental health issues in their children. Parents can begin by contacting their child's teacher and asking how the child be-

haves in school, both in the classroom and on the playground. A child's pediatrician also can be a valuable resource. Share the particular behavior(s) or emotion(s) that are causing concern with the child's pediatrician. The pediatrician may note if the behavior is part of normal development or may recommend a mental health professional to further address the issue.

## Is an evaluation really necessary?

The aforementioned stigma associated with mental health issues may make even the most well-intentioned parents hesitant to seek an evaluation. But evaluations can set children on a path to improved mental health, and it's worth reminding parents that issues like anxiety and depression are quite common and nothing to be ashamed of. In fact, a large-scale 2023 study published in the journal *The Lancet Psychiatry* found that one out of every two people

in the world will develop a mental health disorder in their lifetime. Evaluation is one of the initial steps toward overcoming mental health issues, and children may exhibit different signs that an evaluation is necessary based on their age. For example, the NIMH notes that young children who often seem fearful or worried and those who have frequent tantrums or are irritable much of the time may benefit from a mental health evaluation. Older children who engage in self-harm behaviors or those who diet or exercise excessively can benefit from an evaluation. Additional age-based indicators that an evaluation may be necessary can be found at [nimh.nih.gov](https://www.nimh.nih.gov).

Many mental health issues begin in childhood. Parents can keep an eye out for indicators of mental health issues and work with their children's health care providers to determine the best course of action.

## 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.

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# Tips to get children excited about exercise

Human need to engage in physical activity to stay healthy. But too many children are not getting the exercise they need. Only 50 percent of boys and less than 34 percent of girls between the ages of 12 and 15 are adequately fit, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Children who are not physically fit are at greater risk for chronic diseases. In addition, children who are overweight or obese have higher risk of retaining extra weight into adulthood.

Getting children to exercise regularly can be an uphill battle with so many distractions, such as electronic devices, vying for their attention. But parents can explore the following ways to get children more excited about physical activity.

- Choose interactive toys. Select toys for kids that require movement. These can include sporting activities, scooters, bicycles, and even video games that involve physical activity. Kids will be moving while they play, which is a first step.

- Set an example. Children may

be more likely to embrace physical activity if they see their parents exercising regularly. Adults can share their passions for activities that encourage movement, whether it is hiking, heading to the gym, swimming, or rock scrambling.

- Make it a contest. People can be very competitive, especially young children. If kids know there is a prize or reward attached to doing something, they may have more motivation to engage with it. Offer a prize to the person who can log the most minutes of physical activity each week.

- Make things social. The more people involved in an activity, the greater the chance kids will want to be involved. Therefore, invite their friends, cousins, classmates, and other relatives to participate.

- Look for new ways to exercise. Plan vacations and day trips around an activity. Perhaps the family can learn how to surf or snorkel on a trip; otherwise, a trip to the zoo or a museum can involve a lot of walking.

- Find reasons to walk. Kids and parents can walk to or from school



each day to get exercise. Parking further away from stores ensures some extra steps as well. Take the stairs in malls instead of elevators or escalators.

- Encourage participation in team sports. Afterschool athletics often involve multiple days of practices and games or meets, which can be all the exercise a kid needs to be healthy. Athletics also present a fun way to exercise with friends.

Kids need physical activity to stay healthy, and there are various ways to make them more inclined to be active.

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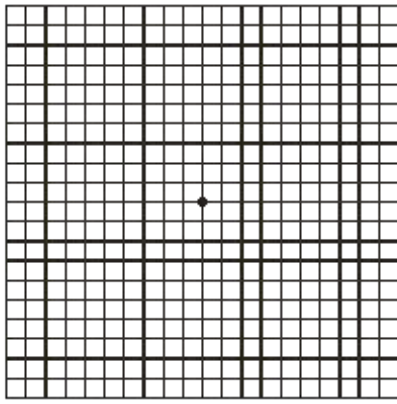
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## How social media affects kids' mental health

Social media has become such a key component of most people's lives that it is easy to think that it has always been there. SixDegrees, created in 1997, was the first social media site similar to the format known today. When SixDegrees shut down in 2001, Friendster, LinkedIn, MySpace, and Facebook soon took root. The University of Maine reports there are now 4.8 billion social media users worldwide, representing 92.7 percent of all internet users. And according to the American Family Survey 2023, 96 percent of parents say their kids have access to at least one social media platform. Many use multiple online platforms daily.

