

PA

ISSUE 4, WINTER 2019

HEALTH

YOUR GUIDE TO FITNESS & WELL-BEING



MANAGING PAIN *BEAUTIFULLY*



**5 FUN WAYS TO
BATTLE WINTER
BLUES**

**WARMING MEALS
TO WARD OFF
WINTER'S CHILL**



If you have a story suggestion or an amazing health story to tell, we'd love to hear it, and maybe we'll even feature it in an upcoming issue of *PA Health* magazine.

Email us at PaHealth@geisinger.edu.

On the Cover: Keith Phelps suffers from chronic pain. But through a unique program, he's learned to manage it — and can still do the things he loves.

Wellness starts from within. In this edition of *PA Health* magazine, you'll meet two men who learned how simple choices around diet, exercise, mindfulness and stress can make a big difference when it comes to health — whether you're fighting disease, managing pain or just trying to live the healthiest life you can. At Geisinger, we're as dedicated to helping people be well and stay well as we are to helping people get well when they're sick.

I hope you find these two stories as inspiring as I do.

Looking forward to the comfort foods that get you through the winter season? These are meals that warm you up and keep you cozy, and we have some tips to make them better for you. Choosing health is easier than you think. Sometimes, just substituting one ingredient for another makes all the difference.

And what about getting out

and getting active? Exercise helps keep you in shape, but it's also a great mood-booster when the days are shorter and gloomier, according to psychologist Laura Campbell, PhD.

Snow is falling, fires are crackling and the holidays are right around the corner. Winters in Pennsylvania are filled with wonder. Get outside and enjoy it. Whether you're sledding, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing or just playing in the snow, the following pages will tell you how many calories you're burning while you're out there having fun. Hard to beat that for motivation.

We hope you enjoy the fourth issue of *PA Health*. As always, we welcome your feedback, comments and suggestions.

Season's best to you and your loved ones.

– Don Stanziano
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HEALTH EVENTS NEAR YOU

Yearning to do yoga? Searching for a support group to manage diabetes? Want to quit smoking? A wealth of wellness events awaits you — including classes, lectures, support groups, screenings and more! Just visit events.geisinger.org and browse by category, date or location.

Keith Phelps looks like the picture of health. Seeing him on WNEP's *Home & Backyard*, so upbeat and positive, surrounded by his hand-crafted wreaths and floral arrangements, it's hard to believe he lives with chronic pain.

BY PAULA FRANKEN



MANAGING PAIN

Beautifully

“**T**here was a year when I made no television appearances whatsoever,” Keith Phelps, owner of Inspired Designs, explains. “I was the face of the business, and I couldn’t work. Pain affected every part of my life — physically, mentally, spiritually. I stopped talking to clients and customers because I couldn’t stand to be around other people. I went from a ‘glass that was three-quarters full’ person to someone with an empty glass shattered on the ground. I was spiraling downward fast.”

Mr. Phelps’ pain began in 2014 after a simple surgery for an inguinal hernia. Only a tiny number — half of 1 percent — of patients experience major complications like his, but for those who do, the pain is excruciating. “It was

a stabbing pain in the groin that would strike out of nowhere,” he says. “I’d never experienced anything like it. Pain was controlling my life.”

After three surgeries in California to correct the initial problem, Mr. Phelps was still in pain. Eventually he came to Geisinger, but the injections he got there didn’t help either. That’s when clinical nurse specialist Dawn Snyder, RN, MSN, suggested the Multidisciplinary Pain Management Program, or MPP.

“The MPP program introduces chronic pain sufferers to alternative therapies that work with their bodies’ natural healing processes,” Ms. Snyder explains. “The goal is to have each patient find the combination of approaches that works for them.” Participants in Geisinger’s innovative eight-session program learn about

using pain medications safely and effectively. But they also learn how a healthy diet, good sleep habits, stress management and behavioral pacing techniques can help decrease pain.

“When Dawn first mentioned the MPP program, I was skeptical, but I agreed to try it,” says Mr. Phelps. “Then, as we were getting in the car, I told my wife there was no way I was doing it, and I told her to call and cancel the appointment.”

But after a few more months of pain, Mr. Phelps was ready. “They got me right in,” he says. “Too many places wanted me to wait weeks or months for an appointment. Not the MPP program — they saw me right away.”

