

# Desert Health®

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January/February 2025

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As humans, we like our world in order. We move forward in perpetual motion accomplishing tasks, making plans and watching all our hard work come to fruition. When we take time to appreciate it all, we often smile with a sense of inner peace and security. We feel warm, happy and in control.

But what happens when the universe throws us curve balls that interrupt our best laid plans?

Many of us jump into "fix it" mode. Frustration, disappointment and anger overpower our sense of peace and security and can cause us to react defensively. We yell at our computer and reply in all caps. We call the service provider and demand change. We have frank discussions with family members and move forward with a disgruntled sense of dissatisfaction. These negative feelings may last a day, or linger for long periods of time, and can leave us feeling that life is no fun.

We all know that one thing we can count on is change. However, accepting that fact isn't always easy.

When you consider that we are one small peg in our interconnected universe, you start to question how much control we really have. Maybe this vantage point can start to shift our thinking and we can begin to see unwanted interruptions as opportunities to expand our thinking. Instead of reacting with conviction that your plan is the only plan, maybe pause to look for the silver lining and see that something more might be unfolding.

Fifteen years ago, I had an idea for a health publication and enthusiastically called someone who could easily make it happen. When he didn't return my calls, I became frustrated, decided to do it myself, and *Desert Health* was born. I recently met him for the first time and thanked him profusely.

Next time your perfect world starts to tilt, remember the words of author and educator Charles R. Swindoll, "Life is 10 percent what happens to you, and 90 percent the way you react."

Editorial by founder/publisher Lauren Del Sarto

## A Calm Space on Campus

CV High creates Zen garden for students and staff

By Wendy Fink

Coachella Valley High School (CVHS) is the first school in the valley to provide students with a Zen garden, a place of calm and a respite from daily stresses and distractions. The garden was officially unveiled on Nov. 20 and is an extension of the high school's wellness center, one of seven in CVUSD. These wellness centers were implemented after Covid-19 in response to rising statistics of students experiencing depression, anxiety, and other issues impacting their attendance and behavior.

Both the wellness centers and Zen garden were dreams of Biological Sciences Educator and Wellness Specialist Jason Tate, a biologist and Certified Functional Medicine Health Coach. He wanted students to have a space where they feel seen, understood and safe, and can receive immediate support and tools for self-care strategies. He also wanted a designated place where they could pause, meditate and let go of daily stresses.

Coordinator of Child Welfare for CVUSD Megan Choate Ramirez, M.Ed., who worked closely with Tate on the implementation of the wellness centers, shared, "Our program teaches students to be aware of their own mental and emotional states. They are taught to identify triggers that set off certain behaviors or emotional reactions, and coping skills

and strategies to self-regulate once they've been triggered in order to get back to academics."

Since the wellness centers opened in 2021 and 2022, the district has seen a dramatic decrease in behavioral incidents, with suspensions dropping 59 percent at CVHS and an average of 55 percent across the district.

"Students are also taught that asking for help in conflict resolution and repairing harm is part of social-emotional learning. Our recidivism rate has significantly dropped because they learn from their mistakes and aren't repeating the same behaviors," adds Ramirez.

Tate sees about 250 students a month at the CVHS wellness center. "It's an open-door, open-arms, open-heart policy," he says, adding that the Zen garden offers solidarity and a connection with nature. "I came to CVHS because there's so much life here; all the trees and the birds, the beautiful views of the mountains. Having a safe, outdoor space for reflection is so important."

The Zen garden was custom built and professionally landscaped, everything within it carefully and intentionally planned by Tate. It has two large water features creating a calming soundscape, flagstones throughout and hand-

Continued on page 18

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(See page 14 for more)

## Your Team To Fight Cancer

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# Thank You for 15 Years!

Gratitude, wonder and pride are the foremost feelings I carry into the new year as we celebrate *Desert Health's* 15th anniversary.

I am grateful for the community we have built through *Desert Health*. Many of our supporting advertisers, editorial contributors and team members have been with us from the start with other treasured partners joining us along the way. Readers follow and share stories of the impact we have made in their lives. We would not be here without each of you who continue to make this publication possible.

Each edition of *Desert Health* still inspires awe and wonder. It always seems to organically come together with common threads throughout. This edition in particular instills care for ourselves and each other as a community, encouraging us to come together to connect, love and learn.