Although social media may have originated as a means to bring people together, there are many who argue that it actually does the opposite. Instances of cyberbullying, which is a form of online harassment, have grown as social media has be-

come more pervasive. Some experts believe that mental health concerns are an unexpected side effect of increased social media use, says Johns Hopkins Medicine. In fact, in the spring of 2023, United States Surgeon General Vivek Murthy, MD, MBA, released an advisory that suggested social media is harmful to young people. In 2024, Dr. Murthy called for a surgeon general's warning label on social media not unlike the warnings on cigarette packages.

How might social media affect children's mental health? Here are some of the main concerns.

- **Changes in a developing brain:** According to the Surgeon General's report, children's brains go through a highly sensitive period of development between the ages of 10 and 19, when feelings of self-worth are forming. Frequent social media use may affect these feelings as children compare themselves to others they

see online. In addition, functions like emotional learning, impulse control and emotional regulation may be affected.

- **Development of depression:** Johns Hopkins Medicine says research has demonstrated there are high rates of depression attributed to very low social media use and very high social media use. Finding a healthy balance might not be as easy as it seems.

- **Addiction:** There is some evidence that children become addicted to checking social media, which can lead to addiction-like behaviors in other areas. According to The Addiction Center, a Web-based substance abuse resource, addiction to social media is driven by an uncontrollable urge to log on that impairs other important areas of life. Fear of missing out (FOMO) is another threat to kids' mental health.

- **Low self-esteem issues.** Children and teenagers who compare them-

selves to others' carefully curated online profiles (which usually are not telling the whole story) can develop feelings of inadequacy and body image issues.

- **Exposure to inappropriate content.** Social media may introduce children to content and images that are not appropriate for their age levels and capacity to understand and interpret. According to Dr. Murthy's report, deaths have been linked to suicide- and self-harm-related content, such as risk-taking challenges or asphyxiation content. Viewing this content normalizes these behaviors for some youngsters.

Although plenty of good can come from social media, parents are urged to exercise caution when giving children access to these platforms, which can affect kids' mental health in negative ways.

# Common issues that affect kids' dental health

Children develop at a rapid pace. Kids' bodies grow from the moment of birth until early adulthood. Children get taller, more dexterous and expand their knowledge by leaps and bounds as they grow up. Kids' teeth also are developing over that time.

Children's teeth are at heightened risk for oral health issues during this delicate time of growth. If left untreated, dental issues can cause poor oral health. WebMD emphasizes that it is essential to keep baby teeth healthy for a child's overall health and well-being, even though baby teeth are eventually replaced with permanent teeth. Many of the same conditions that affect adults also can contribute to issues with children's oral health. Here is a look at some common concerns.

## Caries (cavities)

Dental caries, also known as tooth decay or cavities, are caused when bacteria in the mouth metabolize sugar and produce acids that break down the teeth. Foods that stick to the teeth for a long time, such as candy, ice cream and milk, are more likely to cause decay. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention states that 20 percent of children between the ages of five and 11 have at least one decaying tooth. It is important for children to clean their teeth well, something adults will likely need to assist with to ensure tooth decay doesn't occur.

## Bruxism

Many children grind their teeth at night, which is called bruxism. This habit can damage the teeth and cause misaligned teeth, which af-

fects the bite. Nightguards may be needed to prevent the issue. Addressing any stress that may be causing the grinding also may be necessary.

## Thumb sucking

Sucking on fingers, pacifiers or toys gives young children emotional security and comfort. However, thumb sucking continues beyond age five can affect permanent teeth when they start to erupt. This may force them out of alignment. Breaking the thumb-sucking habit can take time, and a child can wear dental appliances to prevent sucking.

## Over-retained primary teeth

According to Hines Little Smiles Pediatric Dentistry, over-retained primary teeth refers to baby teeth that do not naturally fall out to make room for permanent teeth. This

can lead to complications in the alignment of new teeth. In some instances, over-retained teeth may need to be extracted to make room for adult teeth.

## Bite and alignment issues

As permanent teeth come in, it may become evident that an orthodontist will be needed. Many pediatric dentists will refer children to orthodontists the moment they realize that orthodontic intervention is likely needed. Braces, palate expanders and other treatments might be prescribed so that older children can enjoy healthy, straight smiles.

Parents can work together with dentists to ensure good pediatric oral health.

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# Healthy ways to cope with stress

Stressful experiences are a part of life, and the physiological responses that occur in response to these challenges are natural tools humans developed as survival mechanisms. People learn and grow as they deal with positive stressful occurrences, such as when speaking in public or taking a test. But when stressors cannot be avoided or prove chronic, the body's response to stress can take a toll on a person's mental and physical well-being.

