



Health & Well-Being

A Special Publication Of The Addison Independent
Thursday, January 16, 2025

Prem Prakash, a mere 147 pounds himself, lifts 276 pounds for a world record in his division for the squat lift category. See story on Page 4.



Rooted in Community

Building a Healthier Community Together
One Connection at a Time





SOME OF THE more than 50 students who take part in Yoga Equity Project classes at Otter Creek Yoga stop for a photo after a recent workout. Photo courtesy of Joanna Colwell

Local project that pays people of color to do yoga is thriving

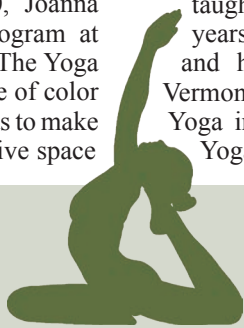
By MEGAN JAMES

MIDDLEBURY — In 2020, Joanna Colwell launched a radical program at her yoga studio in Middlebury. The Yoga Equity Project would pay people of color to take classes there. The idea was to make Otter Creek Yoga a more inclusive space by breaking down two of the barriers that prevent some Black and Brown folks from taking yoga classes: the cost, and the fact that most yoga classes, especially in Vermont, are primarily filled with whiter, wealthier people.

“Get paid to relax” was the first slogan Colwell used when advertising

the affinity space class, which is also taught by a person of color. Five years later, the project is thriving and has recently inspired another Vermont studio, Laughing River Yoga in Winooski, to create its own Yoga Equity Project modeled after Colwell’s.

Here’s how it works: Yoga students participating in the project get a \$20 stipend each week they attend a class at Otter Creek Yoga. Some participants use their stipend to come to the affinity space class, which is just for (See Yoga, Page 11)



“It has totally changed the demographics of our studio.”

— Joanna Colwell



JOANNA COLWELL, WHO started the Yoga Equity Project, poses with Sasha Quattrocci, who commutes from Richmond each week to teach the class in Middlebury. Photo courtesy of Joanna Colwell

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EAST MIDDLEBURY RESIDENT Prem Prakash deadlifts 347 pounds for a world record in his division at the International Powerlifting League World Championships in Las Vegas.

Local man gets in shape, sets records

By MEGAN JAMES

At the age of 65, Prem Prakash is still trying new things — and setting world records in the process. The East Middlebury resident, who is better known for his three decades of teaching yoga in our area, began powerlifting competitively in 2020. It started as a way to spend time with his son, an MMA fighter who was training at home when gyms were closed during the pandemic.

Prem Prakash got hooked. In 2023 he traveled to St. Louis for the International Powerlifting League North American Championships, where he won the gold medal in his division, set four Vermont state records and qualified for the World Championships.

This past summer, he celebrated a birthday, which moved him into the age 65-69 Masters division. Then on Aug. 24, he competed in the Tested Battle at the Capital in Augusta, Maine, where he won his division.

Then, in November, he won another gold medal and set four world records at the International Powerlifting League World Championships in Las Vegas. His openpowerlifting.org stats show that his lifts included squatting 276 pounds for a



DRAPED IN AN American flag, Prem Prakash accepts his International Powerlifting League World Championships gold medal in the Masters division this past November.

Photos courtesy of Prem Prakash

world record in his division, deadlifting 347 pounds for a world record in his division, and bench-pressing 198 pounds. All that and his personal body weight was recorded at a mere 147.5 pounds that day.

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Does AI improve doctors' diagnoses? Study puts it to the test

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. — With hospitals already deploying artificial intelligence to improve patient care, a new study has found that using Chat GPT Plus does not significantly improve the accuracy of doctors' diagnoses when compared with the use of usual resources.

The study, from University of Virginia Health's Andrew S. Parsons, M.D., MPH and colleagues, enlisted 50 physicians in family medicine, internal medicine and emergency medicine to put Chat GPT Plus to the test. Half were randomly assigned to use Chat GPT Plus to diagnose complex cases, while the other half relied on conventional methods such as medical reference sites (for example, UpToDate) and Google. The researchers then compared the resulting diagnoses, finding that the accuracy across the two groups was similar.

That said, Chat GPT alone outperformed both groups, suggesting that it still holds promise for improving patient care. Physicians, however, will need more training and experience with

the emerging technology to capitalize on its potential, the researchers conclude.

For now, they say, Chat GPT remains best used to augment, rather than replace, human physicians.

"Our study shows that AI alone can be an effective and powerful tool for diagnosis," said Parsons, who oversees the teaching of clinical skills to medical students at the University of Virginia School of Medicine and co-leads the Clinical Reasoning Research Collaborative. "We were surprised to find that adding a human physician to the mix actually reduced diagnostic accuracy though improved efficiency. These results likely mean that we need formal training in how best to use AI."