The MPP takes each person’s unique situation into account and creates a sort of toolbox to turn to when pain gets the upper hand. “Pain isn’t just physical,” explains Ms. Snyder. “It involves emotional, social and spiritual aspects, too.”

“The MPP team really listened to me as a person,” says Mr. Phelps. “They saw beyond the pain I was in — and the pain I was being.”

Mr. Phelps started slowly. Gradually, his life began to take on a new normal. “I stopped focusing on what I couldn’t do,” he says. “They got my head in a better place.”

The pain management program encouraged Mr. Phelps to go for walks. Wearing a hoodie to avoid being recognized by people who’d seen him on TV, he went out a little bit every day. He started taking pictures of the wildflowers he saw on his walks and posted them on his Facebook page with facts and information. “I got quite a following,” he says. “I was learning to reconnect with what I love: nature. And it

made all the difference in the world.”

Through the program, Mr. Phelps learned that good sleep hygiene could help get him through the nights. Learning to be mindful of what triggered his pain, and developing ways to de-escalate it, gave him a sense of control. Eventually, he found himself getting back in touch with his creative side. “Once I got better, I taught horticulture therapy through the program,” Mr. Phelps explains. “I did that for about a year and a half. If I could get someone to forget their pain for just 20 minutes, it was a great start — something to build on. I saw it happen time and time again.”

Today, Mr. Phelps is not only back at work, he’s also a regular on WNEP again. He does take medication to manage his pain and also has a spinal nerve implant to help with the pain in his groin. But thanks to Geisinger’s pain management program, he also has strategies to turn to when he needs them.

“The MPP program gave me the tools I needed, and a new mindset,” Mr. Phelps explains. “I don’t have bad days anymore — just more challenging ones. And on good days, I’m down on the floor playing with my grandkids. There was a time when I thought that would never be possible.”

“Pain isn’t just physical. It involves emotional, social and spiritual aspects, too.”

– Dawn Snyder,
RN, MSN



Building Up More Than Muscle

How Exercise Boosts Mood



We all know exercise is great for our bodies. But getting moving, especially on dreary winter days, can also be good for the mind and our moods.

So far, no one can say for certain why exercise helps us deal better with depression and anxiety, says Laura Campbell, PhD, assistant director of adult psychology and behavioral medicine at Geisinger. However, we do know that exercise releases feel-good endorphins — chemicals that make us feel better naturally.

Exercise is also distracting. When you're focused on completing a certain number of lunges or monitoring the miles per hour on your bike in spin class, your brain is busy. In other words, things like cycling can help break the cycle of negative thoughts.

"When you take care of your body, you also tend to feel better about yourself," Dr. Campbell says. "If you're challenging yourself and meeting goals, you're probably proud of yourself. And you might have a better body

image, too, if you're exercising. That added confidence can be mood-boosting."

Dr. Campbell adds that physical activity — things like taking a walk, playing basketball or shoveling snow — is a healthy way to cope with negative feelings. Especially if you enjoy what you're doing. It can also be a way to socialize if you're active with a friend or family member.

"While running on treadmills and lifting weights are great activities, if that type of exercise isn't for you, find activities you like," Dr. Campbell says. "Repeatedly doing a low-impact, but fun, activity is better than doing something intense once and giving up."

Your doctor can offer guidance about starting new physical activities. And keep in mind that exercise complements, but doesn't replace, therapy and medication for depression.

The bottom line? Whether you hit the gym, dance to a Zumba video or take a stroll around your neighborhood with a friend, you'll help boost your mood and banish the blahs.

Warming Meals to Ward Off Winter's Chill

All The Comfort — None Of The Guilt

As cold temperatures settle in, we often turn to comfort foods like mac and cheese, noodle-rich pot pies and thick soups and stews. If you're trying to avoid the fat and carbs in these traditional dishes, Geisinger registered dietitian nutritionist Kim Segiel has good news. Many comfort foods lend themselves to easy and healthy substitutions. BY LISA Z. LEIGHTON



Winter soups and stews:

Lighten up heavy soups and stews by starting with vegetable- and tomato-based broths. Then add high-fiber, nutrient-dense frozen veggies, beans or lentils as meat substitutes. "Hot liquid meals fill you up and curb cravings," says Ms. Segiel. Don't want to skip the meat? Choose lean turkey breast or ground turkey or chicken instead of beef.



