

Healthy

Fall 2025

COMMUNITY

Emmy Award-winning actor,
producer, host and television
and radio personality

*Mario
Lopez*

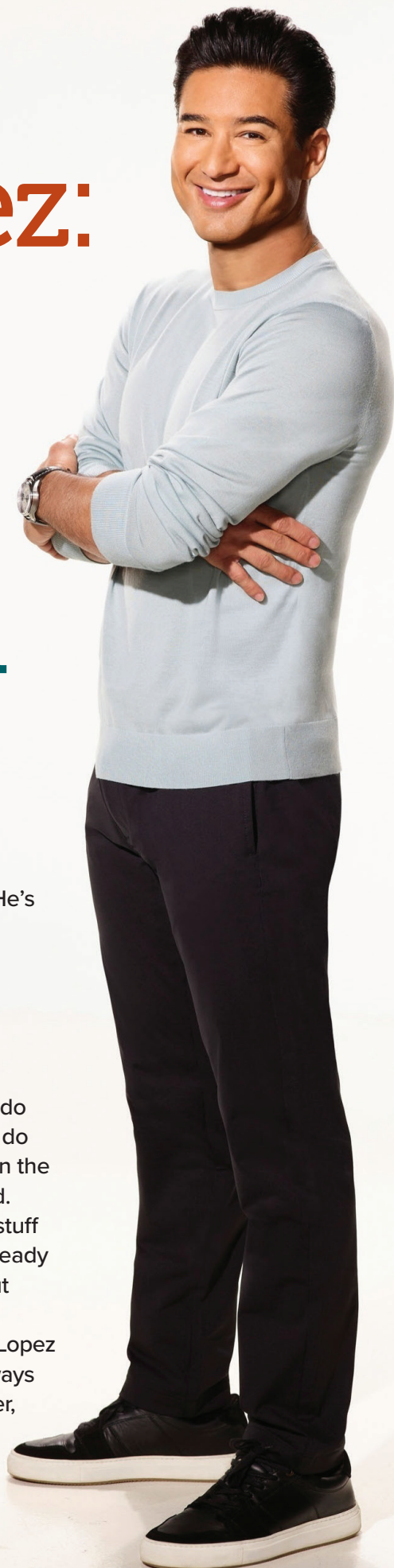
This Issue:
Focus on
Family
Health



Powers
HEALTHSM



Mario Lopez: Hustle, health *and* holding down the fort



IT'S JUST PAST 6 A.M. and Mario Lopez is already in motion. The TV host, actor, radio personality and father of three has built a life defined by hustle — and it all starts before most alarms go off.

"I get up about six," he said. "Just kind of get ready to go to the gym and see all the kids off. They leave together and go off to school. I go to the gym, kind of squeeze a workout in, whether it's boxing or jiu-jitsu or what have you."

That morning workout is non-negotiable. "I always try to get the workout out of the way in the morning or else it'll catch up with me or I'm too tired at the end of the day."

Lopez long has been synonymous with clean-cut charisma and tireless

energy, and that's no accident. He's deliberate about how he fuels himself.

So what does a typical day look like?

After the gym and a quick meal, Lopez drives straight to work. "I do my radio show, and after that I'll do my nighttime show first, and then the daytime show after that," he said. "After that, I'll either have other stuff to do with a podcast or getting ready for the movie or other things. But that's pretty much every day."

It's a stacked schedule, but Lopez thrives in the hustle. "There's always something new around the corner, and that keeps it exciting."

Do you follow a strict diet?

"I'm not a calorie counter," he says. "But I try to have a sensible-looking plate — protein, carbs in every meal." Weekdays are focused and clean, with fried foods and junk food kept to a minimum. But on the weekends? "I love tacos, pizza, fried chicken — I don't discriminate," he laughs.

Lopez credits laughter and teamwork as the glue that's kept their 15-year marriage strong.

How do you keep your kids active?

Lopez's commitment to health and fitness isn't just personal — it's family-wide.

"My wife was a dancer, too, and pretty athletic herself. So, you know, I just kind of want to keep [the kids] busy and mobile and moving and out of trouble," he says. "My daughter dances and does competitive cheer. My boys wrestle and do jiu-jitsu and Muay Thai and all that. They're all pretty active. They have something every day."

Does back-to-school season change your routine?

Only when it comes to homework — specifically math.

"The only stress for me when they go back to school is when they ask me for help on their

homework — because it's math. Then I'm struggling. I'm like, 'Oh no, I can't do it. I'm the last person you need to ask.'" He jokes that his math skills peaked in "the late 1900s." "Now you've got Common Core, and I really don't know how to do that. I push it on my wife — they figure it out."

What's the key to balancing marriage and such a busy schedule?

"I'm blessed with a really great wife," Lopez says. "She is very understanding with the unpredictable, sort of fluid schedule. She holds down the fort at home, and she's a great mom."

