

# PA

ISSUE 18 | Fall 2023 | Free

# HEALTH

YOUR GUIDE TO FITNESS & WELL-BEING

## Gene genie

How DNA guided one  
Milton woman's healthcare

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BRING THE GREAT  
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ARE YOU  
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**On the cover:**  
Kathy Lahr's genetic testing results helped her make the right decision for her own health.  
Photo by Mark Dastrup.



Colorful leaves, crisp temperatures and the scents of autumn in Pennsylvania are welcome changes from the summer heat. I look forward to the changing of the seasons in our beautiful state.

If you can't get outside to enjoy the fall weather, read our tips for bringing the outdoors inside. A few simple changes in your home can lift your spirits and provide a calming connection to nature all year around.

This edition of *PA Health* also highlights genetic testing and how the information is used to help you and your healthcare team find a treatment that's right for you. Kathy Lahr's story is a good example of how her DNA test results informed her decision to have surgery for breast and ovarian cancer.

With autumn comes a bountiful harvest of vegetables, including many varieties of squash. Explore the different types and how to prepare them for a healthy addition to any meal.

And now that kids are going back to school — and back to the field or gym — find out about common sports injuries and how to prevent them. You'll also meet some Penn State athlete ambassadors partnering with Geisinger.

I hope you find this edition of *PA Health* enjoyable and pick up a few tips that make you and your family healthier and happier. I wish you all a wonderful fall season.

**Jaewon Ryu, MD, JD**  
President and CEO  
Geisinger

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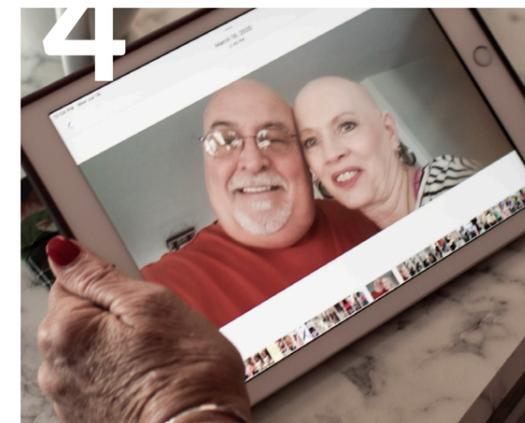
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## CONTENTS

- 4 / It's no Magic 8-Ball, but **genetic testing** can give you a forecast of possible health conditions.
- 6 / Athletes do amazing things with (and to) their bodies. Before they're sidelined, know how to **prevent and treat common injuries**.
- 8 / **Bringing nature indoors** can give you a daily dose of happiness without leaving the comforts of home.
- 10 / The Annual Enrollment Period is upon us! **Test your Medicare smarts** with these tricky brain-teasers.
- 12 / Thinking positive is more than just being optimistic — **self-praise** actually sets you up for success. Try our tips.
- 14 / Find squash mystifying? We can help. Put some **fall color on your plate** with this cozy recipe.



## Can friendship be a perk of Medicare Advantage?

We've probably all struck up a conversation with a fellow patient in a healthcare waiting room. But building friendships at a doctor's office? That's rare.

Unless you're a Geisinger Gold member who joins a Geisinger 65 Forward Health Center.

Just ask Barbara Pacheco, who loves the friendly atmosphere she found when she joined 65 Forward, where — along with gaining a whole care team dedicated to her health — she takes advantage of the center's other social and fitness activities.

"My absolute favorite activity is the balancing class," Ms. Pacheco says. "It's nice to be around people my age because there's a real understanding about what we're going through."

The camaraderie doesn't stop with the other 65 Forward members, though. "You're walking into a place that is so friendly and warm — and they know your name. And that means a lot," she says. "It's the kind of place that you want to go back to."

Strong social connections are proven to support good health. But at 65 Forward, Ms. Pacheco found traditional care that meets her



needs, too, thanks to on-site lab and imaging services. And she loves the longer appointment time she gets with her doctor.

"65 Forward is allowing me to have a chance to have more years to be with my granddaughter and have a quality of life with her," she says.

.....  
*Can Medicare be fun, too? We think so. Check out our puzzles and games on pages 10-11.*

# The story your genes can tell

Looking at your DNA can improve healthcare outcomes for you, your family and people around the world.