The COVID-19 pandemic, inflation, an uptick in weather-related disasters, and global conflicts have proven stressful for people around the world. According to a report from the American Psychological Association titled "Stress in America 2023: A Nation Recovering from Collective Trauma," the long-term stress sustained since early 2020 has had a huge impact on well-being, as evidenced by an increase in chronic illnesses. The report found people between the ages of 35 and 44 have been particularly affected.

Long-term stress poses many health risks, including wear and

tear on the immune system and an increase in worry, anxiety and irritability. Some people turn to drugs or alcohol to combat stress, but there are healthy options. The following are better ways to cope with stress.

- Reduce the amount of stress. It's impossible to remove all of the stress of life, but people can try to reduce some forms of stress. Think about sharing some responsibilities or asking for help. If a person is causing you stress, then distance yourself from them as much as possible. Work is a major source of stress for many. Finding a new job or cutting back on tasks could help.

- Get quality sleep. Prioritize sleeping better and longer. Fatigue can exacerbate the ability to deal with even minor stressors, leaving you more irritable and edgy. Most adults require between seven and nine hours of sleep per night, so adjust your schedule to achieve this.

- Plan for daily exercise. The APA says brisk movement improves sleep and can combat stress. In one study titled "Relationships between Leisure Time Physical

Activity and Perceived Stress," first published in 1996, researchers found that working adults who engaged in moderate physical activity had half the perceived stress when compared to working adults who did not participate. A 30-minute session each day can work wonders.

- Engage in pleasurable activities. It's easy to drop fun things from the schedule when stress is high. But the Cleveland Clinic advises making time for fun things to combat stress. Laughter and humor can reduce stressful feelings, so a night out at a comedy show or watching a funny movie can help.

- Improve your diet. Well-nourished bodies handle stressors, illnesses and life much easier. Aim for a well-balanced diet that is low in processed foods and sugar. Avoid alcohol, caffeine and nicotine, as each can worsen stress in the long run, according to Sutter Health.

Stress is a natural part of life. When stress becomes too much to take, individuals can cope in various healthy ways.

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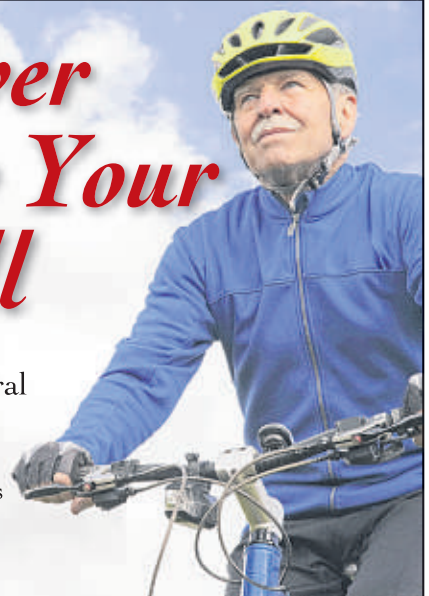
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# What to know about bipolar disorder

The World Health Organization reports that tens of millions of individuals across the globe are living with bipolar disorder. Despite that prevalence, many people still have misconceptions about bipolar disorder, including the notable but false notion that the condition and schizophrenia are one and the same. A greater understanding of bipolar disorder can help the millions of people who have it and may compel others to seek treatment that can be highly effective.

## What is bipolar disorder?

The WHO notes bipolar disorder is a mental health condition in which mood swings from one extreme to another are the primary characteristic. Bipolar episodes may be manic or depressive, and each has its own unique characteristics. In addition, the National Institute of Mental Health reports that a person with bipolar disorder may experience “mixed” episodes, which include symptoms of both manic and depressive episodes.

When a person is having an episode, the symptoms last a week or two, or even longer, and are present every day for most of the day.

## What is a manic episode?

A manic episode is characterized by a person experiencing an extremely high mood. The NIMH notes that symptoms of a manic episode may include:

- Feeling very up, high, elated, or extremely irritable or touchy
- Feeling wired and more active than usual
- Racing thoughts
- Feeling a decreased need for sleep
- Speaking rapidly about various subjects, which the NIMH notes can be characterized as “flight of ideas”
- Excessive appetite for food, drinking, sex, or other pleasurable activities
- A feeling that one can do many things at once without growing tired
- Feeling unusually important, talented or powerful