He credits laughter and teamwork as the glue that's kept their 15-year marriage strong. "We know how to pick up the slack where one is maybe slacking. So we've got a good little rhythm going."

What's next for you?

This spring, Lopez will head to Buffalo, New York, to film a new holiday movie. "I'm going to be playing a fireman in this one — a little romance, a little more serious than our other movies," he shares. "We're going to be shooting at the end of March, beginning of April for a few weeks. I'm happy with the way it's turning out."

He'll even continue hosting one of his shows remotely while filming. ■

A Healthy Start to the School Year

The school year is the perfect time to prioritize your child's health. While supplies and routines are top of mind, so is preparing for cold and flu season.

This time of year brings increased exposure to germs in classrooms, sports practices and after-school activities. Annual wellness visits help ensure children are up to date on vaccines — including the flu shot — and ready for a strong, healthy start.

Flu season is unpredictable, but you can take simple steps to reduce its impact. Get vaccinated, encourage frequent handwashing and keep children home when they're feeling sick. It's also wise to keep essentials like thermometers, tissues and fever reducers stocked at home.

At Powers Health, we know how challenging it can be to juggle school schedules, work demands and health needs.

Our team is here to help you and your loved ones stay well this season. Let's work together for a healthy, confident school year — for every child, every parent and every community we serve. ■

For more information, visit
PowersHealth.org/HCfall2025.



Partnering with the School Nurse:

A Key Ally in Your Child's Health



Between busy schedules, after-school activities and growing academic demands, keeping kids healthy during the school year can be a challenge. But parents aren't in it alone — school nurses play a vital role in supporting students' physical, emotional and developmental health. With a little communication and collaboration, parents and school nurses can become a strong team for student well-being.

What Does a School Nurse Do?

School nurses do far more than manage scraped knees and stomachaches. They are trained healthcare professionals who help monitor chronic conditions, manage medication, support mental health, respond to emergencies and promote overall wellness. In many schools they're also the first to notice patterns in a child's behavior or health that might warrant further attention.

According to the National Association of School Nurses, school nurses are critical to early detection of issues like asthma, diabetes, allergies, anxiety and even vision or hearing problems that may affect learning.

How Parents Can Team Up With the School Nurse

1 Share Key Health Info Early

At the start of the school year — or as soon as your child is diagnosed with a condition — update the school nurse about:

- Allergies (food, seasonal or medication)
- Chronic conditions (asthma, diabetes, seizures)
- Mental health concerns (anxiety, depression)
- Medications your child takes at school or home

The more the nurse knows, the better they can support your child throughout the day.

2 Provide a Medication Action Plan

If your child requires medication during school hours (like an inhaler or EpiPen), work with your pediatrician and the school nurse to develop a care plan. Keep all forms current and clearly labeled.

3 Don't Wait to Report Changes

Is your child suddenly more tired? Struggling with stomachaches before school? Experiencing new symptoms? Let the nurse know. They may be able to spot patterns or catch early signs of bigger issues.

4 Encourage Your Child to Speak Up

Let kids know the school nurse is there to help, not just when they feel sick, but when they feel overwhelmed, anxious or unsafe. Building trust with the nurse gives students a safe adult to turn to when they need support.

5 Stay in the Loop

Many school nurses send home updates or newsletters about illness trends (like flu or strep), screenings, and health programs. Take a minute to read them. It is an easy way to stay ahead of common concerns. ■

Heading into Fall Sports

Know the signs of concussion

by Karin Saltanovitz



Any blow to the head, neck, face, or even the torso, has the potential to cause a concussion. They occur too frequently in contact/collision sports. As children go back to school this fall, it is a good time for parents and coaches to review the signs and symptoms of a concussion, especially for football, hockey, soccer, basketball, cheerleading and wrestling.

A concussion is a mild traumatic brain injury from a collision or a fall, caused by the brain shaking and twisting within the skull. It results in an injury at the cellular level that is not visible on a CT scan or MRI.

Every concussion is different. This means that the variety, severity and duration of symptoms differ greatly from person to person. Early evaluation and management of a concussion results in quicker recovery. It also helps to protect from further injury, which could greatly intensify the already present symptoms.

“Returning to physical activity too soon after a concussion can be detrimental,” said Michael Owens, MD, medical director of the Powers Health Concussion Clinic. “It can prolong recovery and increase the risk of serious complications.”

It is important to identify a concussion and start appropriate care and treatment as soon as possible after the injury.

It is important to identify a concussion and start appropriate care and treatment as soon as possible after the injury.