Chat GPT for Disease Diagnosis

Chatbots called "large language models" that produce human-like responses are growing in popularity, and they have shown impressive ability to take patient histories, communicate empathetically and even solve complex medical cases. But, for now, they still require the involvement of a



DR. ANDREW PARSONS

human doctor.

Parsons and his colleagues were eager to determine how the high-tech tool can be used most effectively, so they launched a randomized, controlled trial at three hospitals: UVA Health, Stanford in California, and Harvard's Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston.

The participating docs made diagnoses for "clinical vignettes" based on real-life patient-care cases. These case studies included details about patients' histories, physical exams and lab test results. The

researchers then scored the results and examined how quickly the two groups made their diagnoses.

The median diagnostic accuracy for the docs using Chat GPT Plus was 76.3%, while the results for the physicians using conventional approaches was 73.7%. The Chat GPT group members reached their diagnoses slightly more quickly overall — 519 seconds compared with 565 seconds.

The researchers were surprised at how well Chat GPT Plus alone performed, with a median diagnostic accuracy of more than 92%. They say this may reflect the prompts used in the study, suggesting that physicians likely will benefit from training on how to use prompts effectively. Alternately, they say, healthcare organizations could purchase predefined prompts to implement in clinical workflow and documentation.

The researchers also caution that Chat GPT Plus likely would fare less well in real life, where many other aspects of clinical reasoning come into play — especially in determining downstream effects of diagnoses and treatment decisions. They're urging additional studies to assess large language models' abilities in those areas and are conducting a similar study on management decision-making.

"As AI becomes more embedded in healthcare, it's essential to understand (See AI diagnosis, Page 9)

"As AI becomes more embedded in healthcare, it's essential to understand how we can leverage these tools to improve patient care and the physician experience."
— Dr. Andrew S. Parsons



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Winter and frostbite

Avoid it, spot it, treat it

One of the best ways to improve our mental and physical health during the winter is to get outside! And Vermont has much to offer during the winter months, whether it's sledding, winter sports or a walk in the woods.

But the Vermont Department of Health reminds us that winter weather conditions mean we need to take extra precautions to stay safe.

The cold can cause frostbite or hypothermia and can contribute to heart attacks when shoveling snow. Icy conditions can cause slips and falls when walking and crashes while driving. Plus, climate change is causing lake ice to thin, which can result in hypothermia and drowning from falling through the ice. Improper burning of heat sources can cause poor indoor air quality and carbon monoxide poisoning.

Be sure to stay safe and warm this winter by following the tips below.

FROSTBITE AND HYPOTHERMIA

Frostbite happens when a part of your body is injured from freezing. It causes a loss of feeling and color in affected areas. People usually get frostbite on their nose, ears, cheeks, chin, fingers or toes. Because frostbite causes tissue numbness, it is often hard to tell that it is even happening. Frostbite can cause permanent damage, and severe cases can lead to amputation.

Hypothermia happens when your body temperature is abnormally low. It is caused by being in very cold temperatures for an extended period of time, and can occur at milder temperatures if you are wet. When you are in cold temperatures, your body begins to lose heat faster than it's produced. Lengthy cold exposure can start to affect the brain, making it hard to think clearly or move well. This makes hypothermia especially dangerous, because you may not know it's happening and won't be able to do anything about it.

Covering your skin, dressing in layers, staying dry, and limiting your time outside are all ways to help prevent frostbite and hypothermia. Older adults and young children, people that spend a lot of time outdoors, and people with conditions that make it harder to regulate their body temperature are at highest risk.

FROSTBITE: WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

If you notice redness or pain in any skin area, get out of the cold or protect any exposed skin — frostbite may be beginning.

Any of the following signs may point to frostbite:

- A white or grayish-yellow skin area
- Skin that feels unusually firm or waxy
- Numbness

A person who has frostbite may not know they have it until someone else points it out because the frozen parts of their body are numb.

FROSTBITE: WHAT TO DO

If (1) a person shows signs of frostbite, but no signs of hypothermia and (2) immediate medical care is not available, do the following:

- Get the person into a warm room as soon as possible.
- Unless absolutely necessary, do not walk on feet or toes that show signs of frostbite — this increases the damage.
- Do not rub the frostbitten area with snow or massage it at all. This can cause more damage.

Put the areas affected by frostbite in warm — not hot — water (the temperature should be comfortable to the touch for unaffected parts of the body).

If warm water is not available, warm the affected area using body heat. For example, you can use the heat of an armpit to warm frostbitten fingers.