## What is a depressive episode?

The WHO notes that a depressive episode is contrary to a manic episode and marked by a depressed mood that makes people feel sad, irritable and/or empty. People experiencing a depressive episode may lack interest in or get little pleasure from activities they previously enjoyed. According to the NIMH, additional symptoms of a depressive episode include:

- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Changes in sleep patterns, including difficulty falling asleep, waking up too early, or sleeping too much
- Speaking slowly, feeling unable to find anything to say, or frequent bouts of forgetfulness
- Inability to perform even simple tasks
- Feeling hopeless or worthless or thinking about death or suicide

## Are symptoms the same for everyone?

The NIMH notes that symptoms of bipolar disorder may be milder for some than others. That’s an important distinction, particularly for people with a family history of

bipolar disorder. The NIMH notes that the exact cause of bipolar disorder is unknown, but research has shown that people with certain genes are more likely to develop the condition than others. But just because a relative exhibited symptoms in a certain way does not mean an individual will show signs in the same way.

## How is bipolar disorder diagnosed?

A health care provider will consider the severity, length and frequency of an individual’s symptoms and experiences after conducting a physical exam to rule out other illnesses. A referral to a mental health professional also is standard before a diagnosis of bipolar disorder is made.

Bipolar disorder affects tens of millions of people across the globe. Treatment for the condition is highly effective, and individuals exhibiting symptoms of bipolar disorder are urged to speak with a health care professional.

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# What to know about AMD

Physical changes are a normal byproduct of aging. Gray hairs and less elastic skin that contributes to wrinkles may be among the more notable physical signs of aging, but older individuals also may note their vision is not what it once was.

Diminished vision can be a by-product of various conditions. Aging individuals who have noticed a loss of vision may be dealing with age-related macular degeneration, or AMD. Seniors concerned by AMD can learn about the condition so they're well-positioned to manage it if and when they need to.

## What is AMD?

The National Eye Institute notes that AMD is an eye disease that is the leading cause of vision loss for older adults. In fact, Johns Hopkins Medicine notes age is the most common cause of severe loss of eyesight among people 50 and older. The NEI notes that aging causes damage to the macula, which is the part of the eye that controls sharp, straight-ahead vision. When a person has AMD, his or her central vision is blurred.

## What happens when a person has AMD?

Because AMD blurs the central vision, people who develop the disease may struggle to recognize faces, read, drive, or engage in activities that require close-up work, including cooking or fixing things around the house.

## Are all cases of AMD the same?

The NEI notes that AMD happens very slowly in some people and faster in others. Some people may not recognize they have vision loss even when they already have early AMD. In addition, there are



two types of AMD:

- **Dry AMD:** Dry AMD is the most common type of the disease and occurs as the macula gets thinner with age. Dry AMD progresses slowly over several years, and occurs in three stages: early, intermediate and late.

- **Wet AMD:** Wet AMD is a less common form of late AMD that the NEI notes typically causes faster vision loss. Wet AMD occurs when abnormal blood vessels grow in the back of the eye and damage the macula. Wet AMD is treatable.

## Does AMD produce symptoms?

AMD produces different symptoms depending on the stage of the disease. Early dry AMD does not cause any symptoms, and the NEI notes some people with intermediate dry AMD may not experience symptoms. Those who do may notice symptoms such as mild blurriness in their central vision or difficulty seeing in low lighting.

Late wet or dry AMD patients may notice that straight lines are beginning to look wavy or crooked and there may be a blurry area near the center of their vision. That blurriness can grow larger over time and people may begin to see blank spots. Colors also may seem less bright and people may have difficulty seeing in low lighting.

## Who is at risk for AMD?

The NEI notes that adults over 55 are more likely to have AMD than any other group. People with a family history of AMD, Caucasians and smokers also have a higher risk of developing AMD. Quitting smoking, getting regular physical activity, maintaining healthy blood pressure and cholesterol levels, and eating a healthy diet that includes leafy greens and fish are some ways people can lower their AMD risk.

AMD is most common among individuals over 50. More information is available at [nei.nih.gov](http://nei.nih.gov).

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# Warning signs for heart disease

Heart disease is the leading cause of death across the globe. Data from the World Health Organization indicates that cardiovascular diseases, which are a group of disorders of the heart and blood vessels, claim roughly 18 millions lives each year. More than 80 percent of those deaths are due to heart attacks and strokes that often-times can be prevented.

The right lifestyle choices, which include eating a healthy diet and exercising regularly, can help people reduce their risk for cardiovascular disease. Learning to recognize warning signs of heart disease is another way individuals can reduce their risk of developing this global but often preventable threat.