A headache is the most common symptom, but a concussion also may cause dizziness and difficulty with balance, visual changes, light and sound sensitivity, mental fogginess, difficulty concentrating and remembering, and sleep issues. On occasion, symptoms will take as long as two days to develop. As soon as a concussion is suspected, though, the affected athlete should be removed from play and be evaluated medically by an athletic trainer on the

sideline, if available and at the Powers Health Concussion Clinic as soon as possible. Serious symptoms, such as worsening headache, vomiting, loss of vision and decreasing consciousness, require immediate evaluation at a hospital emergency room to rule out an injury more severe than a concussion.

The concussion experts at the Powers Health Concussion Clinic provide high-quality, compassionate care to help restore health after a concussion. They use a variety of diagnostic tools to evaluate an individual suspected of a concussion then. The team will create an individualized plan of care for your child’s recovery and collaborate with his or her other physicians and rehabilitation specialists, if necessary, to help with a successful return to school and sports. ■

For more information about the Powers Health Concussion Clinic or to request an appointment, call 219-836-4461.



Your Mid-Year Health Reset:

7 Checkups You Shouldn't Skip

Mid-year is the perfect time to take stock of your health and schedule essential checkups that can help prevent long-term issues. Whether you've been putting off appointments or are simply unsure of what's necessary, these seven screenings help maintain wellness across all stages of life.

1 Primary Care Checkup

An annual visit to your primary care provider helps monitor blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar levels. These simple checks can catch early signs of heart disease, diabetes and other chronic conditions before symptoms appear.

2 Skin Cancer Screening

Skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in the U.S., yet many people skip screenings. A full-body skin exam is especially important if you have a history of sun exposure, tanning bed use or unusual moles.

3 Dental Cleaning and Oral Exam

Beyond keeping your smile bright, routine dental cleanings help prevent gum disease, which has been linked to other chronic illnesses. Most dentists recommend cleanings every six months.

4 Eye Exam

Even if you don't wear glasses, regular eye exams can detect glaucoma, macular degeneration and signs of systemic disease like diabetes.

5 Mental Health Check-In

Stress can build up without you realizing it. A quick check-in with a mental health professional can help identify anxiety or depression and guide next steps.

6 Women's or Men's Preventive Exams

For women, that may mean a Pap smear, mammogram or bone density scan. For men, it could involve prostate screening or a testosterone level check depending on age and symptoms. Talk with your provider about what's right for your age and family history.

7 Vaccination Review

Whether it's a tetanus booster, shingles vaccine or COVID-19/flu shot planning, reviewing your immunization status is a smart mid-year move.

Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Institutes of Health (NIH), Mayo Clinic, Cleveland Clinic, Johns Hopkins Medicine, American Heart Association

Flu Season Ahead

How to Strengthen Your Defenses Now

Now is the perfect time to prep for cold and flu season. While flu activity typically peaks between December and February, building healthy habits now can boost your immunity before viruses spread.

Why Start Now?

Colder months mean more time indoors and greater exposure to germs. Less sunlight and added stress also can weaken immune defenses. But with a few intentional choices, you can keep your body resilient.

Your Fall Flu-Prevention Checklist:

☐ **Eat to Support Immunity** Fuel up with fruits and veggies rich in vitamin C (like bell peppers and oranges), leafy greens for antioxidants and lean proteins to repair immune cells. Stay hydrated with water, herbal teas and broth.

☐ **Get Quality Sleep** Aim for 7-9 hours each night. Good sleep strengthens your body's infection-fighting abilities and helps regulate inflammation.

☐ **Move Your Body** Moderate exercise like walking, biking, or yoga boosts circulation and supports immune function. Just a few sessions a week make a difference.

☐ **Practice Good Hygiene** Frequent handwashing and disinfecting high-touch areas help prevent the spread of viruses.

☐ **Manage Stress** Chronic stress suppresses the immune system. Try breathing exercises, meditation or time outdoors to stay centered and strong.

☐ **Know the Early Signs** Watch for fatigue, sore throat, cough, fever or body aches. Stay home if you're sick and rest to recover and avoid spreading illness.

☐ **Get Your Flu Shot** The flu vaccine remains your best defense against serious illness. It's widely available in early fall. Talk to your provider about scheduling.

Final Thought

Your daily choices matter. With a few simple habits and early action, you can strengthen your defenses and stay healthier all season long.



Your best shot for weight loss

by Kerry Erickson

Powers Health's Weight Management Services offers GLP-1 medications and ongoing support



H

AVE YOU STRUGGLED to lose weight most of your life? Are you coping with obesity-induced health problems, such as type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure and sleep apnea? Powers Health might be your best shot at living

your healthiest life.

The names Mounjaro, Ozempic, Wegovy and Zepbound often can be found in news stories about celebrities who have lost a significant amount of weight. While the names of these injectable medications might be recognizable, how they work and what they entail are not usually part of the conversation. Kristen Bilek, a Powers Health nurse practitioner at the St. Catherine Hospital Medication Therapy Management Clinic and Weight Management Services, answers questions you might have about these potentially lifesaving medications called Glucagon-like peptide-1 (GLP-1) agonists.