Do not use a heating pad, heat lamp, or the heat of a stove, fireplace, or radiator for warming. Affected areas are numb and can easily burn.

Don't substitute these steps for proper medical care. Frostbite should be checked by a health care provider. And remember, hypothermia is a medical emergency and immediate medical care is necessary.

HYPOTHERMIA: WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- In Adults:
- Shivering
 - Exhaustion or feeling very tired
 - Confusion
 - Fumbling hands
 - Memory loss
 - Slurred speech

(See Hypothermia, Page 7)

AVOID * SPOT * TREAT
FROSTBITE & HYPOTHERMIA

In cold temperatures, your body begins to lose heat faster than it can be produced, which can lead to serious health problems.

AVOID

When the weather is extremely cold, try to stay indoors. If you must go outside, **dress properly** and know who is at **high risk** for hypothermia or frostbite.

When going outside be sure to wear:

- A SCARF OR KNIT MASK THAT COVERS FACE & MOUTH
- A HAT
- A WATER-RESISTANT COAT
- MITTENS OR GLOVES
- SEVERAL LAYERS OF LOOSE-FITTING CLOTHING
- WATER-RESISTANT BOOTS

When going outside in winter make sure body parts most often affected by frostbite are covered in warm, dry clothing.

NOSE EARS TOES CHEEKS CHIN FINGERS

Know who is at high risk:

- Older adults without proper food, clothing, or heating
- People who stay outdoors for long periods (homeless, hikers, hunters, etc.)
- People who drink alcohol in excess or use illicit drugs
- Babies sleeping in cold rooms

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FROSTBITE

A victim is often unaware of frostbite because frozen tissue is numb.



Signs & Symptoms


- Redness or pain in any skin area may be the first sign of frostbite.

Other signs include:

- a white or grayish-yellow skin area
- skin that feels unusually firm or waxy
- numbness

HYPOTHERMIA

Hypothermia often occurs at very cold temperatures, but can occur at cool temperatures (above 40°F), if a person is wet (from rain, sweat or cold water) and becomes chilled.




Signs & Symptoms

Adults:

- shivering
- exhaustion
- confusion
- fumbling hands
- memory loss
- slurred speech
- drowsiness

Infants:


- bright red, cold skin
- very low energy



If a person's temperature is below 95° get medical attention immediately.

❄️ ❄️ ❄️ ❄️ TREAT ❄️ ❄️ ❄️ ❄️

If a person is experiencing hypothermia or frostbite...



Hypothermia

(Continued from Page 6)

- Drowsiness
- In Babies:
- Bright red, cold skin
- Very low energy

HYPOTHERMIA: WHAT TO DO

- Try to warm the person up.
- Get the person into a warm room or shelter.
- Remove any wet clothing the person is wearing.
- Warm the center of the person's body — chest, neck, head, and groin — using an electric blanket, if available. You can also use skin-to-skin contact under loose, dry layers of blankets, clothing, towels, or sheets.
- Warm drinks can help increase body temperature, but do not give alcoholic drinks. Do not try to give beverages to an

unconscious person.

- After body temperature has increased, keep the person dry and wrap their body, including their head and neck, in a warm blanket.

• Get the person proper medical attention as soon as possible.

FOR SEVERE HYPOTHERMIA

A person with severe hypothermia may be unconscious and may not seem to have a pulse or to be breathing.

- In this case, handle the person gently, and get emergency assistance immediately.
- Perform CPR, even if the person appears dead. CPR should continue until the person responds or medical aid becomes available. Keep warming the person while performing CPR. In some cases, hypothermia victims who appear to be dead can be successfully resuscitated.



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Fitness regimens for those 50+

Fitness is an important component of overall wellness. Indeed, staying active has been linked to a number of noteworthy benefits, including decreased disease risk and improved mental health.

Routine exercise helps a person burn calories and maintain a healthy weight. Tufts Medicine says weight gain is common among aging individuals, with both men and women tending to put on weight in their mid-sections. Weight gain is a risk factor for diabetes and cardiovascular disease. Older adults may need to step up their fitness regimens to combat growing waistlines.

Staying active also can help with muscle and bone density, which can decline with age. The American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons says exercise is important for maintaining bone strength as the body ages. Strength-training exercises put stress on bones so they can make bones stronger.

Now that it is apparent why fitness is key during senior years, it's time to explore some routines that may be best for people age 50 and older.

YOGA

Yoga is a low-impact practice that improves muscle strength, balance, mobility, and flexibility. All of these factors are important for seniors. For those who find that conventional forms of yoga are too taxing on joints and bones, chair yoga is a lower-impact form of the exercise.