**Chest pain:** Chest pain is widely recognized as a sign of heart attack. However, many people experience chest pain without ever suffering a heart attack. So how can individuals distinguish chest pain suggestive of heart disease from less threatening types of pain in their chest, such as

stiffness after strength training or discomfort stemming from a pulled pectoral muscle? According to the British Heart Foundation, chest pain related to heart attack is marked by feelings of heaviness, tightness or pressure in the chest. Pain or tightness in the chest that subsides after a few minutes may be indicative of angina, which the Mayo Clinic notes is a symptom of coronary artery disease caused by a reduction of blood flow to the heart.

**Stomach pain:** People may not instantly associate stomach pain with heart disease, but in certain instances such discomfort might indicate a heart problem. The BHF notes that a painful or burning feeling in the stomach can be indicative of a heart problem, including heart attack. Though it's not easy to distinguish between heartburn, which in spite of its name is a digestive issue, and stomach pain indicative of heart attack, it's best to avoid writing off abdominal pain as heartburn. The Mayo



Clinic notes that many heart attacks do not involve sudden, crushing chest pain, and are instead characterized by a host of warning signs, including abdominal pain. The BHF advises anyone experiencing stomach pain who are unsure of its origins to contact a health care professional immediately.

**Arm pain:** Pain in the arm is another potential indicator of heart disease. According to the Mayo Clinic, arm pain that appears suddenly and is severe could be a symptom of heart attack. This pain may occur alongside feelings of pressure, fullness or squeezing in the chest. The BHF notes that a heart attack is more like-

ly to occur if the pain is going down the arm, particularly the left arm, or into the neck.

**Swelling in the lower legs:** The National Library of Medicine notes that swelling in the legs, ankles or feet is indicative of a heart problem. Blood flow is adversely affected when the heart is not working at peak capacity, and that can contribute to what's effectively a traffic jam involving the blood in the veins of the legs. That backup causes the buildup of fluid in the tissues.

Heart disease is a formidable and deadly foe. Learning to recognize the warning signs of heart disease might prove life-saving.



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# Tips to protect your eyes in the workplace

Individuals go to work each day to provide for themselves and their families. Working provides many benefits, but it also exposes people to some risks. For some, those risks include eye injuries.

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health says about 2,000 workers sustain job-related eye injuries that require medical treatment each year in the United States. According to the Canadian Association of Optometrists, more than 700 eye injuries are reported in Canada every day, and over 200 of those injuries occur in the workplace. Employment-related injuries can be traced to hazards like chemicals, radiation, dust, and flying debris.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics found that almost 70 percent of the accidents studied on the job resulted from flying or falling objects or sparks striking the eye. However, digital eye strain from working on a computer on a daily basis also affects professionals' eyes.

Preventing eye injuries often comes down to recognition of hazards and what can be done to avoid common injuries. These tips can help.

- Employees should be educated and trained on all dangers specific to the workplace.

- Employers should install barrier and shields in areas prone to flying debris and dust.

- Employees working in hazardous environ-

ments should have access to and be wearing eye safety equipment at all times.

- The proper use of eye safety equipment means using the right kind of protection for the job. Forms of eye protection include goggles, safety glasses, face shields, or full face respirators.

- Employees should take breaks when working on the computer. To help alleviate digital eye strain, experts recommend the 20-20-20 rule. This means taking a 20-second break to view something 20 feet away every 20 minutes.

- Special filters can protect the eyes from optimal radiation exposure. Filters can be used when welding or working with

lasers.

- Employees should recognize that contact lenses can't provide protection from eye hazards in the workplace. However, contact lenses can provide improved vision in the workplace. According to the American Optometric Association, workers should be allowed to wear contact lenses in most eye-hazardous environments, provided they wear eye protection over the contact lenses.

Prevent Blindness America says 90 percent of all workplace eye injuries can be avoided by wearing proper safety eyewear and following the safety guidelines recommended for each particular industry.

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# The basics of diabetic eye disease

Diabetes is a serious condition that can adversely affect a person's quality of life. That's a reality well-known to the hundreds of millions of individuals across the globe who are living with diabetes. According to the International Diabetes Federation Atlas, 10.5 percent of the global adult population between the ages of 20 and 79 has diabetes, and those figures are expected to increase to roughly 12 percent by 2045.

The side effects of diabetes are wide-ranging, which explains why life with the disease can be so challenging. Diabetes can even affect vision, and some with the disease may experience diabetic eye disease, the mention of which may prompt questions among patients and their families.