What are GLP-1 and GIP/GLP-1 medications, and which ones does Powers Health offer?

Powers Health offers advanced medications to support weight loss and manage type 2 diabetes, including glucagon-like peptide-1 (GLP-1) receptor agonists and a dual glucose-dependent insulinotropic polypeptide (GIP)/GLP-1 receptor agonist. These medications lower blood sugar, reduce appetite and promote weight loss by acting on hormone receptors in the gut and brain. They help you feel fuller longer,

reduce “food noise” (the urge to eat when not hungry) and curb mindless eating. The amount of weight loss varies by medication and dose, with patients typically losing 1 to 2 pounds per week.

Powers Health prescribes four main medications:

- **Semaglutide** (Ozempic, Wegovy): A GLP-1 receptor agonist. Ozempic is primarily used for type 2 diabetes to improve blood sugar control, while Wegovy is approved for weight loss in patients with obesity or overweight with comorbidities.

- **Tirzepatide** (Mounjaro, Zepbound): A dual GIP/GLP-1 receptor agonist, distinct from GLP-1-only medications. Tirzepatide’s unique “twincrutin” action enhances insulin secretion, improves glucose control and promotes greater weight loss than GLP-1 agonists alone. Mounjaro is used for type 2 diabetes, while Zepbound is approved for weight loss.

“Tirzepatide’s dual action on GIP and GLP-1 receptors makes it particularly effective for weight loss and diabetes management,” Bilek said. “It not only suppresses appetite like GLP-1 agonists but may also improve insulin sensitivity and fat metabolism through GIP, offering a powerful tool for patients.”

How are GLP-1 medications administered?

GLP-1s typically are injected once a week into the fatty tissue just below the skin. Common injection sites include the abdomen, thigh and upper arm.

What all of this translates to is lower blood pressure, lower blood sugar, fewer sleep problems, more energy and an improved quality of life.

Which patients qualify for a GLP-1 prescription?

These medications are for people who need to lose 25 or more pounds. “In order to qualify, patients need to have a body mass index of 27 or higher and one or more comorbidities, such as type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, sleep apnea or heart disease,” Bilek said. These medications also lessen the risk of diabetes for someone whose A1C indicates prediabetes.

Do these medications have to be taken long-term?

“GLP-1s can be lifelong medications, but the most important thing people have to realize is they are just a tool. It’s not going to do all of the work,” Bilek said. “If you don’t want to be on a GLP-1 long term, and you just want to jumpstart weight loss, it’s really important to focus on lifestyle modifications. If you don’t change your lifestyle and develop that foundation of healthy eating and you go off the medication, you are more likely to gain weight. Keep a food diary and count calories, especially in the beginning. Some people have no idea how many calories they’re taking in. You want to focus on protein intake because as you’re losing weight, you want to lose fat, not muscle. If you’re not getting enough protein, you’ll lose lean tissue.”

What are the potential side effects?

Common side effects can include constipation, nausea, diarrhea, vomiting and headaches. “Less common but more serious side effects include pancreatitis and thyroid tumors, which is why people with a history of pancreatitis and thyroid cancer should talk to their healthcare provider before taking these medications,” she said. “For some people, side effects often subside 24 hours after injections, while some simply can’t tolerate the side effects, and others experience no side effects.”

How does Powers Health’s program help people who are interested in using a GLP-1?

“Patients meet with me to discuss if one of these medications is right for them,” Bilek said. “If their



Above: Kristen Bilek, a nurse practitioner at the St. Catherine Hospital Medication Therapy Management Clinic and Weight Management Services at Powers Health, holds the main GLP-1 medications offered through Powers Health.

prescription is approved, patients then meet with one of our pharmacists at the St. Catherine Hospital Medication Therapy Management Clinic in Munster to go over the basics of the injection pens and how, when and where to inject the medication.” Patients can pick up their medication from the St. Catherine Hospital Retail Pharmacy in East Chicago. They also can have the medication sent the Community Hospital Retail Pharmacy in Munster, or have it shipped for free to their home.

How successful have patients been in losing weight on a GLP-1?

