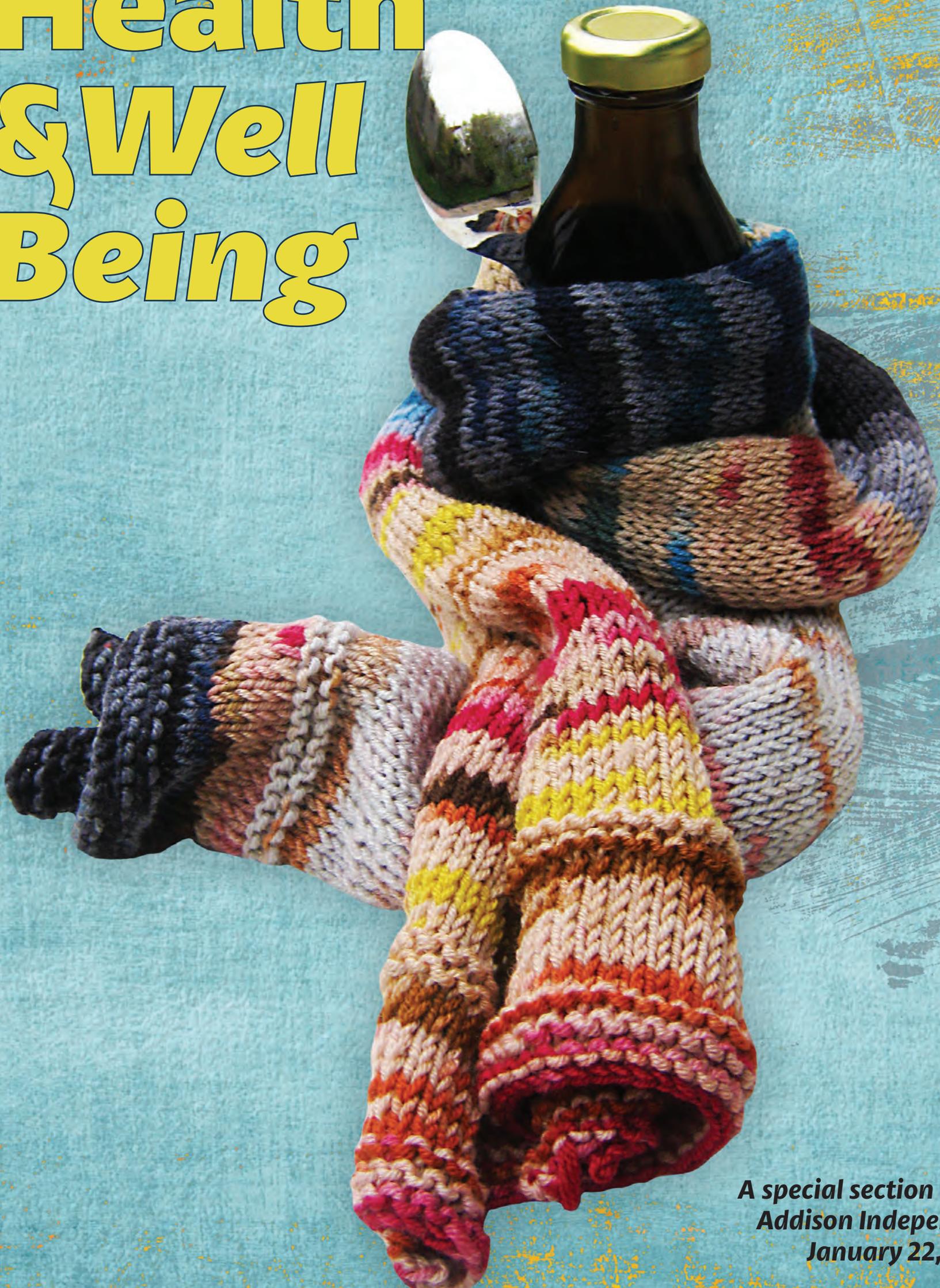


Health & Well Being



**A special section of the
Addison Independent
January 22, 2026**

This flu season is worse than usual; get a shot

By MARIN HOWELL

ADDISON COUNTY — As temperatures cool down throughout the winter months, flu cases around the country are often ramping up.

This year is no exception.

Local healthcare professionals say they're seeing typical influenza symptoms in cases this year and pointed to some aspects of the current flu season that stand out, such as a relatively early start and a particularly contagious flu strain.

"Overall, this flu season feels moderate but noticeable. It's not the worst season we've seen, but it's been busier than some recent years, especially for families with young kids," said Monica Benjamin, a pediatric primary care nurse practitioner at Porter Medical Center. "We're seeing more missed school

and workdays, and more families dealing with flu on top of other winter viruses, which can make it feel like it's lingering longer than usual."

The ongoing flu season has been more intense than recent years from the perspective of Deborah Wesley, a

registered nurse and CEO of Addison County Home Health and Hospice.

"This year's flu season is more lethal and severe than what we have seen in a long time. The influenza A strain is causing some of our community members to become extremely ill," Wesley said. "Even patients who have had a flu vaccine are becoming ill, although they typically are less sick than those who did not have the vaccination. This is taxing our health care system at every level."

Dr. Francisco Corbalan and Dr. Liz Coogan, both pediatricians at Porter Medical Center, point out that this year's flu season started relatively early.

"We were consistently seeing influenza in November and started seeing a significant increase in cases by early to mid-December," they told the *Independent*.

Local healthcare providers reported seeing classic symptoms in this season's influenza cases, including fever, cough, sore throat, body aches and fatigue.

"We are seeing typical flu symptoms which are more severe than normal, and (See Flu season, Page 6)

"This year's flu season is more lethal and severe than what we have seen in a long time. The influenza A strain is causing some of our community members to become extremely ill."

— Deborah Wesley



REGISTERED NURSE MICHELE Christopher gives Kristen Wilson, HR director at Addison County Home Health and Hospice, a flu shot. Local healthcare providers say getting a flu vaccine is key to community members protecting themselves this flu season.

Photo courtesy of Maureen Conrad

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State health experts fault feds on vaccine change

By OLIVIA GIEGER
VTDigger.org

MONTPELIER — The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention scaled back federal guidelines for childhood vaccines on Jan. 5, moving six immunizations out of the “recommended” category. Following the federal action, Vermont officials and health experts are reaffirming the state’s commitment to its existing childhood immunization schedule, which recommends many of the vaccines that the CDC had removed.

The vaccines for flu, RSV, meningococcal disease and hepatitis A and B were among the vaccines removed from the federal recommended category. In Vermont, they remain recommended or required for childcare or school attendance.

The move is the latest in a series of efforts led by U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., who is an outspoken skeptic of vaccines, to move away from established medical science on immunization.

“In Vermont, vaccine policy will continue to be guided by scientific evidence and informed by trusted medical organizations, including the American

Academy of Pediatrics,” state Health Commissioner Rick Hildebrant wrote in a Jan. 6 statement.