## What is diabetic eye disease?

The term "diabetic eye disease" is something of a

misnomer, as it actually refers to a group of eye issues that can affect people with diabetes. According to the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, diabetes can damage the eyes over time, potentially leading to poor vision and possibly blindness.

## What are some conditions that fall under the umbrella of diabetic eye disease?

Diabetic retinopathy, diabetic macular edema, cataracts, and glaucoma are some examples of diabetic eye disease. Each of these conditions is different.

· **Diabetic retinopathy:** The Mayo Clinic notes that diabetic retinopathy is caused by damage to the blood vessels of the retina. Individuals with type 1 or type 2 diabetes can develop diabetic retinopathy, which can lead to blindness.

· **Diabetic macular ede-**

**ma (DME):** The organization Prevent Blindness reports that DME may affect up to 10 percent of individuals with diabetes. DME is caused by the accumulation of fluid in the macula, which is the central portion of the retina. DME can make it hard to focus and may result in substantial vision loss.

· **Cataracts:** The American Academy of Ophthalmology notes that cataracts occur when proteins in the natural lens of the eye break down, causing things to look blurry, hazy or less colorful. The AAO notes normal eye changes that begin to occur after age 40 are the most common cause of cataracts. But diabetes also causes cataracts, and can do so even before a person reaches 40 years of age.

· **Glaucoma:** The Cleveland Clinic notes glaucoma is a general term used

to describe various conditions that damage the optic nerve. Fluid buildup in the front part of the eye puts extra pressure on the eye, gradually damaging the optic nerve.

## When should a doctor be consulted?

The NIDDK urges anyone with diabetes to contact a doctor right away if they notice sudden changes to their vision. Such changes may include flashes of light or more floaters (spots in the line of vision) than usual. Individuals who feel as though a curtain is being pulled over their eyes are also urged to see a doctor immediately.

Diabetic eye disease is a potential complication of diabetes that patients may be forced to confront at some point in time. More information is available at [niddk.nih.gov](http://niddk.nih.gov).

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# Tips to make soup more nutritious

Soup is a dish that wears many hats. When the weather becomes chilly, people often turn to soup to warm themselves up from the inside out. Soup, especially when soup is paired with a favorite sandwich, also can be a simple and light meal when one doesn't want to spend too much time in the kitchen. Soup has been heralded as a remedy as well, a reputation that dates back thousands of years. In the twelfth century, Egyptian Jewish physician Moshe ben Maimonides prescribed chicken soup as a treatment for respiratory tract issues. And Penn Medicine suggests eating soup while ill is a good idea because the meal is nourishing, easy to digest and often full of nutritious components.

People may wonder what they can do to tweak their favorite soups to make them even more nutritious, as many modern soups have gained a reputation as being sodium-heavy. These ideas can give soup a powerful boost.

- Use a higher ratio of vegetables in the soup when compared to meats and grains. Vegetables are notoriously high in nutrients that the body needs to stay healthy, including antioxidants and vitamins.

- Make your own soup stock from fresh ingredients. Doing so helps retain control over what goes into the soup, helping to reduce potential additives or other ingredients like sugar and sodium.

- Vary the color of the vegetables. Aim for vegetables of at least three different colors. The colors of the vegetables often correspond to the nutrients and phytochemicals they contain.

For example, carrots are high in beta-carotene. Beta-carotene converts into vitamin A, which is necessary for eye health, healthy skin and a strong immune system.

- Replace the cream in soups with healthier ingredients. Soups that are cream-based tend to be loaded with calories and saturated fat. Instead, use Greek yogurt at the end (to prevent curdling) or even low-fat cottage cheese to amp up the protein content and give the soup a creamy consistency without the fat. Silken tofu or even a vegetable purée made from potato and cauliflower can add creaminess as well.

- Swap meat for lean

proteins in the soup. Lentils, for example, are a plant protein rich in flavor and nutrition. According to UC Davis Health, lentils have about 18 grams of protein per cup and also are high in fiber. Relatively inexpensive, lentils also can help keep meal budgets in check. Alternative legumes also can work in soups, as can seafood or lean poultry.

- Add texture to the soup. Pumpkin seeds or flax seeds have taste and texture, and can be a healthier option for topping soups over buttery croutons or crackers.

- Keep ingredients "whole" in the soup. Lean on whole grains, fibrous

vegetables, fresh herbs, and lean meats to build a well-rounded soup that's bursting with nutrition.

- Add some turmeric and ginger. If the flavor profile allows, incorporate some fresh turmeric and ginger to the soup. Health magazine says these ingredients are part of the same plant family and have been used in traditional medicine in India and China for centuries. Both are known for reducing inflammation and alleviating symptoms of digestive disease.