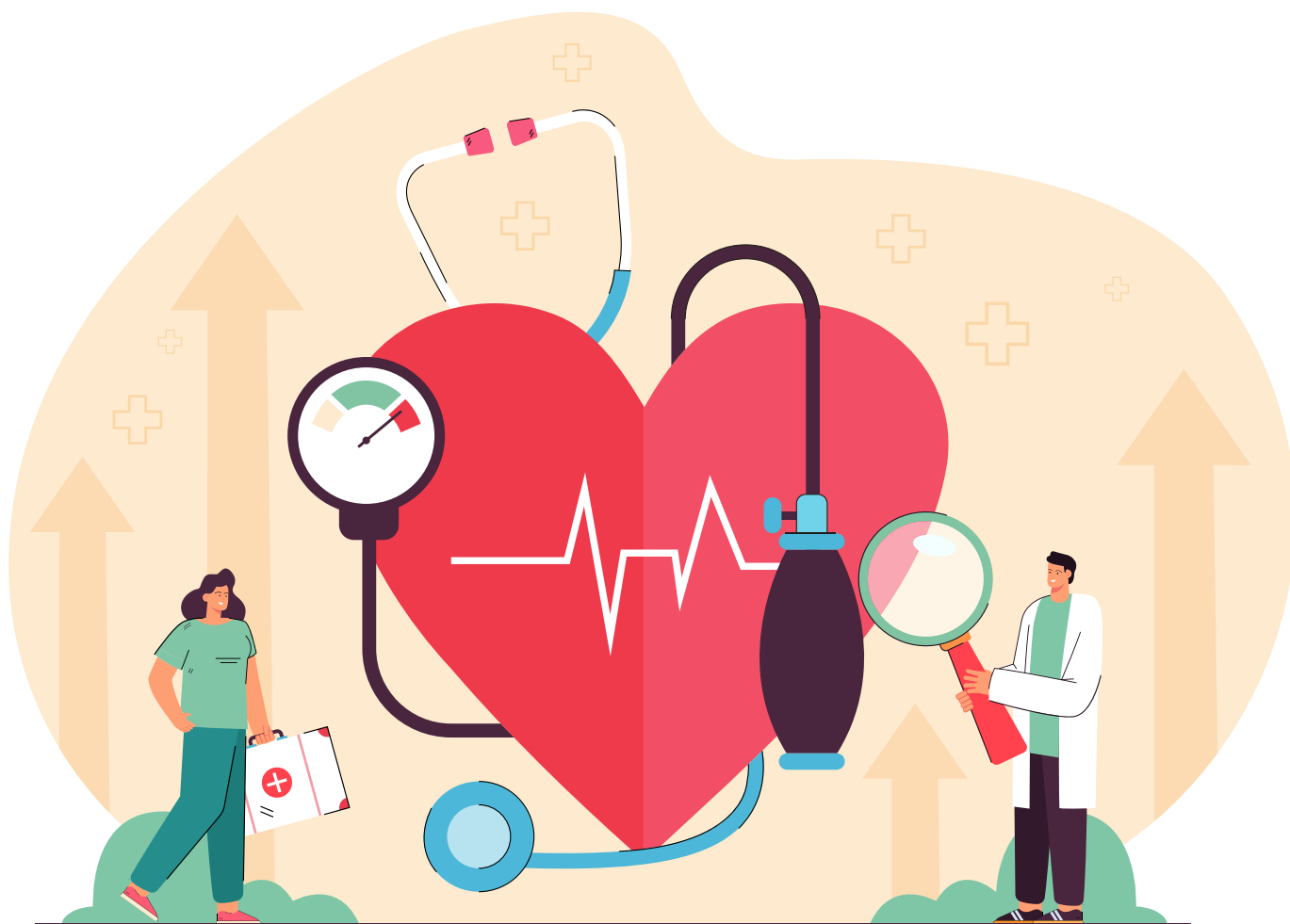
“Our patients have done extremely well,” Bilek said. “While seeing the number on the scale go down is great, we also measure neck and waist circumference and fat mass at every appointment.” After patients’ initial appointment, they come back monthly or every other month so the Powers Health team can track their progress. “We have seen our patients improve their lifestyle choices for the better while using these medications. What all of this translates to is lower blood pressure, lower blood sugar, fewer sleep problems, more energy and an improved quality of life.” ■

For more information, visit PowersHealth.org/medical-weight-loss-HC-fall25 or call 219-703-2454.

Heart of the Matter

Powers Health cardiology team offers innovative AFib procedure

by Vanessa Negrete



POWERS HEALTH offers a safe and effective alternative to traditional ablation methods in treating patients who experience atrial fibrillation, or AFib.

AFib, a common heart condition, is an irregular heartbeat – often rapid – that may affect quality of life and put people at a higher risk of heart failure, stroke and various heart-related complications.

The condition is treatable and often managed with medications or thermal ablation.

In October 2024, a cardiology team at Community Hospital in Munster performed Powers Health’s first procedure using a pulsed field ablation (PFA) system that delivers targeted electrical pulses to treat areas of heart tissue that cause AFib.

Through the PFA procedure, many patients are able to discontinue their AFib medications and enjoy improved quality of life.

“We are excited to implement this new method for cardiac ablation procedures,” said Pratik Patel, MD, an electrophysiologist with Powers Health. “Our patients are benefitting from this transformed approach to AFib treatment that can offer less risk of collateral damage to adjoining tissue rather than conventional thermal ablation.”