Mac and cheese: Consider using whole grain pasta and low-fat or fat-free milk and cheese. Another fun twist? Cauliflower. "There are some great mac and cheese recipes that call for cauliflower, allowing you to cut back on the pasta," Ms. Segiel notes. Best of all, this nutritional powerhouse is rich in fiber and vitamin C, high in antioxidants, fat-free, gluten-free and low-calorie.



Pot pies: Reduce the amount of noodles and double the veggies in your favorite recipe to lighten up this local favorite. And just about any fresh or

frozen vegetable will do. Try corn, peas, mushrooms, peppers, onions... whatever you've got on hand. All of these provide a welcome nutrient boost.

Winter salads: Toss on nuts and seeds to add texture and interest. You can also experiment with kale or cabbage, black beans, chickpeas, kidney beans or healthy grains like quinoa. Roasted vegetables are another way to mix things up, says Ms. Segiel. Just keep in mind that nuts and seeds can be high in calories, so a little goes a long way — one to two tablespoons at most.

Slow and pressure cookers: A slow cooker, pressure cooker — or the newest kitchen craze, the Instant Pot — can be a lifesaver for busy families. But planning ahead is key. If the meal is meat-based, make sure to add veggies to the recipe, too. For slow cookers, root vegetables like sweet potatoes, carrots, turnips, beets and squash hold their texture while adding nutrients.

"I like to remind people that it's a holiDAY, not a holiMONTH," jokes Ms. Segiel.

3 TIPS TO AVOID OVERINDULGING AT HOLIDAY PARTIES

Set yourself up to make healthy choices at holiday parties. Here are Ms. Segiel's top three tips:

1. Don't attend on an empty stomach. Doing so makes it harder to resist overeating.
2. Sample one or two foods you don't normally have — like an interesting side dish or appetizer — and skip the commonplace snacks, like chips and dip. Holidays are special times, so when you indulge, the food should be special, too.
3. Fill half your plate with a winter salad or roasted vegetables — and go home feeling extra merry about your good choices.



**BEATING
DIABETES.**

***BEFORE
IT STARTS.***

BY BETH KASZUBA

Jim Unger always knew better health was within reach.

It was just a matter of finding the right moment — and the right healthcare partner — to make some lifestyle changes. Like gaining control of his diet and fitness.

“Every year, it was the same thing,” Mr. Unger says. “I’d think, ‘I’m gonna lose weight.’ But days go by, and you never really start the program.”

That all changed last year when, determined to find the cause of nagging fatigue, the 54-year-old Mifflinburg resident reached out to a Geisinger doctor. That led to a blood test, which served as a big wake-up call. With his A1C (average blood sugar) levels above 5.7, Mr. Unger was prediabetic. And, even with medication, his high blood pressure put him at risk for stroke.

Determined to get healthy, Mr. Unger jumped at the chance to join Geisinger’s pilot Preventing Diabetes program — a decision he says “changed my life.”

He backs up that claim with numbers and facts. More than a year later, Mr. Unger keeps his weight steady at between 180 and 190 pounds. He’s shrunk his waistband from size 42 to 34. He no longer needs to take blood pressure medicine. And instead of downing bowls of ice cream when he’s stressed, he rides his bike 10 to 15 miles.

“I’m in that mindset where I don’t want to go back,” he says. “I’m in a good rut now.”

Preventing Diabetes, launched last year, empowers participants to customize the program in a way that suits their lifestyle and personality. Mr. Unger chose from four options:

- Join WW[®] (formerly Weight Watchers).
- Receive a daily call from a dietitian to discuss food choices.
- Go to regular appointments with a Geisinger obesity specialist.
- Attend group exercise and nutrition sessions at Lewisburg’s Miller Center for Recreation and Wellness.

“I thought the support group would be better for me than just a call,” says Mr. Unger, who also opted for appointments with Christopher Still, DO, a specialist in nutrition and weight management.