Experiment with different ingredients to create soups that are not only delicious, but nutritious as well.



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## St. Luke's Pioneers Groundbreaking Atrial Fibrillation Treatment – A First in Our Region

St. Luke's cardiac electrophysiology team is first in the Lehigh Valley and Northeastern Pennsylvania to offer Pulsed Field Ablation (PFA), a new and improved treatment for atrial fibrillation (afib). This common heart rhythm disorder affects nearly 40 million people worldwide and, if not treated, can cause the formation of blood clots or a stroke and congestive heart failure.

The first PFA cases in the Lehigh Valley and Northeastern Pennsylvania were performed on May 6 at the St Luke's University Hospital Bethlehem Campus. As of mid-May, the team has completed 10 of these procedures. This technology also is available in select major heart centers in New Jersey, New York and throughout the nation.

Retired basketball great Kareem Abdul-Jabbar was diagnosed with afib after experiencing lightheadedness, weakness and an accelerated and disorganized heartbeat and last year started a campaign to raise awareness of afib. Advanced age, obesity, sleep apnea, alcohol use, heart valve disorders and heart failure put people at a high risk for developing atrial fibrillation. Other famous people whose atrial fibrillation is public knowledge include Presidents George Bush and Joe Biden, Boston Celtics retired superstar Larry Bird, comedian Howie Mandel and entertainer Barry Manilow. It is a disease that will affect one in five people by the time they turn 80 years old.

Fortunately, there is hope, as ablation technology has become safer and more effective, and now is recommended first line by the American Heart Association to treat afib. The newest technology in ablation is Pulsed Field Ablation, which is faster, safer and at least as effective than the conventional methods of ablation, which use radiofrequency and cryotherapy (cold temperatures) to remove problematic heart cells. Pulsed Field Ablation is a high-voltage electrical impulse delivered through a catheter through a small needle puncture in the vein the patient's leg, which renders targeted heart cells, at the top chambers of the heart—the atrium—inert and unable to generate an afib episode.

According to Steve Stevens, MD, one of five St. Luke's Cardiologist and Electrophysiologists who perform ablations routinely, "Pulsed Field Ablation is a 'game changer' that will eventually



become the preferred therapy for afib, because: 1) it is much faster than traditional ablation; 2) it is cardio-selective and doesn't damage other organs near the heart like the esophagus and lungs, which can happen during conventional ablations; and, 3) it can be done with less invasive anesthesia and monitoring techniques since there is less risk to other organs, making it a safer and a less invasive experience for the patient." Dr. Stevens estimates that the majority of atrial fibrillation ablations will eventually be done with PFA, which received FDA approval in late 2023.

The St. Luke's Cardiac Electrophysiologists, Darren Traub, DO; Sudip Nanda, MD; Hardik Mangrolia, MD; Kevin Mills, MD; and Dr. Stevens have trained for over eight years after graduating medical school to provide this innovative procedure, among others, and are regional experts in all heart rhythm disturbances.

A typical Pulsed Field Ablation procedure will take just 30- 60 minutes. Radiofrequency and Cryoablation take roughly one to three hours explained Dr. Stevens. "We plan to make PFA a same-day procedure in select patients" he added.

"Pulsed Field Ablation is an amazing treatment that likely to become the standard of care for afib over the next few years," he added. "This is the direction many European centers have been moving in since it was approved there in 2021 and became commercially available." He added that more than 40,000 patients in Europe have been treated with pulse field ablation, with excellent results.

To learn more, visit [sluhn.org/heart](http://sluhn.org/heart).

A few years ago, Jeremy Haas started feeling tired, but chalked it up to getting older.

Then he coughed up blood, and that started a cardiac odyssey that had him at times near death and eventually brought him to Lehigh Valley Heart and Vascular Institute last fall for two life-saving heart procedures.

The 49-year-old Bally man – now on hiatus from his job as a water treatment system technician helping to install dialysis systems in the eastern half of the U.S. – is hoping to soon be on a heart transplant list.

### Early heart troubles

When Haas first developed a cough, it was during the COVID-19 pandemic, and he received medication and antibiotics after virtual visits with his doctor. He was working in Tenaflly, N.J., when he first coughed up blood.

An examination by a doctor, not affiliated with Lehigh Valley Health Network, showed something alarming. “My heart looked like a water balloon that had been overfilled,” the U.S. Army veteran says. “I was told to go to the emergency room, and I was admitted.”