During a traditional ablation, extreme heat or cold is applied via catheter to areas of the heart associated with abnormal heart rhythms. The new PFA approach instead uses electric fields to treat those areas of the heart. This non-thermal approach is proven to be an effective option for patients while minimizing the risk of damaging surrounding tissue, compared to traditional ablation.

The PFA procedure takes about two hours. Once the patient is sedated, a specialist accesses the veins in groin area and guides catheters to the heart to complete the procedure.

Patients usually go home the same day and resume normal activities within a few days of undergoing PFA. A healthcare provider will monitor the healing and heart rhythm in follow-up appointments.

The PFA technique is another option for patients who have not responded well to medications or who may have other factors – such as health conditions or

advanced age – that prevent them from undergoing a traditional ablation.

“The incidence of atrial fibrillation is on the rise, and access to advanced therapies for our community is essential,” said Dale O’Donnell, vice president of Cardiology Services for Powers Health. “Offering this innovative approach to treating AFib is a step forward in ensuring our patients have the best possible outcomes.”

By 2030, an estimated 12.1 million people in the United States will have AFib, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

AFib causes about 1 in 7 strokes; strokes that occur by complications from AFib often are more severe than strokes that have other underlying causes, according to the CDC.

“The incidence of atrial fibrillation is on the rise, and access to advanced therapies for our community is essential.”

People may live with AFib and do not know they have it because they do not experience any symptoms, so those at higher risk should speak with their healthcare provider. AFib symptoms include fluttering or pounding heartbeat, fatigue, chest pain and shortness of breath.

A person’s age, genes, family history, lifestyle and other medical conditions can raise the risk of developing structural or electrical issues that may lead to AFib, according to the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute.

The risk increases with age, especially in those over 65. Having a family member with AFib raises the risk as well. Alcohol and illegal drugs may trigger AFib in some people. Smoking and stress may be linked to higher risk of AFib as well, according to the Institute.

Common health conditions that increase the risk of AFib include diabetes, sleep apnea, chronic kidney disease, COPD, high blood pressure and obesity. ■

For more information about cardiovascular care at Powers Health, visit PowersHealth.org/heart-HC-fall25.

We've got your back!

Powers Health neurosurgeon offers tips to keep you moving

by Karin Saltanovitz

If YOU EXPERIENCE BACK pain, you are not alone. According to a 2019 National Health Interview Survey, nearly 40 percent of American adults experienced back pain within a three-month period. Experts say the prevalence of lower back pain is not expected to decrease over the coming years, especially as Americans become more sedentary.



Joshua Simon, MD
Neurosurgeon

The experienced neurosurgeons and orthopedic surgeons at Powers Health use innovative, minimally invasive technologies to help diagnose and treat conditions affecting the spine, if surgery is deemed necessary.

“Much to our patients’ relief, the majority of patients with back and neck pain do not necessarily need surgery.

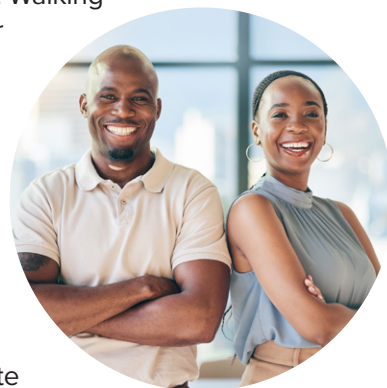
Lifestyle changes are often the first interventions we recommend, including physical activity, posture correction, weight loss and tobacco cessation. Our society has adopted an increasingly sedentary lifestyle, between our desk jobs, computer work and a preoccupation with our phones, and many of us do



not engage in sufficient exercise, particularly with a focus on maintaining a healthy back and neck,” said Dr. Joshua Simon, a neurosurgeon with Powers Health who specializes in spine surgery, brain surgery, and peripheral nerve conditions.

At Powers Health, our goal is to get you moving to keep lower back pain at bay. Here are some tips to get you started:

1 Take a hike (or at least a walk): Walking is one of the best exercises for your body. Not only does it improve overall health, but it helps prevent or alleviate existing back pain. Walking strengthens core and lower back muscles, improves circulation and reduces inflammation. The American Heart Association recommends at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity each week. If that feels daunting, you could even break it down to a 30-minute walk five days a week.



2 **Straighten up and stand tall:**

Good posture can help prevent back pain. Maintaining proper spine alignment when sitting, standing and moving reduces strain on your back muscles, ligaments and joints, which in turn alleviates and prevents back pain.



3 **Stretch it out:**

Make it a habit to start your day with some gentle stretches, which can provide tension relief and improve flexibility.

However, if you are in pain and it persists beyond a week or two, you should consider seeing a healthcare provider for evaluation.