By Kimberly Adler-Morelli

Having information from genetic testing and analysis can help you avoid disease or help your doctor find it earlier. And if you've been diagnosed with a particular disease, your doctor can use this data to decide a course of treatment that's right for you.

How does genetic testing work? Through a small sample of blood or saliva, the test looks for changes (variants) in your genes. These mutations raise your risk of developing specific health conditions, like certain types of cancer and heart conditions. Simply having a gene mutation doesn't necessarily mean you'll get the illness — just that you're at higher risk for it.

## Genetic counselors guide your journey

If you have a genetic variant identified, you'll likely meet with a genetic counselor. These healthcare professionals have specific training in genetics, and can tell you about your gene change and its associated risks.

Genetic counselors also offer:

- Medical management recommendations
- Advice on your next steps
- Information and education for your at-risk family members
- Psychosocial support
- Guidance on resources, such as mental health and patient advocacy programs

Alyson Evans, a Geisinger genetic counselor, is grateful to be part of her patients' care. "It's very rewarding to be able to provide education, guidance and support for patients and their families at the times they need it most — and empower them to make the best decisions for themselves and their health," she says.



Kathy and Bernard Lahr of Milton, Pa.

## One woman's story

Kathy Lahr of Milton, Pa., planned to have a lumpectomy and radiation when a routine mammogram found a small lump in her breast. However, a presurgical MRI showed a second tumor. Because her family has a genetic predisposition for breast cancer, Ms. Lahr opted for genetic testing.

She learned she has a disease-causing variant in the *BRCA2* gene, which significantly increases the risk for breast and ovarian cancer. Armed with this information, she decided to undergo a double mastectomy instead of a lumpectomy.

But Ms. Lahr's journey didn't end there. Because the *BRCA2* variant increases the likelihood of ovarian cancer to about 20% (compared with less than 2% in the general population), she opted for a partial hysterectomy to take ovarian cancer out of the equation. "Now I know that I am more susceptible to other cancers...(because) I came back positive for *BRCA2*," she says.

During her partial hysterectomy, cancer was found in one ovary and a fallopian tube. She

was referred to Scott C. Purinton, MD, PhD, chief of gynecologic oncology at Geisinger Medical Center. As Dr. Purinton explains, "Genetic testing is recommended when ovarian cancer is present, regardless of the patient's age." Because Ms. Lahr, at age 71, had already had the genetic testing done, he knew she was predisposed to several types of cancers. If she hadn't been tested, the ovarian cancer might not have been discovered until a later stage — when the prognosis could have been much worse.

Because of her *BRCA2* variation and incidentally found ovarian cancer, she had multiple surgeries and six cycles of chemotherapy. She's now cancer free.

Besides her husband and family, Ms. Lahr credits her care team with getting her through the treatment. "You feel like you're really a person they care about. They're committed to helping you in any way possible to get through it and hopefully have a good outcome," she says. And the comforting hug from Dr. Purinton, she adds, was just what she needed when facing more surgery and chemo treatments.

Dr. Purinton's motto: "I treat every single patient like family. If this patient was my wife, what treatment

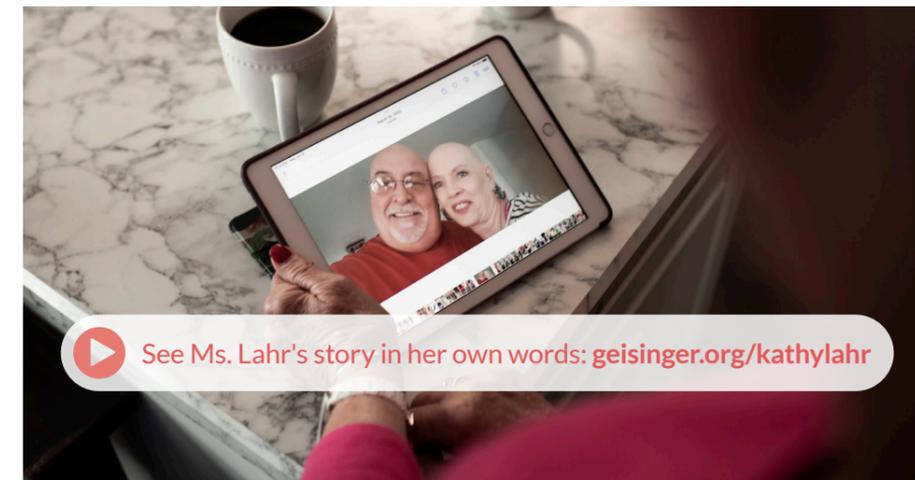
would I recommend?" Compassion and kindness, he says, are important aspects of treatment when someone is facing a life-threatening illness.