CYCLING

Riding a bike is a cardiovascular workout

that offers a wide range of benefits. Most people find riding a bike is easy on the joints, and regular cycling can increase muscle strength and enhance flexibility. The pace and intensity of rides can be customized depending on riders' speed and the routes they ride.

PILATES

Joseph Pilates developed an exercise routine that now bears his name in the early twentieth century. Pilates emphasizes core strength and stability, but works all the major muscle groups in the body. Since it is another low-impact exercise, it can be suitable for people with joint issues.

BODY WEIGHT EXERCISES

As individuals age, they may find that working with dumbbells, barbells or weight equipment at the gym is too taxing. Using body weight to build strength is a low-intensity option. Squats, wall push-ups, chair push-ups, and resistance bands can be used to build strength.

WALKING

Walking is an unsung hero in the fitness realm. According to Better Health Channel, just 30 minutes of walking every day can increase cardiovascular fitness, strengthen bones, reduce excess body fat, and boost muscle power and endurance. Walking is low-impact and less taxing on joints than jogging or running.

Seniors have a host of options to stay active as they navigate their changing fitness needs.

— Metro Creative



Metro Creative photo



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Tips to get better sleep

There is no magic formula to ensure long-term health. However, if there were such an equation, sleep would be a critical component. Though adults may be able to function with less sleep than doctors recommend, the National Institutes of Health note that consistent lack of sufficient sleep can interfere with work, social functioning and driving ability.

The National Institute on Aging notes that adults of all ages generally need the same amount of sleep, typically between seven and nine hours of rest per night. That's an important distinction, as busy adults in mid-life might feel as though they can operate on less sleep without adversely affecting their overall health. However, in addition to the problems noted by the NIH, the NIA reports that ongoing lack of sleep, or even consistently poor sleep quality, can increase risk for cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, depression and obesity.

Adults who feel their sleep quality is poor or those who aspire to sleep more each night can consider these three strategies to ensure a more restful night's sleep.

1. Keep devices out of the bedroom.

Screens are everywhere in modern life, and that includes the bedroom. In fact, the National Sleep Foundation's 2022 Sleep

in America Poll found that 58% of survey participants acknowledged looking at screens within an hour before bedtime. The NSF reports that device usage so close to bedtime can adversely affect sleep quality because the blue light emitted from screens has shorter wavelengths than other colors in the visible light spectrum, which results in more alertness than warmer tones. The blue light actually confuses the brain into thinking it's earlier in the day, thus making it harder to fall asleep.

2. Skip late afternoon naps.

Short naps can help people reenergize, but the timing of naps could adversely affect how well people sleep at night. The Mayo Clinic notes that napping after 3 p.m. can make it harder to sleep soundly at night. And while short naps can provide a necessary jolt, it's important that naps be no longer than 30 minutes. Naps that exceed a half hour can contribute to feelings of grogginess and even compromise your ability to get restful sleep overnight.

3. Avoid alcohol.

Some may consider alcohol a sleep aide, and there's good reason for that perception, even if it's misguided. Hackensack Meridian Health notes that

(See Sleep, Page 11)



Metro Creative photo

Get kids excited about exercise

Human beings need to engage in physical activity to stay healthy. But too many children are not getting the exercise they need. Only 50% of boys and less than 34% 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 are at a higher risk of retaining that 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.

— Metro Creative

AI diagnosis

(Continued from Page 5)

how we can leverage these tools to improve patient care and the physician experience,” Parsons said. “This study suggests there is much work to be done in terms of optimizing our partnership with AI in the clinical environment.”

Following up on this groundbreaking work, the four study sites have also

launched a bi-coastal AI evaluation network called ARiSE (AI Research and Science Evaluation) to further evaluate GenAI outputs in healthcare. Find out more information at the ARiSE website at tinyurl.com/AIresearchMD.

The researchers have published their results in the scientific journal JAMA Network Open.



Prevent lung cancer, test for radon

In January, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency recognizes National Radon Action Month and encourages Americans to test their homes for radon. Radon is an odorless, colorless, naturally occurring radioactive gas that, when left unaddressed, can build up inside a home. Over time, exposure to radon can cause lung cancer.

The only way to know if your home has high levels of radon is to test for it.

“Radon is a serious public health risk that can be reduced using simple, proven techniques,” said Acting Director of EPA’s Indoor Environments Division Sharon White. “During this year’s National Radon Action Month, we urge everyone to take the first but vital step of testing their home. This year’s theme of ‘Test Your Nest: Test, Fix, Save a Life,’ emphasizes that identifying and reducing radon exposure can decrease lung cancer risk and save lives. Together we can protect our families and communities from this invisible threat.”