“People who begin to experience back or neck pain with pain radiating down the arm or leg should see a provider to ensure that there are no neurological concerns,” Dr. Simon said. “I fully recognize it might seem stressful to see a neurosurgeon. One of the most important parts of my job is to guide you and your family through the

“Part of my job is to guide you through the process and build a relationship with you. I consider it a privilege to care for my patients.”

process of understanding what you are dealing with and building a relationship with you. I consider it a sincere privilege to care for my patients and your comfort and understanding of the treatment is critical to our collective success as doctor and patient.”

Community Hospital holds the Joint Commission’s Gold Seal of Approval for Advanced Certification in Spine Surgery by demonstrating continuous compliance with its performance standards. ■

Got spinal and neck pain? Powers Health has your back

Spine Symposium: Meet the Experts

Join us as Powers Health spine specialists discuss therapeutic, surgical and pain management options for patients coping with neck and spine issues. This FREE event also will feature spine health vendors. Space is limited. Call 219-836-3477 to register.

Thursday, Oct. 16 • 2-6 pm

The Center for Visual and Performing Arts, 1040 Ridge Road, Munster

Our Speakers and Their Topics:

2:30 pm: Gregory McComis, MD –
Surgical Options for Neck Pain

3:15 pm: Joshua Simon, MD –
The Mechanics of Back Surgery:
To Fuse or Not to Fuse

4 pm: Nitin Khanna, MD –
Innovations in Neck Surgery

4:45 pm: Mohammad Shukairy, MD –
Advancements in Endoscopic Spine
Surgery

5:30 pm: James St. Clair, MD –
Is it My Neck or My Shoulder?

To learn more about the nationally recognized neurosurgery and orthopedic programs at the hospitals of Powers Health – Community Hospital in Munster, St. Catherine Hospital in East Chicago, St. Mary Medical Center in Hobart and Powers Health Rehabilitation Center in Crown Point – visit PowersHealth.org/neurosurgery-HC-fall25.

Clearing the confusion

Emergency Department vs. Immediate Care Center: Where to turn for prompt medical care

by Vanessa Negrete

When a lingering sore throat will not respond to over-the-counter medications or a thunderous headache arrives out of nowhere, it is time to seek treatment from a medical professional.

About 155 million emergency department visits occurred in the United States in 2022, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Deciding where to turn for prompt, appropriate care comes down to several factors.

For life-threatening injuries, call 911. Emergency responders are trained to know which course of action to take, such as stabilizing patients for safe transport to a hospital.

Life-threatening conditions include sudden loss of responsiveness, shortness of breath, tightening/discomfort in the chest or other parts of the upper body, sudden numbness/weakness in the face, arms or legs, confusion or trouble speaking, trouble walking or seeing, dizziness or sudden severe headache.

In non-life-threatening situations, the decision may be less clear on whether to seek help from a primary care provider, immediate care center or emergency department. People often head straight to an emergency department for ailments or injuries that could be treated at an immediate care center.

Many primary care providers offer a limited number of same-day appointments to accommodate patients with urgent needs. If no openings are available, an immediate care center or emergency department are the remaining options.

The severity of the injury or illness is a top indicator of which is the best option.



The emergency department is the best place for people experiencing the following:

- Abdominal pain
- Allergic reaction with difficulty breathing
- Broken bones
- Chest pain
- Confusion
- Difficulty breathing
- Electrical shock
- Loss of consciousness
- Physical trauma
- Poison ingestion
- Severe back/side pain
- Severe burns
- Severe vomiting
- Shortness of breath
- Suicidal thoughts
- Uncontrolled bleeding

An emergency department also is the best option for patients who need prompt medical attention when immediate care centers are closed.

When medical attention is needed urgently but the injury or illness is less severe in nature, immediate care is a good choice.

Patients experiencing the following should consider immediate care:

- Abscess
- Cold symptoms
- Earache
- Eye infection
- Flu symptoms
- Minor allergic reactions (without difficulty breathing)
- Minor animal bites
- Minor burns
- Rash
- Simple cuts/lacerations
- Sprain/strain
- Skin infection
- Urinary discomfort

The Immediate Care Centers of Powers Health have extended and weekend hours. The Emergency Departments of Powers Health – at Community Hospital in Munster, St. Catherine Hospital in East Chicago and St. Mary Medical Center in Hobart and Valparaiso – are open around the clock every day.

St. Catherine Hospital recently expanded its Emergency Department by nearly 2,000 square feet. Among the features is an exclusive waiting area for patients with emergency behavioral health needs and five exam rooms dedicated to those patients.

“With more room and design efficiencies, this project leads to a better patient experience and offers a supportive workplace for our healthcare providers,” said Leo Correa, CEO of St. Catherine Hospital.

St. Mary Medical Center expanded its emergency services in 2024 by opening a location in neighboring Valparaiso. The 8,000-square-foot Emergency Department is open 24/7 at St. Mary Medical Center Outpatient Center, 3800 St. Mary Drive.