Many people's stories would stop there. But Ms. Lahr's faith and generosity of spirit moved her to reach out to others diagnosed with cancer to do what she can to help them and let them know they aren't alone. She's an avid proponent of genetic testing and cancer screenings, especially mammograms.

## Why have genetic testing?

Dr. Purinton credits genetic testing for providing valuable information when deciding on a course of treatment. "Earlier diagnosis leads to a better prognosis," he maintains. In Ms. Lahr's case, she opted for prophylactic (preventive) surgery, which led to better outcomes.

Encouraging family members to undergo testing is key, too, says Dr. Purinton. If they carry the same genetic variant, knowing it is the first step in choosing what to do. After Ms. Lahr urged her family members to have genetic testing, her son and sister found they also had the *BRCA2* variant. "The more you know about your health and your family's health, the richer you're going to be for it," she says.



▶ See Ms. Lahr's story in her own words: [geisinger.org/kathylahr](https://www.geisinger.org/kathylahr)

## Clinical genetic testing vs. MyCode

Clinical genetic testing happens if you or your healthcare provider have concerns about

your family history of a particular health condition. Your provider can refer you to a genetic counselor for testing and follow-up.

Geisinger's MyCode® Community Health Initiative is a research study to discover and analyze genetic changes that increase the risk for certain health conditions. So far, more than 330,000 people have joined MyCode. Through the study, researchers investigate ways to prevent medical conditions, diagnose them earlier or treat them better. The MyCode Genomic Screening and Counseling Program informs participants if they have a genetic result putting them at higher risk for conditions like cancer or heart disease. These results are "actionable," meaning they can be medically treated or managed. If you have a genetic variant, the team will offer you a visit with a genetic counselor.

To join MyCode, you consent to participate, then provide an extra blood sample when having lab work done at Geisinger or ask for a free, at-home saliva kit.