“As always, we encourage families to consult trusted health care professionals when making decisions about their children’s health, including their pediatrician, school nurse, or local pharmacist. We also urge caution when sharing or acting on unverified or misleading health information,” his statement continued.

On Jan. 6, he appeared before the Vermont House of Representatives’ Committee on Human Services to address the federal change and to testify about a proposed state bill that aims to protect access to vaccines for those who want and need them in Vermont.

Hildebrant confirmed to lawmakers that the cost of and access to childhood vaccines has not changed with the federal recommendation shift — insurers are still required to cover the costs of these vaccines. But the Health Department is still taking steps to prepare for a future where that is no longer the case as federal policy under President Donald Trump’s administration continues to change.

“We are very concerned about what

this could look like in the future,” he said, adding that he worries this change is “setting the stage” for more drastic restrictions on access to vaccines.

He said the Health Department is working to proactively safeguard vaccine

access in Vermont. The proposed bill H.545 is one path it is taking to do so.

Currently, the state buys vaccines from the CDC, which buys the vaccines from manufacturers in bulk and is able to
(See Feds, Page 9)

“As always, we encourage families to consult trusted health care professionals when making decisions about their children’s health, including their pediatrician, school nurse, or local pharmacist.”

— Vt. Health Commissioner Rick Hildebrant



DR. RICK HILDEBRANT, commissioner of the Vermont Department of Health, speaks before the Senate Health and Welfare Committee at the Statehouse in Montpelier on Jan. 7.

Photo by Glenn Russell/VTDigger






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Wash your hands!

The Cleveland Clinic advises that a person can prevent one in three illnesses that cause diarrhea and one in five respiratory infections simply by keeping hands clean. Germs from unwashed hands can be transferred to objects like tabletops, door handles and even foods and beverages, which underscores the significance of handwashing.

You should wash your hands frequently, and especially after using the toilet; changing diapers; before, during and after preparing food; before eating; before touching your nose, eyes or mouth (including handling dentures or orthodontic aligners); after sneezing, coughing or blowing your nose; and when you arrive home from shopping or being in high-traffic public areas.

The best way to wash hands

1. Wet your hands with clean, running water and use soap if it is available. Any soap will do. Antibacterial products are not essential.
2. Lather up for about 20 seconds, and make sure to get in between fingers, on the back of hands and under the nails where germs like to linger. Don't forget to also wash the wrists.
3. If possible, remove rings and watches before washing hands, or try to at least move the rings to wash under them.
4. Rinse hands well under running water to remove all traces of soap.
5. Dry hands using a clean towel or air dry them. It is best to use paper towels or a single-use cloth towel.
6. Use a clean paper towel to turn off the faucet and open the door in public restrooms. People at home should routinely wipe down faucets and handles with cleansing products to remove germs from these high-touch points. Frequent laundering of towels also can be effective.



SIXTY-SIX-YEAR-OLD Prem Prakash strides to the bar during the International Powerlifting League World Championship before deadlifting the 365 pounds of weight to set a world record.

Photo courtesy of Prem Prakash

Age no barrier to fitness

Prem Prakash, one of Addison County's very active senior athletes, has been at it again. He recently brought home a gold medal from an international competition where he lifted a bar loaded with weights that amounted to more than twice his own body weight.

In the process he set a world record.

Prakash travelled to Wolverhampton, England, and competed in the International Powerlifting League World Championship this past Nov. 19-20. The 66-year-old East Middlebury resident is probably best known in the area as a yoga instructor training both regular citizens and college athletes. So it is no surprise that he keeps his personal body weight at a trim 146 pounds.

In November's competition he won a gold medal in his age and weight class by achieving a personal best and world record 365-pound deadlift.

Prakash was excited to win and seems at least as jacked up about actually compete — at his current age, or any age. As he says, we all age, but we each can chose whether we get "old."

"As we age, it's important we find some physical activity that helps us retain our youthful exuberance for life," he told the *Independent*. "It's also valuable to engage in some form of competition, of striving to fulfill our potential, of engaging in the pursuit of glory."

"We all started life in victory, we all

(See Prakash, Page 11)



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A sedentary lifestyle is bad for kids' health

Physical activity is an important component of a healthy lifestyle for people of all ages. Too often children aren't spending enough time being physically active, and they could pay a hefty price for that as kids and adults.

The digital age has altered childhood for millions of youngsters. Whereas kids once spent much of their free time engaging in unstructured play, typically doing so outdoors, modern kids now live more sedentary lives indoors. Low energy sitting or reclining while looking at a phone or playing video games means children are spending more time than

ever in inactive states, which can lead to long-term, negative health consequences. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, only about 24 percent of children between the ages of six and 17 participate in 60 minutes of physical activity each day. The World Health Organization reports that more than 80 percent of the world's school-aged adolescent population is insufficiently physically active. Here's a look at how this lack of exercise is affecting children.

- **Increased childhood obesity:** Inactivity is directly tied to the global rise in childhood obesity, as sedentary

behavior reduces metabolic rates and alters how the body processes fats and sugars, says the WHO.

- **Reduction in cardiovascular fitness:** Without regular exertion, the lungs and heart will not develop the same efficiency as they would if kids were physically active. According to data published in the Journal of the American Heart Association, sedentary childhood habits can contribute to arterial stiffness, which is a precursor to heart disease.

- **Potential for weaker bone structures:** Bone density is built through weight-bearing exercises like jumping and running. Sedentary children run the risk of entering adulthood with weaker bones, potentially leading to orthopedic issues and higher rates of fractures.

- **Adverse psychological effects:** Physical activity releases feel-good chemicals in the body like endorphins and dopamine. Highly sedentary children may be at an elevated risk for anxiety and depression because they are not reaping the benefit of these natural mood boosters.

- **Decreased cognitive function:** Cognitive function could be impacted by low physical movement, which decreases blood flow to the brain, says the National Institutes of Health.

Children can benefit from being active, as it offers protective benefits against various health ailments that can manifest during childhood and even later in life.

— Metro Creative

Please a kid, build an adult with nutritious snacks

Medical professionals note the important role parents can play in helping children build healthy relationships with food. That assistance can begin at an early age so kids get the nutrients they need and learn to enjoy healthy, whole foods. Offering children two or three items at snack time helps them feel in charge of their food decisions, and could set them on a path to lifelong health.

Snack time can be particularly tough for parents, as children may resist anything that isn't potato chips or other foods that do not boast a strong nutritional profile. But many snack foods are both flavorful and nutritious, and parents can offer such items when kids get between-meal hunger pangs.

Fun snacks

Pairing creative presentation with healthy foods often encourages children to try new things. Consider these options for snacks that elevate the fun factor.

- **"Ants on a log":** Parents may have come across these tasty snacks as requests from teachers or at preschool snack time. They're essentially celery sticks filled with cream cheese,

(See Snacks, Page 10)



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Flu season

(Continued from Page 2)

patients are remaining ill for longer than in the past,” Wesley said.