Testing for radon is easy and inexpensive. Affordable do-it-yourself radon test kits are available for purchase online and at most home improvement and hardware stores. Some states and

municipalities even provide at-home radon test kits for free. You can also hire a qualified radon professional to test your home. Contact your state radon program to learn more about radon services in your area.

Millions of homes in the United States have elevated levels of radon. Radon is the number one cause of lung cancer among non-smokers and is responsible for about 21,000 lung cancer deaths every year, but many people don’t know about radon or the risks it can pose to their health.

If you haven’t tested your home for radon, National Radon Action Month is the perfect time to take this step to protect yourself and your loved ones. Tens of millions of homes have already been tested, and millions of homes with high radon levels have been fixed.

The EPA recommends taking action to fix your home if you discover radon levels above 4 picocuries per liter. If your home does have elevated levels of radon, a qualified professional can install a system to lower your indoor radon levels. For more guidance on how to address radon risks, see EPA’s radon website at www.epa.gov/radon.



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Adults need shots, too: Find out which vaccines are important for heart health

BURLINGTON — While most parents are good at keeping track of vaccines kids need to stay healthy, many people don't realize there are immunizations important to keeping adults heart-healthy, as well. The American Heart Association urges all adults, especially those already with a history of heart disease or stroke, to take a look at their immunization status, and stay up-to-date on preventive vaccines, particularly for flu and COVID-19.

• **Influenza/Flu** — Flu season begins in early fall and extends into early spring. Many people may experience just a few days of aches and chills, but the flu can be deadly for some, including the very young, people who are older and those with chronic health conditions like heart disease, stroke and diabetes. There has been some research linking flu infection to cardiovascular disease. Getting a flu shot can not only prevent the flu, it may also reduce the risk of having a heart attack or stroke.

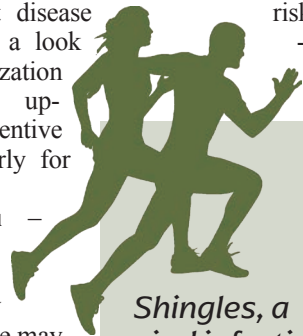
—A study published in the American Heart Association journal, *Stroke*, found that, among a group of people hospitalized

for various reasons, those who experienced a flu-like illness within a month of their hospitalization were 38% more likely to have a stroke, compared to those who didn't have a similar illness. Receiving a flu vaccine within the year prior to hospitalization lowered a person's stroke risk to 11%.

—People older than age 50 who were hospitalized and those in nursing homes who were at high risk for influenza had lower rates of death, heart attack, mini-stroke and cardiac arrest if they were vaccinated against flu, according to a study presented at the American Heart Association's Basic Cardiovascular Sciences 2020 meeting.

—And a study published in the American Heart Association's flagship journal, *Circulation*, found that people living with heart failure who got an annual flu shot had an 18% lower chance of dying from cardiovascular disease or any other cause, compared to those who did not get a flu shot.

“Getting an annual flu shot should be part of routine health care for all individuals and especially for people who are already living with chronic health conditions that put them at higher risk for



Shingles, a viral infection caused by the chickenpox virus, has been linked to an increased risk of stroke...



DR. EDUARDO SANCHEZ

heart attacks or strokes,” said Eduardo Sanchez, M.D., M.P.H., FAHA, American Heart Association chief medical officer for prevention. “The potentially serious complications of the flu are far, far greater for those with chronic diseases. This is true not just for older people but even those age 50 and younger who have a history of high blood pressure, heart disease or diabetes.”

Sanchez notes most adults can get a flu vaccine at no out-of-pocket cost at a local pharmacy or through their local health department.

• **COVID-19** — The American Heart Association established the COVID-19 Cardiovascular Disease Registry at the onset of the pandemic and the registry has produced a number of studies reporting that people with, or at risk for, cardiovascular disease were more likely to become infected with and die from COVID-19. Additionally, the research has found many people are experiencing new heart and vascular disease after they get COVID-19.

—A study from the registry in the American Heart Association journal *Circulation: Arrhythmia and Electrophysiology* found new-onset atrial fibrillation (AFib) in 1 in 20 patients hospitalized with COVID-19.

—Research from the registry presented at the American Heart Association's International Stroke Conference found that people hospitalized with COVID-19 had a higher risk of stroke, compared with people who had similar infectious conditions such as influenza or sepsis.

—A study published in the *Journal of the American Heart Association* in February 2021 found that obesity, high blood pressure, diabetes and heart failure — all risk factors related to cardiovascular disease — were four of the top risks for

COVID-19 complications.

“We can't stress enough the connections between COVID-19 and cardiovascular disease. There is clear evidence that people who have heart and vascular disease and even those with cardiovascular disease risk factors are more likely to get COVID and to have more severe complications from the virus,” Sanchez said. “We urge everyone who is eligible to get the vaccine and all recommended boosters.”