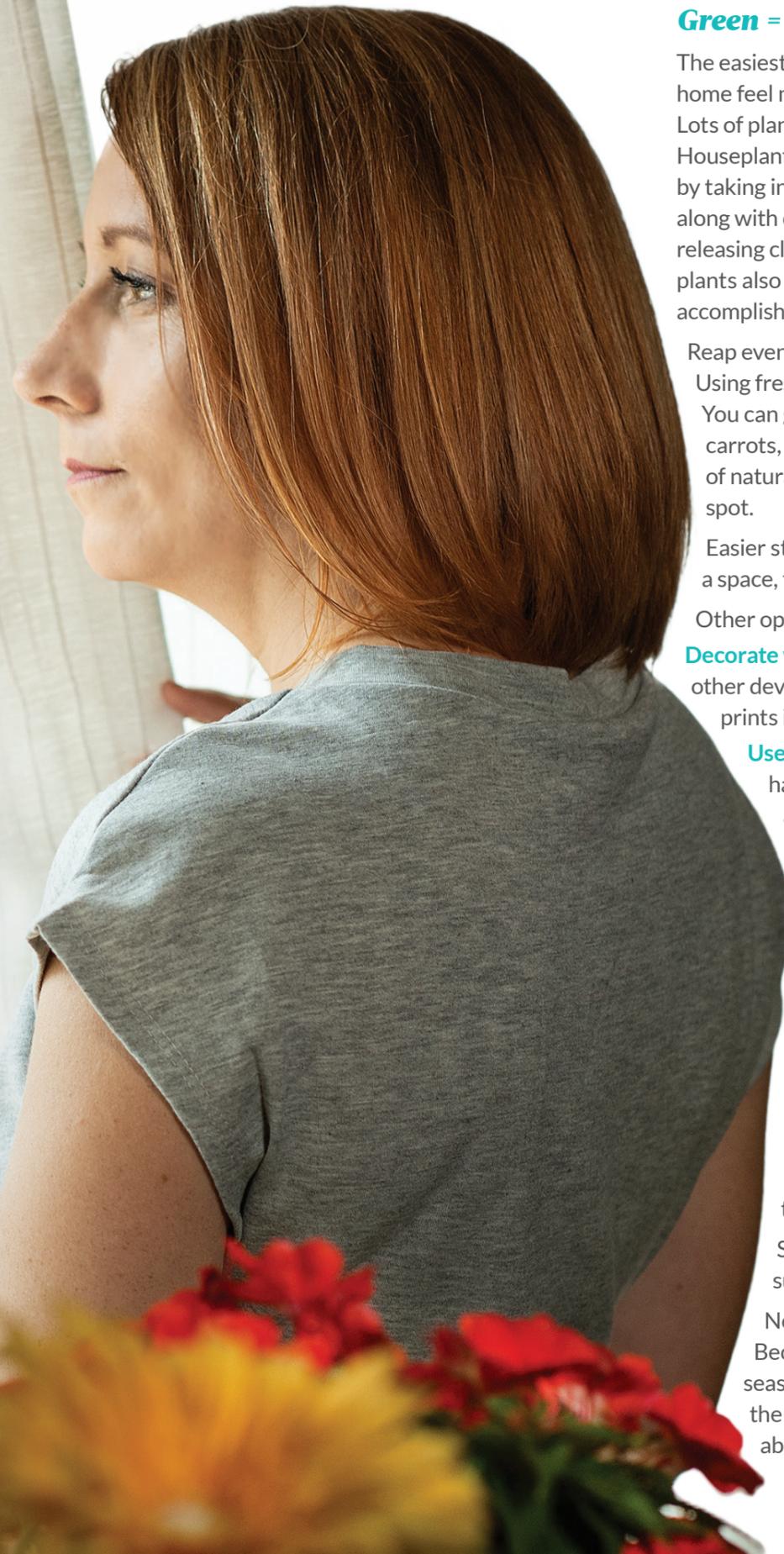
You can choose to be part of this study if you're a Geisinger patient. Visit [geisinger.org/mycode](https://www.geisinger.org/mycode) to get started.

*MyCode is a research study, not a replacement for clinical genetic testing. If you're concerned about your or your family's history, ask your physician for a referral to a genetics counselor.*



# Bring the outdoors in for a healthy win.

Enjoy the great outdoors — even when you're indoors.



## Green = serene

The easiest way to make your home feel more outdoorsy? Lots of plants and flowers. Houseplants cleanse the air by taking in air pollutants, along with carbon dioxide, and releasing clean oxygen. “Tending plants also improves your mood, reduces anxiety and gives you a sense of accomplishment,” says Thomas Morland, MD, Geisinger primary care physician.



Reap even more green benefits by growing herbs and vegetables indoors. Using fresh herbs in cooking elevates your meals and gives them more flavor. You can grow vegetables year-round indoors. Some of the easiest to grow: carrots, garlic, hot peppers, lettuce and tomatoes. Make sure they get plenty of natural light or use a grow light or bright lamp if you don't have a sunny spot.

Easier still, bring in bouquets of fresh cut flowers. Not only will they cheer up a space, they'll make it smell like a garden.

Other options for including greenery in your home:

**Decorate with nature scenes.** Use a nature background on your computer or other devices. Hang posters or paintings of beautiful landscapes. Using floral prints is a great way to add some cheer to a room.

**Use color therapy.** Green and yellow are mood-lifting colors. You don't have to paint a whole room to gain the benefits, though. Use a few pops of green or yellow to boost the mood.

**Go for faux.** Don't have a green thumb? No worries — you can gain some of the same benefits you get from live plants with fake ones. They still lift your mood without all the watering and fertilizing. And if you have pollen allergies, artificial plants won't leave you sneezing.

## Here comes the sun

“Sunlight is linked to the production of serotonin, a chemical associated with regulating your mood and reducing depression and anxiety,” says Dr. Morland. The World Health Organization recommends getting five to 15 minutes of sunlight on your skin two to three times a week.