Benjamin said something that’s stood out is how “hard and fast it hits — kids and adults often feel fine one day and very sick the next.

“In children especially, we’re seeing high fevers and extreme tiredness, and some kids also have vomiting or diarrhea, which can be part of flu and often surprises parents as we tend to think of flu as more of a respiratory illness,” she added. “The flu is making people feel really wiped out for several days.”

PREVENTION & TREATMENT

When it comes to protecting yourself from the flu, healthcare professionals stressed the importance of getting a flu shot.

“This year we’ve seen more circulation of a K subclade flu strain that isn’t a perfect match to the vaccine, which means some vaccinated people can still get sick,” Benjamin said. “That said, the vaccine still provides protection, especially against severe illness, hospitalization and complications — and it’s still strongly recommended.”

ACHHH offers around 25 flu clinics annually, providing vaccines at workplaces and the organization’s office. Wesley said ACHHH has given out 392 doses this year, compared to 592 last year.

“The reason for us vaccinating fewer community members this year is not clear — it may be vaccine fatigue, a lack of understanding about the benefits of receiving the vaccine or community members may be receiving them elsewhere,” she said.

Providers noted it’s not too late to get a flu vaccine.

“It does take about two weeks for the flu vaccine to provide the strongest protection against the virus, so there is still time to get protection well before the end of flu season,” Benjamin said.

They offered other advice for community members this flu season, including frequently washing hands and using good handwashing practices, staying home if you’re sick and considering masking up if gathering in a group.

“We are finding that this year’s strain of the (flu) is exceptionally contagious, and it is not only affecting immunocompromised and elderly people. Children and middle-aged people are also being affected,” Wesley said.

Benjamin noted community members can also prioritize sleep, nutrition and hydration, “which really do help support the immune system.”

For those that do end up getting the flu, providers said people can often manage infections with rest, hydration and using acetaminophen and/or ibuprofen to help alleviate fevers and other symptoms.

“Kids and adults should stay home until they’re fever-free for at least 24 hours

without medication,” Benjamin said. “Anyone who has a medical condition that puts them at great risk for complications from flu, like asthma, should seek medical attention even if they are feeling OK.”

WHEN TO SEEK CARE

She added it’s important for people to seek medical care in instances of:

- “Trouble breathing or fast, labored breathing.
- High fevers that aren’t improving, or a fever that goes away and then comes back.
- Signs of dehydration, like very little urine or a dry mouth.
- Extreme sleepiness, confusion or difficulty waking.
- In infants, poor feeding or fewer wet diapers.”

“And always — if something doesn’t feel right to a parent or caregiver, trust that instinct and reach out to a healthcare provider,” she said. “We would rather talk to you and see you in the office than have

you worrying at home.”

Coogan and Corbalan said individuals at an increased risk for serious complications from the flu — a group that includes children under 5 years old and people with a chronic respiratory problem like asthma — are eligible for the antiviral medication oseltamivir, often known by the brand name Tamiflu.

“If you or a family member is in one of these categories, we recommend reaching out to your primary care doctor to see if they should be tested for influenza and/or need treatment,” they said.

Corbalan and Coogan also noted several at-home flu tests can be found at pharmacies.

“Like home tests for COVID-19, false-positive results are unusual but the test isn’t very sensitive and false-negative results are possible,” they said. “So,

if you have a positive result, you can assume you have the flu, but if you see a negative result and still wonder about flu or aren’t sure about the result, you can

reach out to your primary care provider who can help interpret the results and determine if any other testing is needed.”

Looking ahead, Coogan and Corbalan said they can’t predict when flu activity will peak or begin to decline, but “we continue to see increasing cases of influenza-like illnesses in Vermont each week so we can expect

ongoing high rates of influenza for now.” Other healthcare providers echoed that sentiment, emphasizing that prevention remains important as the flu season will continue for a while longer.

“We expect the flu season to stay strong until the end of February and then lessen when the weather starts to warm up in March (we hope),” Wesley said.

“If something doesn’t feel right to a parent or caregiver, trust that instinct and reach out to a healthcare provider.”

— Monica Benjamin

New testing tools show virus amounts in local wastewater

By LYNN BLEVINS
Vermont Department of Health

Vermonters can now check levels and trends of common respiratory viruses detected in wastewater on a new dashboard. The viruses currently include Influenza A, the most common flu virus, and SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19.

Wastewater treatment facilities currently participating in the surveillance program are: Burlington–Main, Essex Junction, Middlebury, Montpelier, Ludlow, and South Burlington–Airport Parkway.

SARS-CoV-2 data will be added soon for Brattleboro, Milton, St. Albans, St. Johnsbury, and Springfield.

The dashboard shows virus levels (very low, low, moderate, high, very high) for a sewershed of interest or all sites combined. Trends over the last 28 days (decrease, stable, increase) are available for each sewershed. A graph shows levels over time while a map displays the sewershed selected.

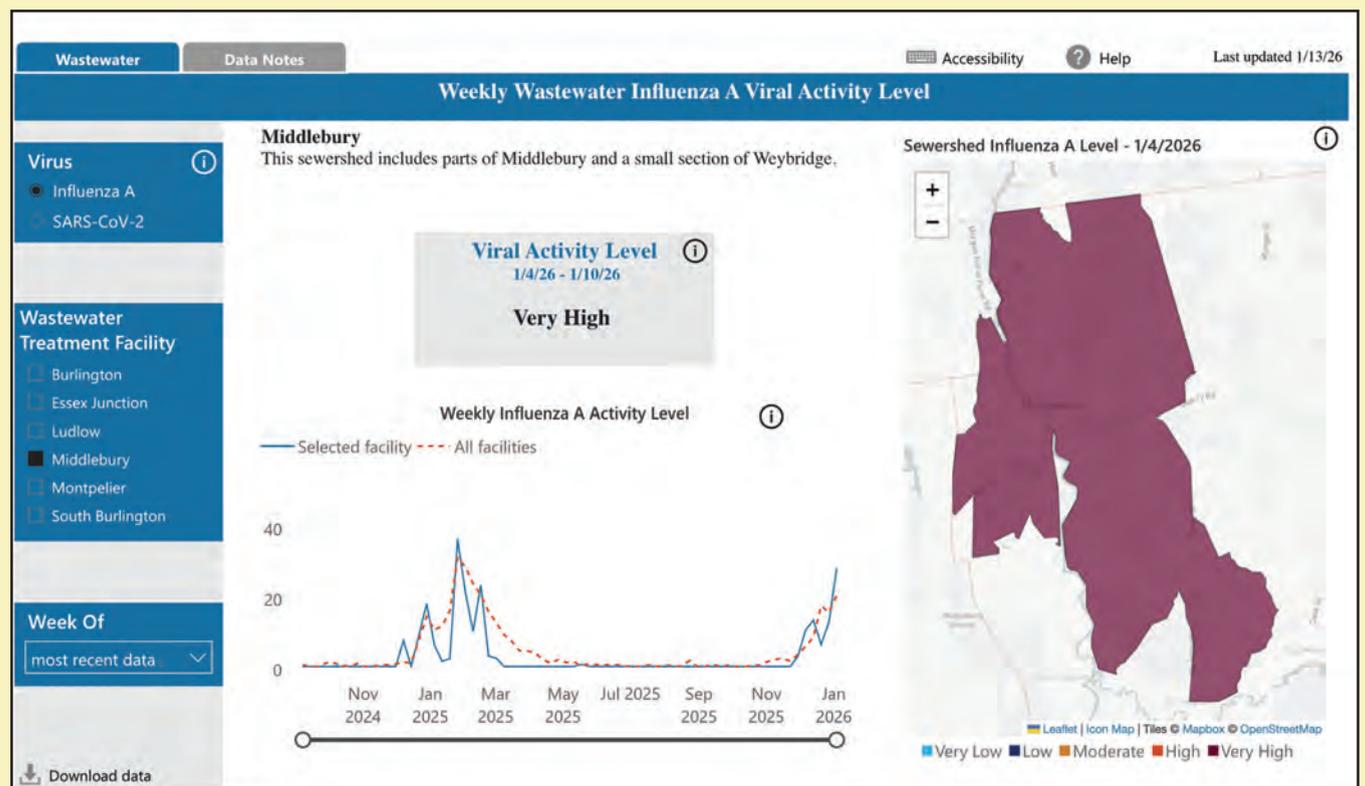
The dashboard is intended for a general audience, with additional statistics and explanations available for those interested in understanding how