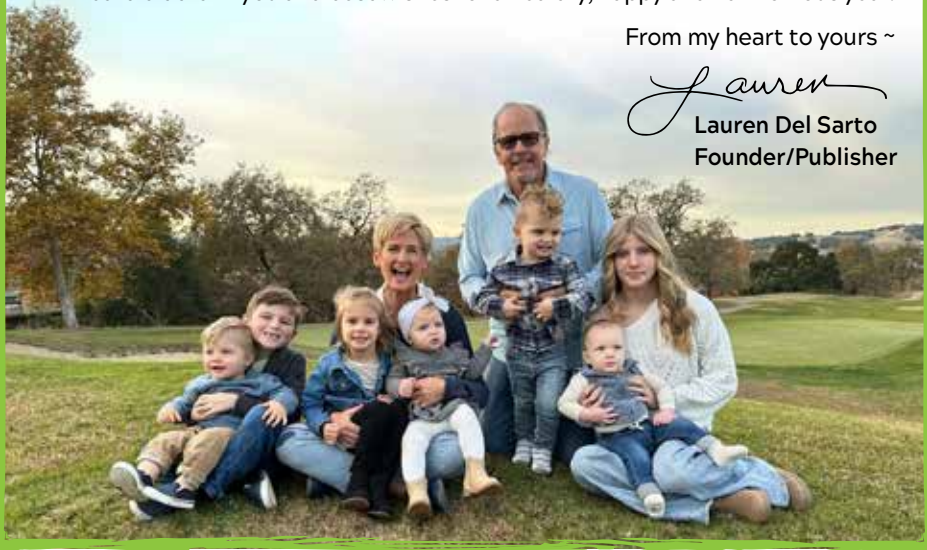
I am proud that we are accomplishing our original goals of uniting our valley's medical and natural health communities, and encouraging readers to be their own health advocates through education. The shifts are intrinsic and we see them evolving more each year.

As we continue to grow together, let's be grateful for the many blessings in our lives - from our community's efforts to make living well a priority, to the people who make living life more meaningful (like our seven incredible grandchildren below ❤️).

A heartfelt thank you and best wishes for a healthy, happy and harmonious year.

From my heart to yours ~

*Lauren*  
Lauren Del Sarto  
Founder/Publisher



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## Your Symptoms Are Helping You

*Our bodies are built to help us heal*

Joseph E. Scherger, MD, MPH

Winter is the season for many viral infections that cause congestion, cough and sometimes fever. We spend a fortune treating these symptoms, believing and hoping the medications are actually helping us overcome the infection. The truth is they are not. Most medications for congestion, cough and fever are counterproductive, preventing our body from eliminating the offending virus and may be prolonging the illness.

In her exceptional book, "The Anti-Viral Gut: Tackling Pathogens from the Inside Out," integrative gastroenterologist Robynne Chutkan, MD, describes how our bodies respond and naturally eliminate viral infections. Nasal and sinus congestion have the benefit of washing out the viral particles. I do not take or recommend medications to treat these symptoms, but instead, I will blow my nose and use a saline nasal spray to wash the nasal passages and sinus openings and eliminate the virus.

Medications can have serious side effects, especially in seniors. Over-the-counter (OTC) decongestants are known to elevate blood pressure and interfere with sleep while OTC antihistamines can cause dry mouth, create heart rhythm problems and worsen balance. Furthermore, the anticholinergic effects of antihistamines used regularly are associated with cognitive decline and dementia. Antibiotics for viral infections upset the gut microbiome and can require months to recover. Some expectorants (Mucinex, Robitussin) may help a little and appear to have minimal side effects, but overall, we should let nature do its work to overcome viruses efficiently.

The purpose of a cough is to keep the lungs clear. That expression resonates

with me often. A viral cold may become bronchitis, inflammation of the airways, or pneumonia, an infection in the lungs, if we overly suppress our cough defense mechanism with pain relievers like codeine. Coughing and sneezing help to expel the virus. Just remember to be courteous and cover your cough and sneezes in public.

Viruses are heat sensitive and our bodies work to destroy them by developing a fever. Yes, fevers are good for us, including children. I despair when we attack a fever with medications like Tylenol or Ibuprofen. A fever of 104 can be a red flag for a bacterial or serious viral infection, or a reaction to medication, but on their own, they are not dangerous. If you have a sick child who develops

fevers easily, you may have tried to treat this with a combination of Tylenol and Advil every two hours in a desire to help. Dr. Chutkan describes how this cultural practice may be harmful by delaying or preventing the body from shedding the virus.

For adults, using heat such as a sauna or red light therapy may be more helpful in countering a viral infection, and instead of bundling up when you have a fever, dress lightly to let your body expel the heat.

Other adult alternatives to medications are some supplements that have antiviral benefits, including zinc up to 25 mg, vitamin C up to 1000 mg, vitamin D3 2000-5000 units (all my patients take this with vitamin K2 for bone health) and black elderberry syrup. These do not disrupt the body's defenses.