Soak up the sun from your porch or a sunny window. Increase natural sunlight in your home by opening curtains and blinds during the day.

Not enough natural sunlight in your house? Try light box therapy. Because a light box mimics outdoor light, it can reduce the symptoms of seasonal affective disorder (SAD), a type of depression that can occur in the fall and winter months. These devices vary, so talk with your doctor about which kind is best for you and how to use it.

## Furry friends

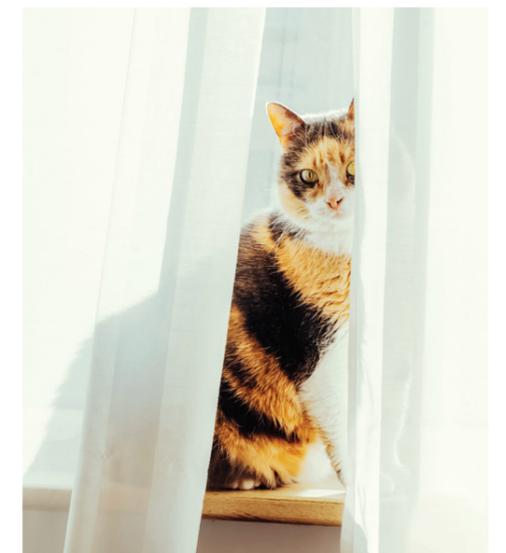
Communing with nature involves relating to other living things. Birdwatching or feeding deer in a backyard or park is one way to do it. But caring for a pet can bring joy, too.

Petting an animal decreases cortisol, a stress hormone, lowering blood pressure and stress levels. Having someone else around can ease loneliness, too. And taking care of a pet that depends on you gives you a feeling of nurturing and a sense of purpose.

Not a dog or cat person? You can still get the benefits of an animal companion. Think outside the box! Find a new friend in the form of a:

- Fish
- Bird
- Ferret
- Rabbit
- Turtle, lizard or snake
- Hamster or guinea pig
- Chinchilla

Some pets are easy to care for and don't need a lot of space, but all of them have specific diets and habitats. Do your research before adopting any type of animal. Consult reputable websites, veterinarians or pet breeders for guidance in finding the perfect pet.



# Game changer.

Puzzled by Medicare? Don't be. With a little basic knowledge, getting the right coverage can be child's play. (And if you need some hints along the way, it's not cheating to ask the experts.)

By Beth Kaszuba

## Medicare Advantage Myth Buster

Geisinger's Medicare Advantage plan is called Geisinger Gold. All the options below may be covered, depending on the plan you choose. But which two options come with every Geisinger Gold Medicare Advantage plan?

- A. Dental care
- B. Vision care
- C. Membership in 65 Forward
- D. Coverage for Medicare Parts A and B
- E. Prescription drug coverage

## Moving Toward Medicare

As you advance to your 65th birthday, you'll pass some Medicare milestones. Make sure you stop at each one, so you'll cross the finish line a winner!

★ **9-12 months before:**  
Confirm eligibility.

★ **3 months before:**  
Enrollment begins.

★ **65th birthday month:**  
Congrats! You still have 3 months to enroll.

★ **3 months later:**  
This is your last chance. Enroll now and collect your benefits!



## Medicare Match

Medicare has four parts — each covering a different “part” of healthcare. Can you match the parts of Medicare and what they cover?

- |        |   |
|--------|---|
| Part A | 1. Prescription drugs   |
| Part B | 2. Hospital stays   |
| Part C | 3. Outpatient care  |
| Part D | 4. Private insurance that may offer extra benefits — also called Medicare Advantage |

## Medicare Mixer

Don't let Medicare spin you around. Unscramble these common Medicare-related terms and boost your knowledge about coverage.

A list of prescription drugs covered by a plan.

Y M L U A R O F R

A person who has insurance through Medicare or Medicaid.

C F E E N B I I R A Y

An amount you pay for care or prescriptions before Medicare or other insurance coverage begins to pay.

B T U C D E I D E L

When you choose to join or leave a Medicare plan.