the data are calculated.

Wastewater surveillance can identify the presence and estimate the amount of a pathogen in a population (sewershed) without relying on clinical data, such as from hospitals and laboratories. It compliments other types of public health data, often providing signals sooner than other surveillance systems.

Data from a wastewater treatment facility represent people who live, work, play, or travel within a sewershed. People using septic systems or disposable diapers, or who

(See Wastewater, Page 9)



THE VERMONT DEPARTMENT of Health’s new dashboard for Influenza A at the Middlebury wastewater treatment facility shows that in the week ended Jan. 13, the level of flu virus in town was “Very High.”

These daily habits promote health

Health should be a priority, but too often life gets in the way and individuals take a reactive, rather than proactive, approach to their personal well-being. But living healthier need not be so difficult. In fact, research suggests that small, positive changes in how a person lives each day creates a healthier person over time.

A Hologic-Gallup survey on the state of women's health conducted in April 2024 found 63 percent of respondents said it was hard for them to make health a priority. They cited feeling overwhelmed, needing to care for others before themselves, emotional/mental health, and work as the top barriers to focusing on health. But it's important that both women and men recognize that small changes can add up to big results. These healthy habits can help individuals start living healthier lifestyles.

• **Get some exercise.** Regular physical activity is one of the most important things a person can do for his or her health. Exercise helps manage weight, reduces the risk of disease, strengthens bones and muscles, and improves brain health. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says adults should aim for at least 150 minutes (30 minutes a day for five days) of moderate-intensity aerobic activity a week. A great place to begin is with a daily walk, which is a simple and effective habit that does not require a lot of time and no equipment except a good pair of athletic shoes.

• **Wear sunscreen every day.** After washing your face each morning, apply a

facial moisturizer with an SPF of at least 30, or blend equal parts of sunscreen and regular moisturizer, suggests Harvard Health. Use it on the face, neck, ears, and any thinning hair spots on the scalp. Skin cancer is the most common type of the disease worldwide, and wearing sunscreen can help many people avoid it.

• **Spend time outdoors.** It takes just a few minutes in the sun to raise vitamin D levels. Vitamin D is necessary for bone and heart health and helps to boost mood. Various studies indicate spending time in green spaces promotes calm and increases happiness.

• **Plan your meals.** Meal planning is not just a way to manage food budgets. It's also a great method to being more mindful of food choices and avoiding impulse buys or meals that may not be as healthy as they can be. Adding more plant-based foods to a diet is a good start. Such foods can reduce the risk of chronic conditions like high cholesterol and hypertension.

• **Stay hydrated.** Hydration supports good digestion, increases energy and may improve brain performance, states Harvard Health. Drink a glass of water each day upon waking up and with every meal. Older adults often do not feel thirst like they did when they were younger, so it is especially important for seniors to stay hydrated.

Healthy habits are more easily adopted when people begin small and make a daily commitment to their overall health.