The human body has powerful mechanisms in place designed to fight off illness and keep us healthy. By learning more about this vital

*Continued on page 6*

**"Using heat such as a sauna or red light therapy may be more helpful [than medications] in countering a viral infection."**

**- Joseph Scherger, MD**

## Urgent Call for Volunteer Advocates for Boys in Foster Care

*Compliments of Voices for Children*

Research has proven the benefits of a positive, reliable adult male figure in boys' lives – but in Riverside County, only a small fraction of the boys who need these role models have them. To this end, Voices for Children is urgently calling for compassionate and empathetic men in Riverside County to step up and become volunteer Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs).

Voices for Children trains volunteer CASAs to support youth in foster care as these children navigate an often confusing and frightening time in their lives, advocating for their needs to the court. Often, these children have suffered major abuse and trauma and do not have a reliable male figure or positive male role model in their lives. They need good experiences with men who will keep them safe, and CASAs provide that. CASA volunteers do not require any particular professional background, only a willingness to be trained and to show up for their case child.

In Riverside County, about 49 percent of the 5,900 children in foster care annually are boys, but only 17 percent of CASA advocates are male. Currently, 55 boys in Riverside County are waiting for an advocate to be there for them, and more are entering foster care daily. There is a particularly urgent need for men, especially men of color and those who are bilingual in Spanish and English. Those who are located in more rural areas across the county are also encouraged to consider becoming a CASA, as children in foster care in these areas often must wait longer for a CASA advocate to speak up for their needs.



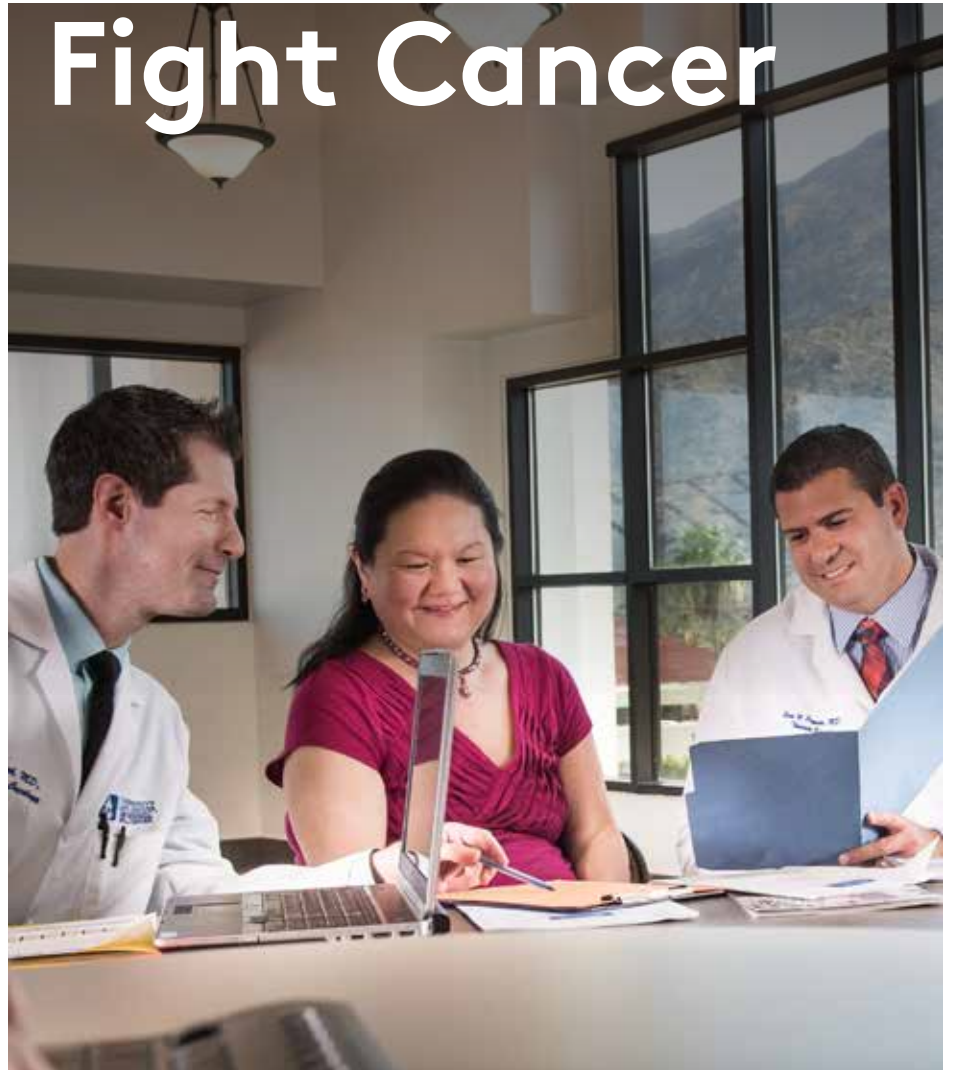
CASA volunteer José with a youth he has served through Voices for Children

"We need men in Riverside County to speak up for boys in foster care now," said President and CEO of Voices for Children Jessica Muñoz, Esq., MFS. "Volunteering as a CASA is a concrete, actionable way to make a difference in the lives of children in your community. If you are looking for a way to give back, here is how you can step up now. Whether you are advocating in court, talking to a child's teacher, or doing simple things like teaching a child to ride a bike or cheering them on from the bleachers at sports games, your influence has a huge potential payoff for future generations."