“Due to tremendous support and growth at our Valparaiso facility, we expanded our services to better serve our community,” said Janice Ryba, CEO of St. Mary Medical Center.

Healthcare providers accept patients on a walk-in basis, no appointment needed, at five immediate Care locations across Northwest Indiana:

- Powers Health Immediate Care, 10215 Broadway, Crown Point
- Powers Health Immediate Care, 10240 Calumet Ave., Munster
- Powers Health Immediate Care, 7651 Harvest Drive, Schererville
- Powers Health Immediate Care, 9660 Wicker Ave., St. John
- Powers Health Immediate Care, 1451 W. Morthland Drive, Valparaiso

Medical history is an important consideration when deciding between an emergency department or an immediate care center. People dealing with a severe chronic medical illness, are immunocompromised or frequently hospitalized are more likely to require care at an emergency department.

While emergency departments offer a broader range of services, the Immediate Care Centers of Powers Health are equipped and staffed with healthcare providers who are able to test, diagnose and treat patients for a wide scope of conditions.

The state-of-the-art facilities offer laboratory testing as well as a variety of medical imaging. With fully equipped, spacious exam rooms and experienced physicians specialized in family, internal and emergency medicine, Powers Health is ready and willing to take care of your urgent healthcare needs. ■



At Top: Celebrating the expansion of St. Catherine Hospital Emergency Department are, from left, **Dillon Barron**, MD, medical director of St. Catherine Hospital Emergency Department; **Samantha Hall**, nurse manager of St. Catherine Hospital Emergency Department; **Julie Latta**, CFO/vice president of Finance; **Leo Correa**, CEO of St. Catherine Hospital; **Edward Williams**, president of St. Catherine Hospital Board of Directors; **Nina Stur**, chief nursing officer/vice president of Patient Care Services of St. Catherine Hospital; **Donald P. Fesko**, president and CEO of Powers Health; and **Alan Kumar**, MD, COO of Powers Health.

Lower Photo: From left: **David Otte**, vice president of Engineering and Support Services; **Kimberly Sgouroudis**, vice president of Patient Care Services and chief nursing officer for St. Mary Medical Center; **Donald P. Fesko**, president and CEO of Powers Health; **Ken Krupinski**, president of the St. Mary Medical Center Board of Directors; **Janice Ryba**, CEO of St. Mary Medical Center; **Guneesh Saluja**, MD, medical director for Emergency Services at St. Mary Medical Center; **Frankie Fesko**, chairwoman of the Board of Community Foundation of Northwest Indiana; **Jon Costas**, mayor of Valparaiso; and **Alan Kumar, MD**, chief operating officer of Powers Health, stand in the ambulance bay of the St. Mary Medical Center Emergency Department in Valparaiso.

For more information about emergency and immediate care at Powers Health, visit PowersHealth.org/emergency-HC-fall25.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE



Mario
Lopez



Your
School
Nurse



Flu Season
Ahead!



Gut
Health

Your Gut, Your Guide:

How Digestive Health Shapes Immunity, Mood and More



YOUR GUT IS MORE THAN just a place where food is digested; it's a critical command center for your immune system, mood regulation and even chronic disease prevention. The gut microbiome — the trillions of bacteria, fungi and viruses living in your digestive tract — is one of the most important ecosystems in the human body.

Why Gut Health Matters

Around 70% of your immune system resides in the gut. A diverse microbiome helps your body recognize harmful invaders and mount a proper immune response. It also supports the production of short-chain fatty acids, which fight inflammation and protect the gut lining.

A disrupted microbiome, on the other hand, can contribute to conditions like:

- Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)
- Obesity
- Type 2 diabetes
- Autoimmune disorders
- Mood disorders like anxiety and depression

The gut-brain axis — the communication pathway between your digestive tract and brain — means your mental health is closely tied to your gut environment.

How to Strengthen Gut Health

1. Eat More Fiber

Aim for 25–30 grams of fiber daily. Fiber feeds beneficial bacteria and promotes regularity: think fruits, vegetables, whole grains and legumes.

2. Include Fermented Foods

Yogurt, kefir, sauerkraut, kimchi and kombucha contain natural probiotics that increase good bacteria in your gut.

3. Limit Sugar and Processed Foods

A high-sugar diet can feed harmful bacteria and yeast in the gut. Choose whole, nutrient-rich foods instead.

4. Consider a Probiotic (with Guidance)

Talk with your provider before starting any supplement. Not all probiotics are created equal, and the best type depends on your individual health needs.

5. Stay Hydrated and Sleep Well

Dehydration and poor sleep can throw off gut balance. Consistent routines support gut rhythm and overall digestive health.

By taking care of your gut, you're investing in long-term immunity, inflammation control and even a better mood. It's prevention from the inside out.