— Metro Creative



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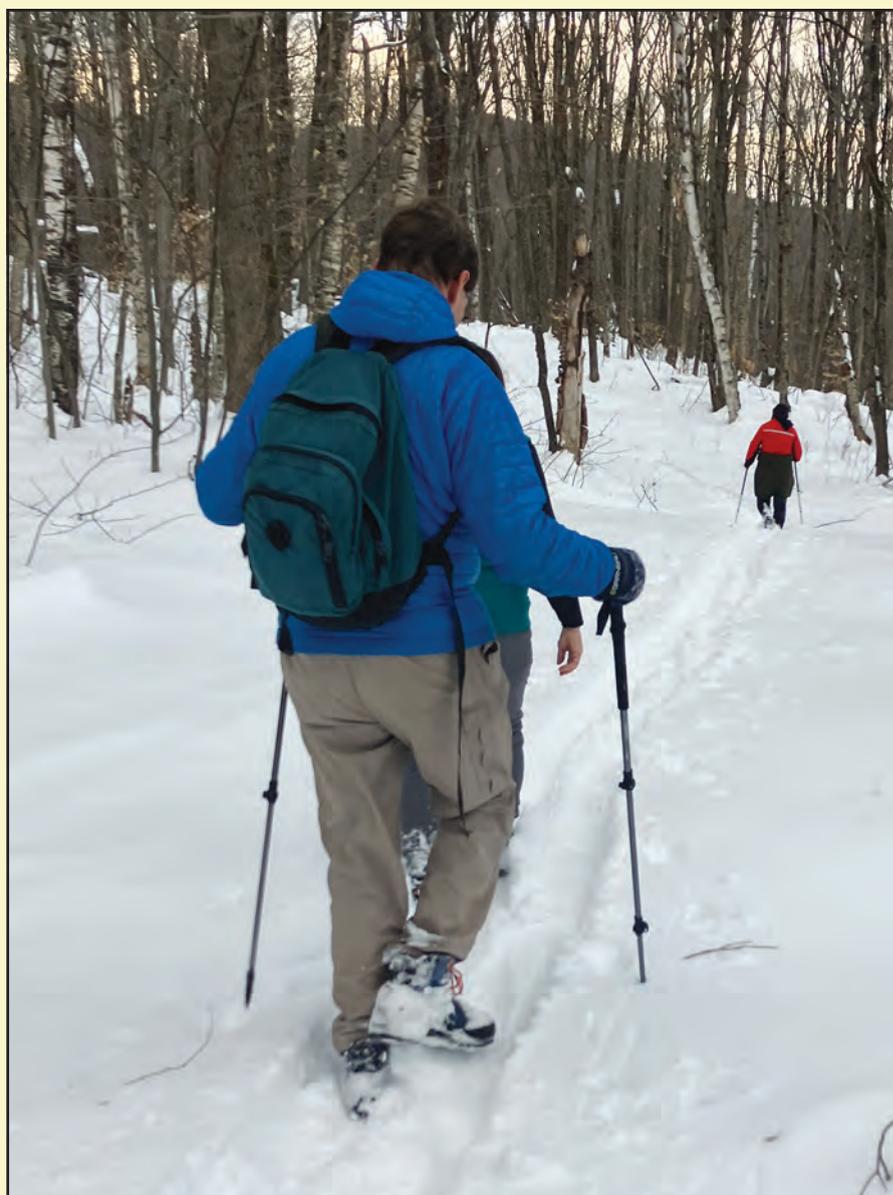
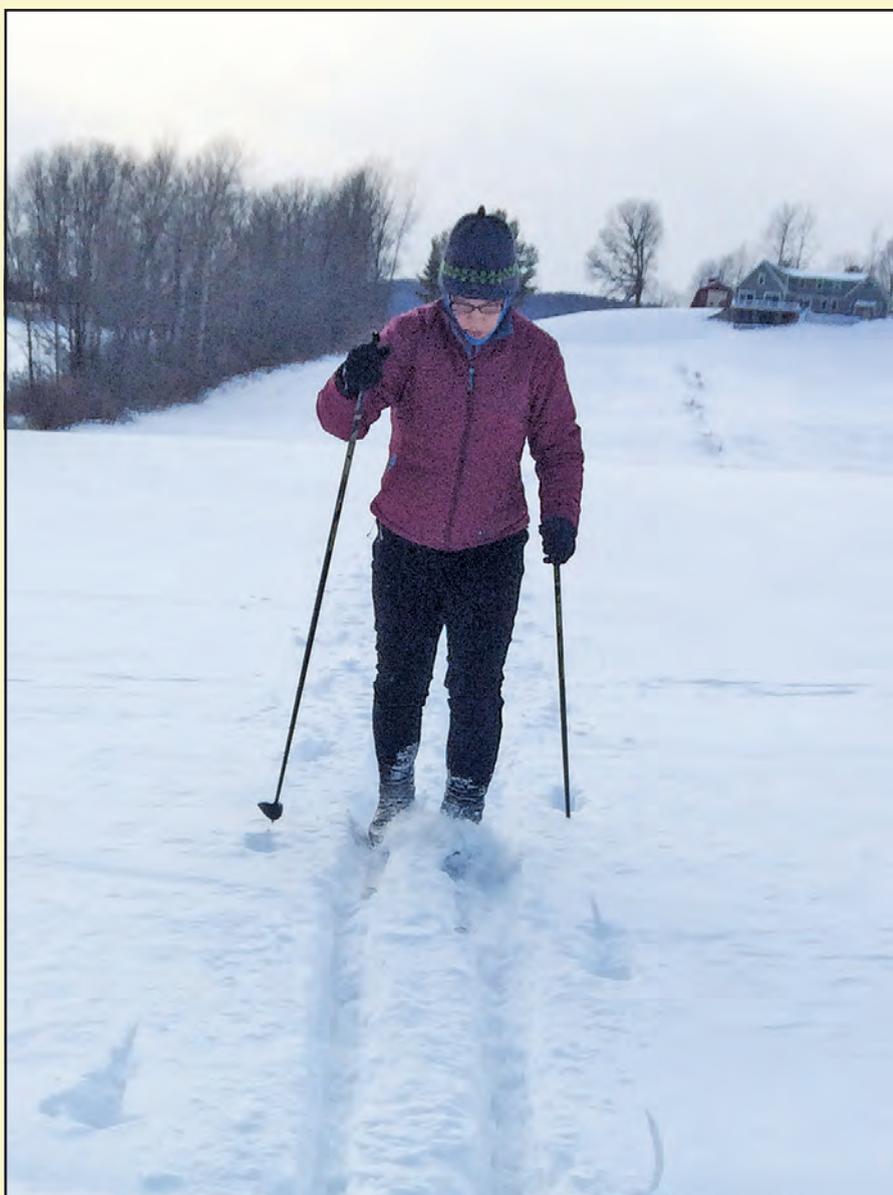


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Cold-weather fun

Don't let the snow stop you from getting outside and moving your body this winter. Activities like cross country skiing, snowshoeing or just walking in the snowy woods all give you a low-impact, full-body workout that boosts cardiovascular fitness, strengthens muscles (legs, glutes, core, arms) and improves balance. Experts say a person can burn 400 to 1,000 calories in an hour engaging in these pastimes. Because they are generally gentle on joints (especially snowshoeing), these activities are accessible for many fitness levels.

In addition, skiing, snowshoeing and walking provide mental health benefits like stress relief by getting your body in motion and immersing it in the natural world around us. Time spent on a ski or forest trail can give you a whole new perspective on the world.

Independent photos/John S. McCright

Building a strong core is about more than body sculpting

Fitness professionals recognize the importance of a well-balanced workout. Much like a diet that includes foods from each of the major food groups can provide the balance of nutrients and vitamins bodies need to achieve optimal health, a workout routine that includes an assortment of strength and cardiovascular exercises is the recipe for a fit and healthy body.

Core exercises are a vital component of a well-rounded workout. Core exercises can help individuals build sculpted abdominal muscles, and while that's a goal for many core devotees, the benefits of core exercises extend well beyond the cosmetic.

• **Build a strong, healthy back:** The International Association For the Study of Pain reports that lower back pain has been the leading cause of years lived with disability across the globe since 1990. Lower back pain can be debilitating, but core exercises strengthen muscles in the core, including those in the back. The

Mayo Clinic notes that core exercises train muscles in the pelvis, lower back, hips, and abdomen to work together, creating greater balance and stability and contributing to a healthy back.

• **Make daily life easier:** Individuals may not realize it, but their cores play a vital role in performing a great number of daily tasks. Core muscles are activated when doing everything from taking out the trash to getting dressed. If those muscles are weak, the cumulative effect of that weakness can add up and contribute to aches, pains and other health problems. Strong core muscles make daily tasks easier and less taxing on the body, providing both short- and long-term benefits.

• **Become a better athlete:** Core training has long been a key component of professional athletes' exercise regimens, and it's just as beneficial to amateur athletes as

well. The Harvard Medical School notes that a strong core powers a host of athletic activities, including golf, tennis, cycling, running, swimming, and team sports like baseball and volleyball. A strong core also benefits outdoor enthusiasts who love to kayak and hike difficult terrain.