While flu and COVID-19 vaccines are of the utmost importance, there are also a number of other immunizations that can help keep people heart-healthy.

The **pneumococcal vaccination** protects against a common cause of severe pneumonia and is especially important in people 65 and older and others with certain underlying medical conditions. This type of pneumonia can be deadly, especially for people already at high risk for health complications, including cardiovascular disease. One shot is usually good for several years, although depending on how old you are when you get your first shot, you may need a second one later.

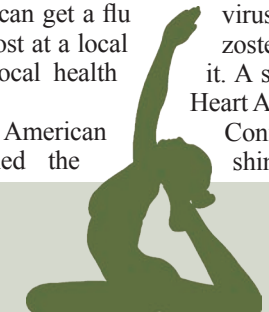
Shingles, a viral infection caused by the chickenpox virus, has been linked to an increased risk of stroke. More than 99% of people age 40 or older in the United States may carry the dormant chickenpox virus, also known as the varicella-zoster virus, and not even realize it. A study presented at the American Heart Association's International Stroke Conference in 2021 found that the shingles vaccine may reduce stroke risk by about 16% in older adults.

There is also research that links **human papillomavirus, or HPV**, a common sexually transmitted infection, to cardiovascular disease. A 2019 study published in the American Heart Association journal *Circulation Research* found that Korean women infected with high-risk strains of HPV were 22% more likely to develop heart disease or have a stroke than women not infected with the virus. While this vaccine is not currently among those recommended by the Association for cardiovascular benefits,

the research points to growing evidence about the connections between viral infections and cardiovascular disease.

“There is still much to learn about how infection and inflammation can impact the cardiovascular and cerebrovascular systems of the body. What we do know is that preventive care, including regular immunizations as appropriate, can save lives,” Sanchez said.

Learn more about important immunizations and other preventive health tips at heart.org.



“Getting an annual flu shot should be part of routine health care for all individuals and especially for people who are already living with chronic health conditions that put them at higher risk for heart attacks or strokes.”

— Eduardo Sanchez, M.D.

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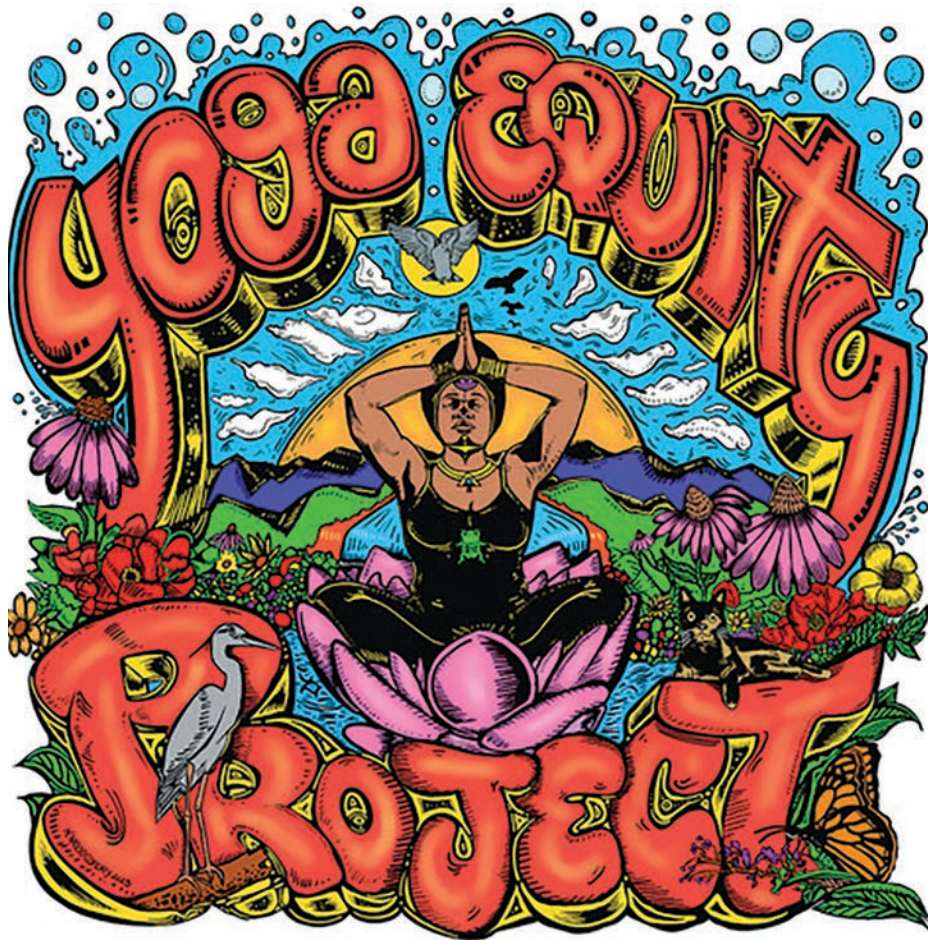
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THIS LOGO FOR the Yoga Equity Project was created by Will Kasso Condry, a prominent Vermont artist and who is, himself, a person of color.