The group sessions included weigh-ins and advice from Geisinger registered dietitian nutritionist Allison Naylor, who discussed topics like cooking habits and eating triggers. The group also enjoyed cooking demonstrations and visited Weis Markets, touring the aisles to learn what to eat — and foods to avoid.

Mr. Unger adds that he discussed his personal dietary challenges one-on-one with Dr. Still and Ms. Naylor. “I’m on the road a lot,” he says, explaining that he ate a lot of fast food while traveling. “I had to tell them, ‘This is what I’m up against.’”

Today, Mr. Unger says his friends tease him about how good he looks — and ask how to join the program.

“I know it’s their job, but they actually change lives,” he says, crediting Dr. Still and Ms. Naylor with supporting him on his journey to better health. “They handled me like I was the only patient, the only person in the program. I can’t thank them enough.”

Of course, Mr. Unger also deserves credit for making the decision to get healthy — and taking that first crucial step to make it happen.

“I know it’s their job, but they actually change lives.”

—Jim Unger



5 Fun Ways to Battle WINTER BLUES

Got a mild case of the winter blahs or fighting seasonal affective disorder? Laying low on the couch might sound tempting. But get outdoors and get moving. It might help you keep the blues at bay.

BY ELIZABETH
LAURA

For some people, Pennsylvania is truly a wonderland in winter. But if you've got seasonal affective disorder, or SAD, you may feel depressed, anxious, lacking in energy — even craving high-carb foods — during the winter months.

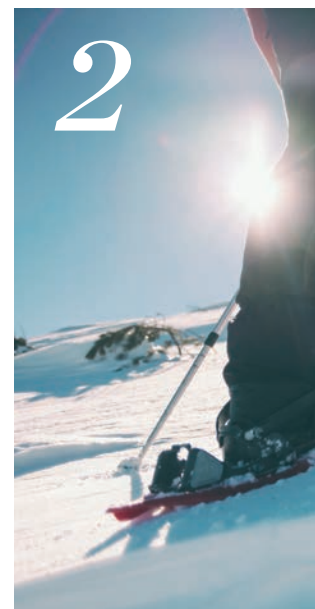
Want a natural way to help ease your symptoms? It might be as easy as bundling up and walking out your front door. Getting outside, especially on sunny days, can increase your melatonin, serotonin and vitamin D levels and bring your circadian rhythms back into sync.

Here are 5 fun ways to get outdoors — and maybe feel happier.

1 SLEDDING: When was the last time you zoomed through the snow on a sled or plastic saucer? It's just as fun as you remember! Round up your friends and traverse the nearest hill after the next snowfall. You could burn more than 450 calories an hour as you climb (and re-climb) the hill.

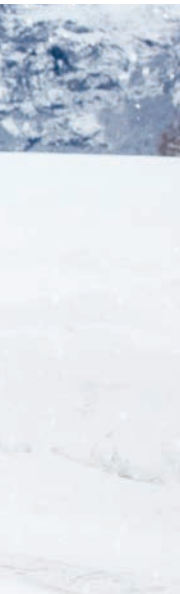


2 SNOWSHOEING: This method of navigating trails is easier than it looks. While traditional snowshoes had hardwood frames and rawhide lacings, modern versions are made of lightweight metal, plastic and synthetic fabric that more evenly distribute your weight. They're also easier to maneuver. Rent a pair or buy your own and take to the trails or snow-covered golf course near you. This low-impact, muscle-building activity will help you burn up to 1,000 calories an hour.





3 CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING: If you're not a fan of black-diamond slopes, cross-country skiing might be more your speed. It's a great full-body aerobic exercise, and you can burn up to 500 calories an hour skiing 2.5 mph.



4 ICE FISHING: As soon as the ice is 4 inches thick, and temperatures are below freezing for several days in a row, it's safe to venture out on a local pond or lake to try ice fishing. Dress in layers, invest in an ice rod/reel — and other appropriate gear — and you're on your way to a family outing that enhances peace, quiet and an overall sense of well-being. Take an experienced ice fisher along on your first time out.



5 PLAY IN THE SNOW: Have a snowball fight. Build a snowman. Make a snow angel. The activities you loved as a kid will increase your resting metabolism and enhance your social connections. And being out in the cold can cause your body to burn fat and energy.

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