• **Sculpt abdominals:** The cosmetic benefits of building a strong core should not be overlooked, as individuals might gain additional motivation to keep exercising and eating right when they see desirable results in the mirror. Core exercises

strengthen and sculpt abdominal muscles, creating a win-win situation for anyone who wants to get healthy and look good doing it.

Core exercises are vital to building a healthier, stronger body.

— Metro Creative





Feds

(Continued from Page 3)
offer lower prices. Yet, earlier in the fall, this reliance on the federal body led to delays in the state's ability to procure the COVID-19 vaccines.

The bill also includes clearer guidelines for the state's immunization processes, relying on a committee of local experts, not just federal vaccine panels. It adds details to ensure insurers will continue covering the cost of vaccination and to offer legal immunity for providers who administer the vaccines in good faith, following broadly agreed upon medical science.

Tracy Tyson is a pediatrician and the president-elect of Vermont's chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. She told lawmakers in the Jan. 6 hearing that her organization sees Vermont as setting an important example by solidifying its own state vaccine schedule separate from federal recommendations.

Those at American Academy of Pediatrics "see Vermont as a trailblazer in protecting the relationship between public health, its providers and its patients," she said.

She still worries there is serious harm

in the current landscape of shifting federal guidelines. Even though children can still get the vaccines and insurance will cover them, the confusion that many parents face about what protections their child should receive and when is dangerous, she said. It hinders "true, informed consent," Tyson told lawmakers.

"It may seem like it's giving more autonomy to families, but what it's giving is more confusion, and that is going to lead to more lapses in care," she said of the altered vaccine schedule.

Many health care providers across the state have echoed the state Health Department in reaffirming the safety of the previous CDC vaccine schedule.

"This schedule is grounded in rigorous science and the expertise of immunologists, infectious disease specialists, and public health professionals," Dartmouth Health Children's chief physician Keith Loud wrote in a statement, referring to the previous guidelines. The children's hospital will continue to root its recommendations in the American Academy of Pediatrics schedule.

The Vermont Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, Vermont Academy

The CDC's scaling back childhood immunizations "may seem like it's giving more autonomy to families, but what it's giving is more confusion, and that is going to lead to more lapses in care."

— Dr. Tracy Tyson

Wastewater

(Continued from Page 6)
are connected to treatment facilities not participating in wastewater surveillance may not be represented. Wastewater levels and trends can be influenced by external factors, such as heavy rain which can cause pathogens (e.g., from animals) present in the environment to be detected in influent.

The dashboard can be found on the Vermont Department of Health Respiratory Illness Activity website.

Take steps to protect you and your family from getting sick this cold and flu season. Learn more at HealthVermont.gov/StayHealthy.

of Family Physicians and the Vermont Medical Society issued a joint statement echoing the importance of these vaccines.

They are important not only for children's health, Hildebrandt added in his address to the House committee, but it is also a massive cost-saving tool for the health care system.

"The reason we use vaccines is to prevent expensive and deadly illnesses," he said, giving the example of a \$10 flu shot that could prevent a child from landing in the emergency room or intensive care unit, racking up hundreds of thousands of dollars in medical bills.

"The data on vaccines is a slam dunk. These are cost saving, not cost generating," he said.

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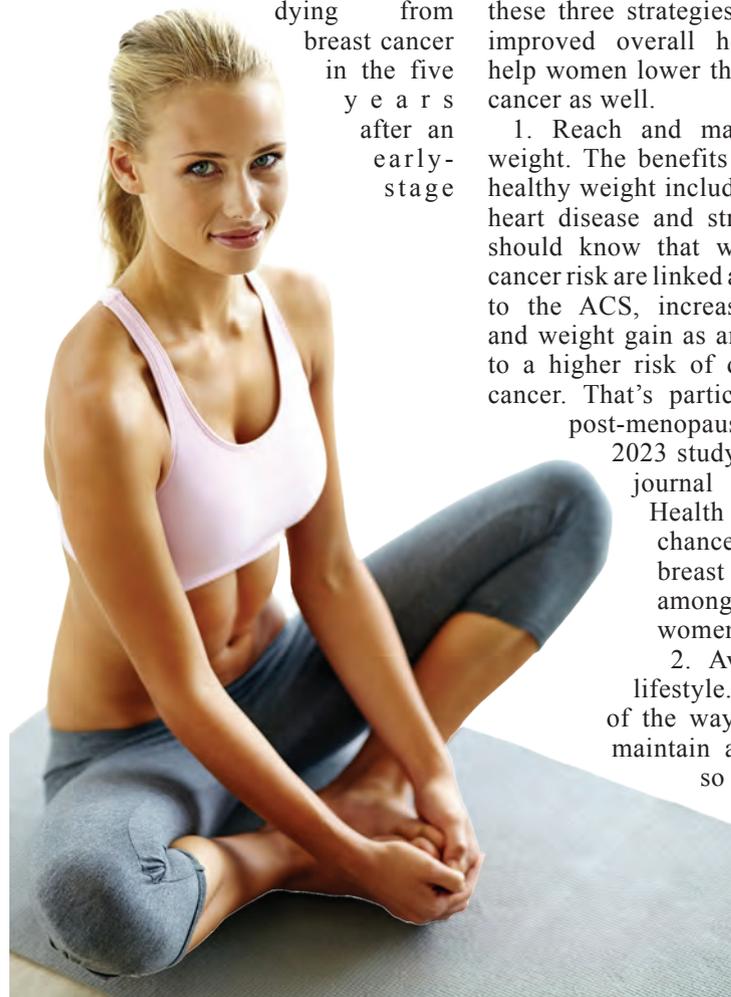
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3 strategies that can lower breast cancer risk

Breast cancer affects millions of individuals each year. The World Cancer Research Fund International reports that breast cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer in women across the globe, affecting roughly 2.3 million women each year.

Despite the global prevalence of breast cancer, various organizations report high five-year survival rates, particularly among women whose cancers are detected in the earliest stages of the disease. In fact, a 2023 study published in the journal *BMJ* found that the risk for dying from breast cancer in the five years after an early-stage



to 5 percent in recent years, a notable improvement from the 14 percent risk of death that was reported in the 1990s.