Yoga

(Continued from Page 3)

folks of color. Others use theirs to come to any general yoga class at the studio. “It has totally changed the demographics of our studio,” Colwell said.

A recent BIPOC class included nine college students, two older community members, and two 10-year-olds. Eight other college students of color participated in a general yoga class later in the day because it fit their schedule better.

“More than 50 students attended the four classes offered that day at Otter Creek Yoga, and half of those folks were People of the Global Majority,” Colwell wrote in a recent email to the project’s supporters.

So how can a little yoga studio in Middlebury pay for the program? The first year, Colwell did a very yogic fundraiser. She and a friend asked folks to sponsor them in a challenge performing 108 sun salutation over 90 minutes. The next year, after a successful six-week trial run, the Yoga Equity Project got a \$25,000 grant from an anonymous donor through the Vermont Community Foundation.

In addition to paying participants, the money goes toward paying the instructor, Sasha Quattrocci, who commutes from Richmond each week. The Yoga Equity Project gets its 501(c)3 non-profit status through the Community Resilience

Organizations, a Vermont nonprofit that supports smaller projects focused on racial equity and climate resilience around the state.

“It’s all about helping Vermonters who are the most marginalized get through this time we’re living in,” Colwell said.

The same anonymous donor has funded the program each year since, and this year doubled the grant to \$50,000. Which is great, says Colwell, because the program is still growing. Colwell hosted a party at the studio last week to celebrate the five-year anniversary and invited more than 90 people who have recently participated in the program.

“Because of that grant, we’ve never had to say ‘no’ to anybody,” she said.

Later this month, Otter Creek Yoga is adding a second BIPOC-only class to its weekly schedule.

The project, said participant Kristin Hocker, “has helped me settle into a new yoga home in addition to making Vermont my new home. It has been wonderful to practice in a space that is committed to yoga beyond the asanas (yoga poses), including the practice of being a beloved community, fostering social justice through reparations, and embodying an authentic sense of belonging.”



“More than 50 students attended the four classes offered that day at Otter Creek Yoga, and half of those folks were People of the Global Majority.”

— Joanna Colwell

How do you keep them active?

The noncompetitive physical kid

Competitive sports provide a wonderful opportunity for children to be physically active. That’s a notable benefit and one that could help to confront a growing problem of overweight and obesity among modern youths.

Data from the World Health Organization indicates 37 million children under the age of five were overweight in 2022, while more than 390 million youngsters between the ages of five and 19 were overweight or obese in that same year. In addition, the percentage of children and adolescents across the globe who qualified as obese in 2022 had grown considerably since 1990, increasing from 2% to 5% during that span.

Sports can definitely help to remedy the overweight and obesity epidemic among youths across the globe, but what about children who are not into competitive athletics? The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends all children and adolescents, including non-athletes, get at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity each day. That might sound difficult for parents of non-athletes, but there are a number of physical activities beyond organized athletics that can ensure kids get all the exercise they need.

• **Dancing:** The National Institutes of Health notes that dancing is both an exciting and effective workout that benefits the body in myriad ways. Dancing is a versatile form of exercise that encompasses everything from ballroom dancing to salsa. The NIH notes that dancing is a great cardiovascular exercise that also helps to build strong bones and muscles and improve balance. Dancing also is a social activity, which means it can provide many of the same benefits related to social interactions that are often attributed to team sports.



Metro Creative photo

• **Hiking:** Hiking is another physical activity that can provide great exercise for youngsters who are not into competitive sports. According to Piedmont Health, hiking is a whole-body exercise that gets the heart pumping, making it a wonderful cardiovascular activity. Cardiovascular exercise has been linked to a number of benefits, including a lower risk for conditions such as heart disease, stroke and high cholesterol. Hiking also is considered a weight-bearing exercise that helps to build muscle mass.

• **Skateboarding:** Skateboarding has (See *Noncompetitive*, Page 12)

How much activity is enough for children?

Children need physical activity as part of their overall health regimen. How much physical activity a child needs varies with age.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says children between the ages of three and five should be active throughout the day to ensure proper growth and development. This can be achieved by being physically active

during play.