N O E L I C T E

## Medicare Math

These numbers really add up: The more providers who accept your Medicare Advantage plan, the more options you have for care. How many providers accept Geisinger Gold — which means you're covered when you see them?

## Medicare Message

We're leaving you with one last clue to making the most of Medicare. Can you decode the message?

Vwloo sxccoHg eb Phglfduh? Fdoo rxu Phglfduh hgxfdwruv. Wkhh'oo eh kdssb wr dqvzhu brxu txhvwlrqv.

(Hint: The letter H equals E.)

Geisinger Gold Medicare Advantage HMO, PPO, and HMO D-SNP plans are offered by Geisinger Health Plan/Geisinger Indemnity Insurance Company, health plans with a Medicare contract. Continued enrollment in Geisinger Gold depends on contract renewal. Geisinger Health Plan/Geisinger Indemnity Insurance Company are part of Geisinger, an integrated health care delivery and coverage organization.

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Medicare Message: Still puzzled by Medicare? Call our Medicare educators. They'll be happy to answer your questions.  
(You can reach them by calling 800-482-8163 (TTY: 711) Monday – Friday, 8 a.m. – 8 p.m. or Saturday, 8 a.m. – 2 p.m.)

Medicare Math: 30,452  
Medicare Match: A-2, B-3, C-4, D-1  
Medicare Mixer: FORMULARY, BENEFICIARY, DEDUCTIBLE, ELECTION  
Center, your membership is covered, too. to join a Geisinger 65 Forward Health Medicare Parts A and B, and if you want C and D. All Geisinger Gold plans cover Medicare Advantage Myth Buster:

# Take a good look in the mirror.

(And tell yourself how great you are.)

By Beth Kaszuba

Ready to have a sunnier outlook, gain the confidence to land your dream job or the willpower to quit a bad habit?

Before you order a stack of self-help books or hire a life coach, take a quick stroll to your bathroom.

That's right. Just walk in, look in the mirror and tell yourself you're a superstar, you've got what it takes, and you can achieve any goals you set for yourself.

Using positive affirmations might sound too easy to be effective. But consistent use of these short, empowering statements is a proven way to reframe your mindset, recognize your strengths — even inspire yourself to make meaningful changes or work toward an achievement. "The more a statement is said or heard, the truer it becomes," says Lynne Ann Gallagher, outpatient pediatric therapist at Geisinger Health Plan.

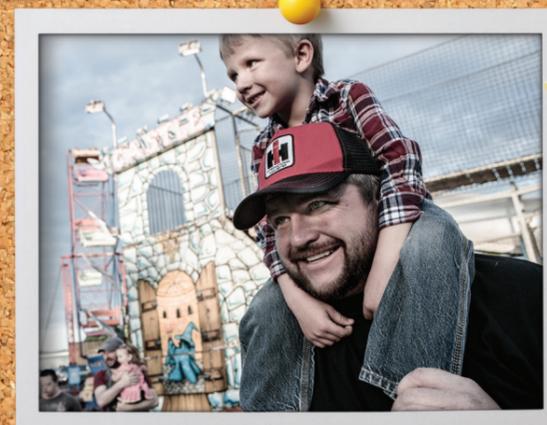
To get started, set your personal goals. Then make a list of brief positive statements related to your target, whether it's internal, like gaining confidence, or external, like completing a fun run. Use "I" or "me" statements to make your affirmations personal and focus on uplifting, motivating messages, like our examples.

It can help to write your affirmations on sticky notes and post them somewhere you'll see them every day — like the bathroom mirror where we started this journey. Then look yourself in the eye and repeat your phrases, loud and proud. (Or, if that's too awkward, read them silently but with conviction.)

Keep up a steady practice, and soon you'll be on your way toward achieving your goals. Geisinger's ZING543210 program encourages you to repeat four positive affirmations a day as part of a healthy — and fun — lifestyle. Find out how many belly laughs and fruits and veggies are beneficial, too: [geisinger.org/zing](https://www.geisinger.org/zing)

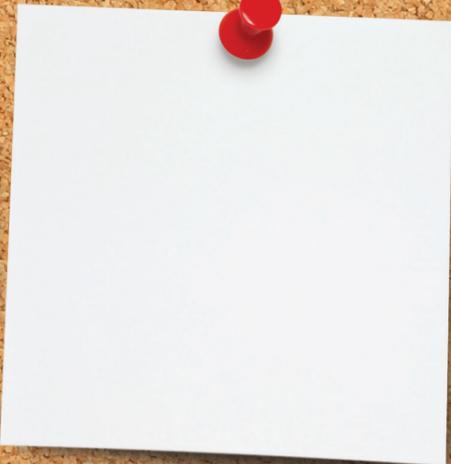


I deserve all the good things in my life. ☀️



I will exercise 15 minutes today.