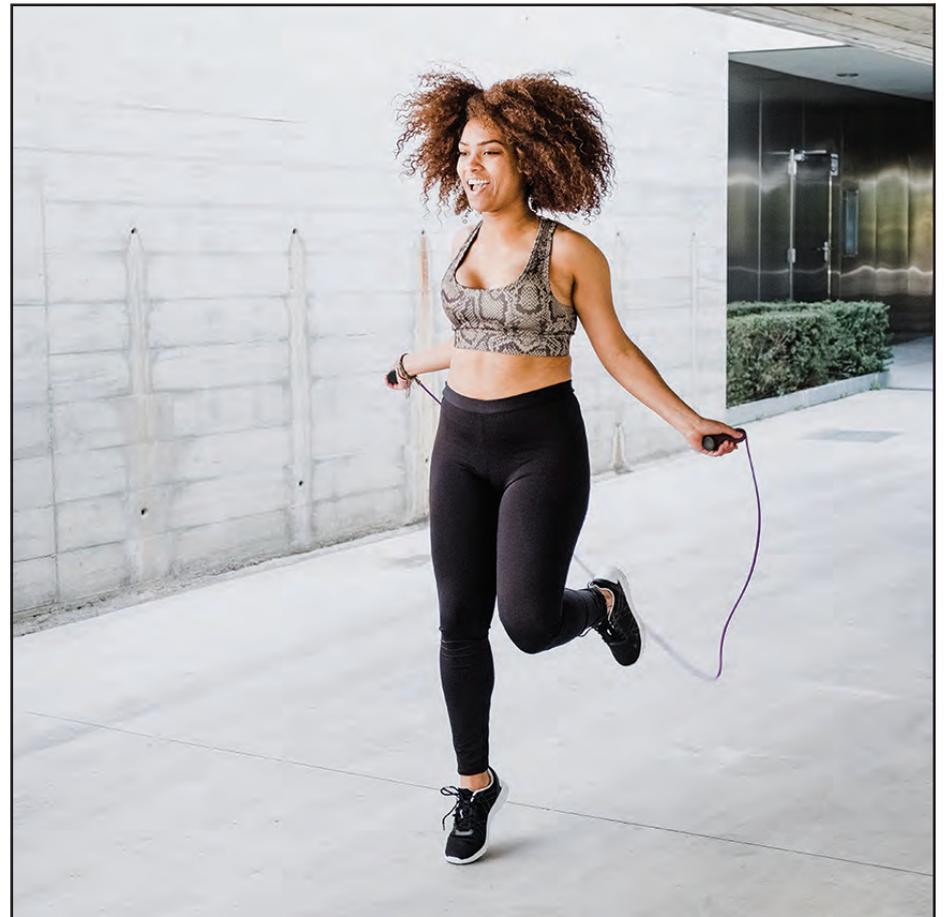
Increased survival rates for breast cancer are welcome news for women and their families. The higher survival rates are a byproduct of the tireless efforts of cancer researchers, who also have discovered links between the disease and certain lifestyle factors. Though there's no way to eliminate one's risk for breast cancer entirely, the American Cancer Society notes certain variables are within women's control. With that in mind, women can consider these three strategies that can lead to improved overall health and might help women lower their risk for breast cancer as well.

1. Reach and maintain a healthy weight. The benefits of maintaining a healthy weight include a lower risk for heart disease and stroke, and women should know that weight and breast cancer risk are linked as well. According to the ACS, increased body weight and weight gain as an adult are linked to a higher risk of developing breast cancer. That's particularly so among post-menopausal women. A 2023 study published in the journal *BMC Women's Health* found that the chances of developing breast cancer increase among post-menopausal women who are obese.

2. Avoid a sedentary lifestyle. Exercise is one of the ways to achieve and maintain a healthy weight, so it makes sense that being physically active can reduce breast cancer risk. The National Cancer

Institute reports that a 2016 meta-analysis of 38 cohort studies found that the most physically active women had between a 12 and 21 percent lower risk for breast cancer than women who were the least physically active. The NCI also notes that additional studies have found that women who become more physically active after menopause also have a lower risk for breast cancer than those who do not.

3. Limit or eliminate alcohol consumption. The ACS urges women who drink to consume no more than one alcoholic drink per day, noting that consumption of even small amounts of alcohol have been linked to an increased



risk for breast cancer. Officials with the MD Anderson Cancer Center note that the link between alcohol consumption and breast cancer risk is low. However, the MDACC notes that alcohol can contribute to unwanted weight gain, thus increasing cancer risk. In addition, alcohol can increase levels of estrogen and other hormones associated with breast cancer.

It may be impossible to completely prevent breast cancer. However, women can embrace strategies that improve their overall health in ways that lower their risk for breast cancer.

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Snacks

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peanut butter or seed butter, and topped with raisins.

- **Fruit kabobs:** Foods on sticks are easy for young hands to grasp. Using blunt wooden skewers, adults can thread grapes, melon chunks, strawberries, granola bar pieces, and maybe marshmallows. The kabobs can be served with a yogurt dip.

- **Smoothies:** Smoothies are a great option that blend fruits and vegetables into something that may be more palatable to youngsters. Parents can take this snack one step further by freezing the smoothie batter into popsicle molds to create a refreshing dessert.

Quick snacks

Having quick snacks at the ready is essential when hungry kids are around. Children may be more inclined to eat a few smaller meals and snacks than three big meals as they go about their days.

- **Cheese sticks:** Prepackaged, low-fat cheese sticks or cheese slices are a protein-rich snack that kids can help themselves to when they get hungry between meals. Cheese also can be paired with apple slices or whole wheat crackers.

- **Parfaits:** Let children create their own yogurt "sundaes" with their favorite ingredients. Have plenty of toppings on hand that can be added to plain or vanilla flavored yogurt, such as berries, bananas, chia seeds, nuts, and granola.

- **Hummus:** Blended chickpeas can be seasoned with an array of flavors to create hummus varieties kids love. Mixing cocoa powder and honey into hummus also can create a "dessert" hummus that goes well with graham cracker dippers.

Kids might demand less healthy fare at snack time. However, parents can stay a nutritious course and offer many healthy and flavorful alternatives to potato chips.





A SPOTTER BACKS up Prem Prakash as he successfully squat lifts 293 pounds at the International Powerlifting League World Championship in England this past November.

Photo courtesy of Prem Prakash

Prakash

(Continued from Page 4)

won the sperm race; it behooves us to continue to strive to be our best.”

Prakash does weight training three to four days a week, depending on the mode and cycle of his training. Not surprisingly, he also does yoga virtually every day.

On the horizon, his next major

competition is the Olympia Pro in Las Vegas in September. Prakash notes that participants must be classified as “Elite” in order to qualify for the competition.

“It’s a very prestigious event, where Arnold Schwarzenegger made his name,” he said.

Your body will change as it ages

Aging is an inevitable component of life. Young children often cannot wait until they get older because of the freedoms that seemingly come with being more mature. On the flip side, adults often wish they were young again. Time waits for no person, and with aging comes many changes, many of which manifest physically.

The following are some components of healthy aging that go beyond graying hair and wrinkling skin.

Bones, joints and muscles

According to the Mayo Clinic, with age bones may become thinner and more fragile. Joints will lose their flexibility, while muscles lose mass and strength, endurance and flexibility. These changes may be accompanied by a loss of stability that can result in balance issues or falls. It’s common for the body frame to shrink, and a person may lose a few inches from his or her height.

A doctor may suggest a bone-density test or supplementation with calcium and vitamin D to keep bones as strong as possible. Physical activity that includes strength training can help keep muscles strong and flexible.

Body fat

As muscle mass diminishes, body fat can increase. The Merck Manual indicates that, by age 75, the percentage of body fat typically doubles compared with what it was during young adulthood. The distribution of fat also changes, which can adjust the shape of the torso.