Children and adolescents between the ages of six and 17 need to be active for at least 60 minutes each day, with that activity being moderate-to-vigorous in nature. The activities enjoyed should include a variety of aerobic, muscle-strengthening and bone-strengthening exercises.

— Metro Creative

Sleep

(Continued from Page 8)

alcohol acts as a depressant for the central nervous system that can cause brain activity to slow down. As a result, alcohol can increase feelings of relaxation and tiredness.

However, that effect is not long-lasting, and as alcohol levels in the blood drop, individuals are likely to wake up and may even find it hard to fall back asleep.

Waking up in the middle of the night cuts down on the time individuals spend in the most restorative stage of sleep, which is why individuals often feel as if they got little rest after a night of drinking.

Sleep is an important component of a healthy lifestyle. Some simple strategies may help adults get a more restful night’s sleep.

— Metro Creative

Mentoring is great for improving mental health

Amid an increasing mental health crisis, communities across the nation, including our own here in the Green Mountain State, are searching for sustainable, effective solutions. As the CEO of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Vermont, I've witnessed firsthand the transformative power of mentoring. The evidence is clear: Mentoring not only changes lives, it can also be a pivotal part of the solution to our mental health challenges — mind you, a cost-effective solution.

Recent data underscores the pressing need for new approaches to mental health support. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, millions of Americans live with various mental health conditions, many of which go untreated due to stigma, lack of resources, or access to care. This is also the case right here in Vermont. Yet, we here at Big Brothers Big Sisters know there's hope in the form of human connection and building resiliency — mentoring.

Research demonstrates the profound impact that mentoring can have on individuals with depressive symptoms, particularly among young people. A study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* found that young people who have access to a mentor exhibit fewer depressive symptoms,

report greater self-esteem, and improved academic outcomes compared to their peers without mentors. We have witnessed the same data right here with our Vermont youth. Mentoring provides a unique relationship that fosters emotional, social and academic support, often filling gaps left by traditional mental health interventions.

Here in Vermont, we can lead the way in integrating mentoring into our mental health strategy. By investing in and expanding mentoring programs, we can offer a lifeline to those feeling isolated, misunderstood, or in need of guidance. Mentoring doesn't just benefit mentees; it enriches the lives of mentors too, creating a cycle of learning and growth, opportunity and support that ultimately creates stronger communities. Let's be real — the cost of mentoring is significantly less than treatment or incarceration, so let's rally around cost-effective preventative approaches.

However, harnessing the full potential of mentoring requires a collective effort. Schools, businesses, nonprofits and government agencies must collaborate to create accessible, impactful mentoring programs. We also need to ensure that mentors are equipped with the resources and training to address mental health challenges effectively, providing a

bridge to professional help when needed.

Let's not underestimate the power of human connection. By embedding mentoring into our mental health framework, we can create a more resilient, supportive and empathetic community. It's time to act boldly, with the understanding that mentoring isn't just a nice-to-have — it's a must-have in our pursuit to reduce the mental health crisis.

As we move forward, let us remember that every individual struggling with mental health deserves hope and support. Mentoring closes opportunity gaps and harnesses the power of caring relationships in fostering well-being and joy. Together, let's champion mentoring as a critical part of our mental health solution, ensuring that no one must face their darkest moments alone.

This is not merely a call to action; it's an invitation to be part of a movement that values every member of our community, particularly our most vulnerable youth. In the face of mental health challenges, mentoring stands out as a beacon of hope and opportunity for each one of us. Most importantly, it's also a way for everyone to get involved, as a volunteer or supporter. Let's embrace it wholeheartedly as part of our commitment to a healthier, more connected Green Mountain State. Visit www.bbbsvt.org to join us as a donor or volunteer.

Community Forum

This week's writer is Stacy W. Kramer, CEO of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Vermont.

Noncompetitive

(Continued from Page 11)

come a long way since modern parents were children. Though skateboarding might once have been frowned upon due to skateboarders' penchant for practicing in places that were off limits, the perception of skateboarding has now changed dramatically and the activity is touted as great exercise. A 2018 study published in the journal *Gait & Posture* found that skateboarding helps participants develop a strong sense of balance. The motions required to ride a skateboard also help to increase heart rate, which can provide a boost to cardiovascular health.

- **Cycling:** Many young children love riding their bikes, and it's worth noting that an afternoon of cycling provides an incredible full-body workout. The Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health notes that the health benefits associated with cycling include improved cardiovascular fitness, stronger muscles, greater coordination and general mobility, and reduced body fat. Cycling also has been linked to improved mental health, as riding a bike releases feel-good endorphins that can reduce stress.

Children and adolescents who are not into competitive sports can choose from an array of physical activities that provide a host of health benefits.

— Metro Creative

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