Write your own positive affirmation here. →



"I'M COMPASSIONATE AND DESERVE COMPASSION, TOO."



I'll ace my next work presentation.



I'M COURAGEOUS.



If you'd like to share it with us, we may feature it in a future issue of PA Health — plus we'll send you a small reward! Send a photo (and your name and address to [pahealth@geisinger.edu](mailto:pahealth@geisinger.edu) or mail it to Zing543210 Challenge, 100 N. Academy Ave., M.C. 40-20, Danville, PA 17822.

By Kimberly Adler-Morelli

# Take the squeamish out of squash



For a light, kid-friendly pasta alternative, try spaghetti squash boats: [geisinger.org/squashboats](https://www.geisinger.org/squashboats)

Butternut, spaghetti, pumpkin, zucchini, yellow. With so many varieties of squash to choose from, selecting one and preparing it can be a little intimidating.

These gourmet gourds are not only delicious, but they're also chock-full of vitamins, minerals and antioxidants — making squash a great choice for a healthy diet. But which squash should you choose, and what do you do with it? It's easier than you think.

## Summer vs. winter squash

The two main categories for this flavorful fruit (yes, it's actually considered a fruit!) are summer and winter squash.

Summer squash can grow on a bush or a vine. They have softer skin, a mild flavor and taste best when

they're picked within 60 to 70 days of planting. Zucchini and yellow squash are two well-known varieties.

Winter squash grow on a vine, have tough skins and a stronger flavor. They take longer to mature and can be picked then stored until the winter months. Examples of these include acorn, butternut, Hubbard — and pumpkins, surprisingly.

## Now you're cookin'!

It's hard to go wrong when you prepare squash. Serve them raw, roasted, fried, steamed or pureed. Ideas for cooking some popular types:

**Butternut squash**  
This squash works well with sweet or savory recipes and has a mild, buttery flavor. The easiest way to cook it is to roast it in the oven. Peel it with a vegetable peeler and cut into cubes before roasting.

**Spaghetti squash**  
True to its name, this is a great alternative to high-calorie pasta. Cut in half, remove the seeds, then microwave or roast in the oven. Scrape out the long, noodle-like strands and ladle on your favorite sauce.

**Sugar pumpkin**  
A sweeter cousin to the larger "Halloween" or field pumpkins, sugar pumpkins are smaller and rounder. They're equally as good in a homemade pumpkin pie or pureed for soup.

**Yellow squash**  
Go simple by adding a few seasonings and roasting in the oven, or add this versatile ingredient to salads, pasta or chili.

**Zucchini**  
The mild flavor makes it easy to add to lots of recipes, or grill thick slices seasoned with salt, pepper and parmesan cheese for a tasty side dish.

With so many ways to incorporate it — whether it stars as a main course or shines as a side dish — squash is an easy, smart choice for a flavorful, nutrient-packed meal.



## Orange honeyed acorn squash

Serves 6.

### Ingredients:

- Three small acorn squash
- 2 tablespoons orange juice
- ¼ cup honey
- 2 tablespoons butter or margarine
- ⅛ teaspoon nutmeg (optional)

### Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 400° F.
2. Cut squash in half, remove seeds and place the halves cut side up in a shallow baking pan.
3. Combine the orange juice and honey, mixing well. Spoon some of the orange juice/honey mixture into each squash cavity.
4. Add a tablespoon of margarine or butter to each squash half. Sprinkle with nutmeg, if desired.
5. Cover the pan with aluminum foil to keep the steam in, which will speed cooking.
6. Bake for 30 minutes, remove the foil and continue baking for 30 minutes more or until squash is tender.

Adapted from [myplate.gov](https://www.myplate.gov)

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