Heart

Organs in the body also age, and cells begin to die off, making those organs work less efficiently. The heart is one such organ that changes with age. It pumps more than 2.5 million beats during one’s lifetime. As a person gets older, blood vessels lose their elasticity, and the heart has to work harder to circulate blood throughout the body, reports Johnson Memorial Health. Exercise can help keep the heart as strong as possible.

Urinary tract and kidneys

The kidneys become smaller as a person ages, which means they may not be able to filter urine as effectively. Urinary incontinence may occur due to hormonal changes or because of an enlarged prostate. Furthermore, the bladder may become less elastic, leading to an urge to urinate more frequently.

Memory and thinking

Older adults experience changes to the brain as they age. Minor effects on memory or thinking skills are common and not usually cause for worry. Staying mentally active by reading, playing word games and engaging in hobbies can help. Following a routine and making lists (as multi-tasking may become challenging) are some additional ways to address memory issues.

These are just some of the changes that can come with aging. Generally speaking, exercising, using the brain and adhering to a balanced, healthy diet can help keep the body functioning well into one’s golden years.

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Give your brain a break now and then

Fatigue and exhaustion are often discussed in terms that characterize the physical effects that they have on the body. However, mental fatigue can be just as draining as physical exhaustion, even if its symptoms are not as evident as aching muscles or tired feet.

An online medical resource notes that mental fatigue typically arises when individuals focus on mentally challenging tasks for extended periods of time. Many individuals also experienced mental fatigue during the pandemic. Pandemic-related restrictions forced individuals across the globe to confront a number of unforeseen, unexpected challenges, including a sudden shift to remote work and school closures that forced working parents to juggle the rigors of their careers with the difficulties of remote learning. That upheaval contributed to prolonged mental fatigue for many individuals.

Much like athletes need routine breaks from exercise to let their muscles recover, individuals need to look for ways to give their overworked minds a chance to recuperate from fatigue. Each person is different, but these strategies can help people overcome mental fatigue.

- Take breaks from the news. Overconsumption of news is one potential contributor to mental fatigue. That's especially so in the digital age, when the latest headlines are never further than a smartphone away. The Johns Hopkins Women's Mood Disorders Center notes

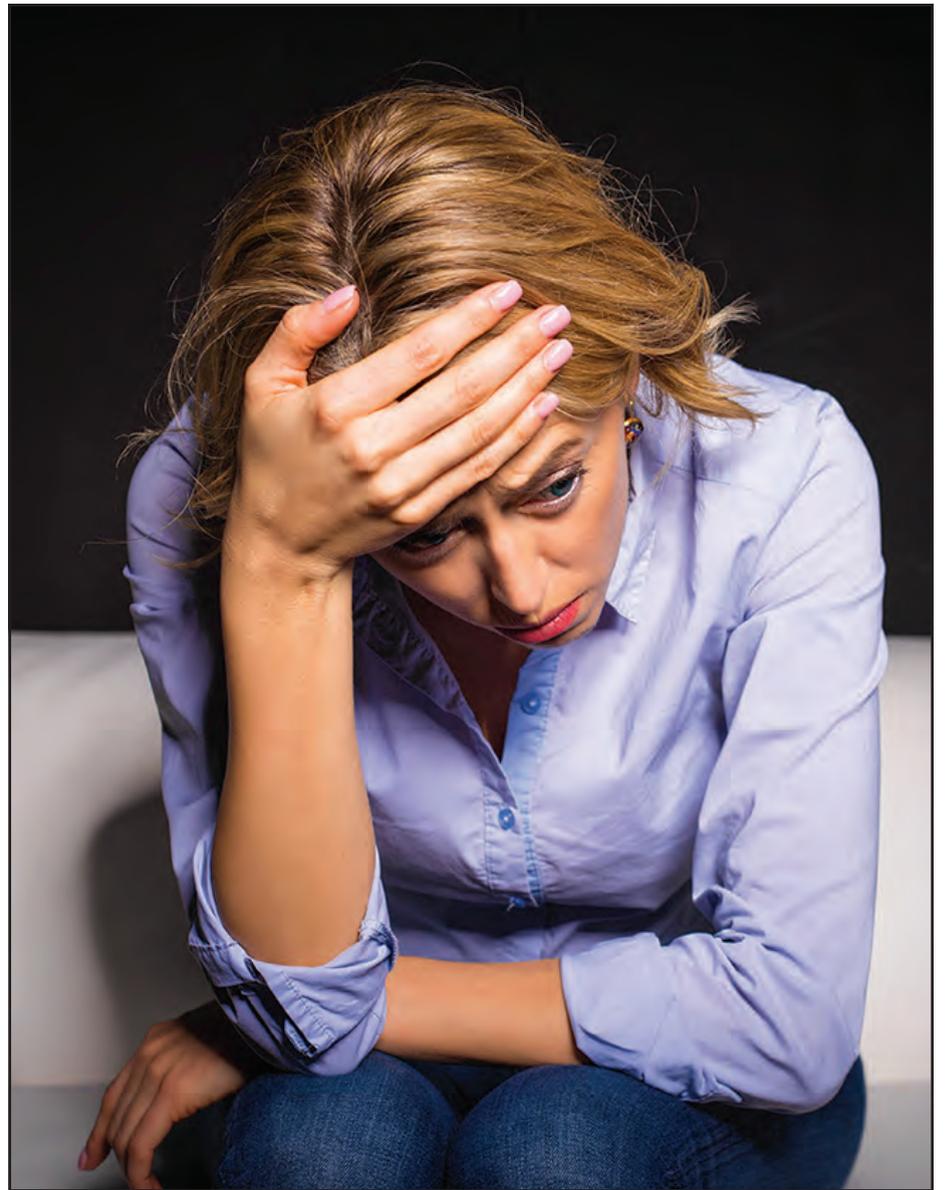
that limiting news consumption during stressful times can be an effective way to reduce symptoms of stress, including mental fatigue.

- Schedule time to relax. The pressure to feel as if you should always be doing something, whether it's working, taking care of your family or tackling a to-do list around the house, can contribute to mental fatigue. Schedule time to relax and make a concerted effort to keep that time open. Avoid using scheduled relaxation time to work on household chores or check work emails. Instead, use this time to do something you find genuinely relaxing, even if that activity feels like you're doing "nothing."

- Spot the signs of mental fatigue. Another way to overcome mental fatigue is to learn to recognize its symptoms. Recognition of these symptoms allows individuals to use them as alarm bells that alert them when it's time to take a step back and unwind. Mental fatigue symptoms include mood-related issues like increased irritability or anger; difficulty concentrating that makes it hard to finish tasks; zoning out; difficulty sleeping; and engaging in unhealthy behaviors, including overconsumption of alcohol.

The signs of mental fatigue may not be as instantly recognizable as the symptoms of physical exhaustion. But mental fatigue can be just as dangerous as physical tiredness if left unchecked.

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