Testing delivered more bad news. It showed Haas’ heart’s pumping ability was extremely low and he was in heart failure. He had a peripherally inserted central catheter line (PICC) placed in his right arm that delivered medication that helped his heart pump more blood with each contraction.

### Worsening situation

He eventually had a defibrillator implanted, which freed him from wearing the vest, but still had the PICC line to deliver his heart medication. After various infections, Haas was critically ill and had to be intubated, meaning he had a tube inserted down his throat, into his windpipe, to help him breathe.

He spent about a month in the hospital and went home, then returned in early November so doctors could implant an Impella heart pump to help his heart function, but also allow it to rest and heal.

That type of Impella was only meant to assist Haas’ heart for a short time. When his condition worsened, his cardiologist reached out to Tim Misselbeck, MD, at Lehigh Valley Heart and Vascular Institute. Dr. Misselbeck agreed to accept Haas as a patient and operate to implant an Impella pump designed for more extended use.

“They (LVHN) gave me a less than 10% chance to make it through, even with the new Impella, just because of how bad everything was,” Haas says.

He became stable enough to receive a left ventricular assist device (LVAD) and got that on Nov. 17. The RVAD was removed because the right side of Haas’ heart had recovered. He got back home a few days before Christmas.

“It was sort of miraculous, because he was so sick,” Dr. Misselbeck says. “It was a great outcome. To have needed both the RVAD and LVAD was a marker of just how sick Jeremy was. It’s very unusual to need both.”

Patients with heart problems like Haas are typically much older. Dr. Misselbeck says Haas’ relatively young age, while helpful in the heart health crisis, was not a match for the severity of the situation.



“I had a huge support team, more than I knew, and a prayer group that extended to so many people. I had so many people sending prayers and good vibes my way,” Haas says. “I couldn’t have done it without them.” His entire family, including his mother, two sons and other extended family, were with him every step of the way.

### Heart and Vascular Institute expertise and compassion

“I was amazed at how well-oiled that machine was,” Haas says of the Heart and Vascular Institute and LVHN. “They are efficient. The right hand knows what the left hand is doing.”

Haas says he was impressed with the various LVHN teams who helped nurse him back to health. “Without this, I was faced with a few weeks to maybe a few months of life. I would definitely have had a very short time left if I couldn’t get this LVAD. When you’re faced with that and you don’t have an alternative, things get real.”

Haas says Dr. Misselbeck and the whole LVHN team made him “feel like family.”

“He’s [Misselbeck] an awesome guy. He is a professional and very gifted, but not arrogant. Somebody who is that good at their job could be very cocky and arrogant, but he’s not. He made me feel like a special patient and he genuinely cared. When I first did that walk down the hallway after the LVAD procedure, they took a video and sent it to Dr. Misselbeck because he wanted to be notified of my progress.”

### Next step

Haas is now working with doctors at the University of Pennsylvania hospital and was recently placed on a heart transplant list.

“The thing that weighs on me is that someone has to give up their life through some horrible circumstance for me to live,” says Haas, himself a registered organ donor.

Nothing is certain, but Haas is perpetually hopeful.

“I guess I’ve always been a glass half full kind of guy,” Haas says. “It’s not over till it’s over. I have motorcycles and I enjoy playing guitar. I enjoy traveling and meeting new people. I just enjoy living.”

Haas says he hopes to be around to see his eventual grandchildren and see his nieces and nephews grow up. He wants to go on vacation and eventually return to work.

Right now, Haas says he’s feeling great. One thing on his to-do list is a photo with Dr. Misselbeck. Haas says he’ll be wearing a T-shirt that reads, “I was saved by Jesus and an amazing heart surgeon.”

A photograph of a woman with short, curly hair lying in a hospital bed, looking towards the camera. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent red filter. The text 'Heart failure can hide in plain sight.' is written in large, white, sans-serif font across the left side of the image.

# Heart failure can hide in plain sight.

Heart failure doesn't always happen all at once. It can start slow with symptoms like fatigue, shortness of breath or swelling. Don't get caught off guard. Lehigh Valley Heart and Vascular Institute has the region's largest team of heart failure specialists. Schedule your appointment today.

[LVHN.org/heart](https://LVHN.org/heart) | 888-402-LVHN



# 5 Stars & Straight A's



In health care, there are specific honors – based on objective measures of quality, safety and overall performance – that matter.

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Congratulations to St. Luke's and the Network's 20,000+ doctors, nurses and all employees who have made St. Luke's #1 in the nation.

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