If you are able to give of your time, we encourage you to consider becoming a CASA. This small act of giving can have a life-changing effect on a young boy in need.

To learn more about becoming a CASA in Riverside County, visit [www.speakupnow.org](http://www.speakupnow.org).

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# Redirecting Relationships from Disasters to Masters

By Susan Murphy, PhD

My favorite psychologist, John Gottman, PhD, has studied relationships throughout his career. In his "Love Lab," the world's first couple's laboratory which opened in 1986 at the University of Washington, he has studied over 3,000 couples. Because of this, he can predict within 15 minutes of an argument which marriages will end in divorce within the next six years. He puts the couples into one of two categories, either "Masters" or "Disasters," and his predictions have had a 91 percent success rate.

As he outlines in his *New York Times* bestseller, "The Seven Principles of Making Marriage Work," Gottman has seen four communication habits that increase the likelihood of divorce: criticism, defensiveness, contempt and stonewalling.

He calls these behaviors the "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse," in reference to the Bible's Book of Revelations where conquest, war, hunger and death signal the end of times. However, Gottman's four horsemen – criticism, defensiveness, contempt and stonewalling – signal the end of times for a relationship.

Though most people use these habits from time to time in their relationships, the key is to recognize their use, quickly make repairs, and work toward using them less.

Let's take a deeper look at Gottman's four horsemen, the behaviors most likely to damage a relationship:

**Criticism** is the act of noticing a problem within your relationship and turning it into a commentary of your partner's character. Criticism is different from a complaint as a complaint focuses on the actual issue and can be helpful in dealing with resentment over time.

- An example of a complaint: "I am so tired at the end of the day, and it is frustrating for me to encounter a sink full of dirty dishes!"
- An example of criticism: "Why do you always leave the dishes in the sink? Once again, you never care about me and how tired I am!"

The complaint focuses on the problem – the dirty dishes – while criticism turns the partner into the problem. Once that happens, your partner will probably respond defensively and the conversation may escalate into conflict.

**Defensiveness** is a reaction to perceived criticism and escalates conflict rather than resolving it. A defensive person may react to the dirty dishes by:

- Seeing themselves as a victim: "You are always critical of me and never notice all the things I do right."
- Counter-criticizing: "I'll do the dishes when you start cleaning up the dog droppings in the yard. It's a mess."
- Overexplaining: "I started to do the dishes and the phone rang. Next, I found we are out of detergent and added it to the shopping list. Then I got interrupted by..."

**Contempt** is perhaps the most corrosive of Gottman's four horsemen and can manifest as sarcasm, cynicism or name-calling. It is fueled by simmering negative thoughts about your partner that then lead to using shame and mean-spirited

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### Coachella Valley's Health Care Industry

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### Students Get Psyched for Behavioral Health Careers

By Kim McNulty

Behavioral health professionals, college professors and alumni from College of the Desert (COD) and California State University, San Bernardino Palm Desert (CSUSB), came together on Nov. 12 to inspire 200 students from six local high schools to pursue careers in health care, especially behavioral health and social work.

The event, "Let's Get Psyched!" was presented by Riverside University Health Systems - Behavioral Health (RUHS-BH), CSUSB, COD and OneFuture Coachella Valley's behavioral health alignment team. Nisha Elliot, workforce education training manager for RUHS-BH, was the charismatic emcee, skillfully highlighting the wide variety of careers awaiting students and the positive impact they can make as behavioral health practitioners.


The event kicked off by introducing students to ikigai, a Japanese concept for discovering your purpose by thinking about what you love, what you're good at, what the world needs and what you can get paid for. This theme was woven into presentations throughout the day as students toured CSUSB's nursing and kinesiology labs and met college faculty in psychology, child development, social work and nursing street medicine.

Students also heard from COD and CSUSB alumni who shared their behavioral health career journeys and what it's like to now be working at places like Eisenhower Health and RUHS-BH. Presenters shared that there are medical positions in mental health like psychiatrist (MD), nurse practitioner (NP), and psychiatric technician, as well as allied mental health positions like psychologist (PhD, PsyD), licensed clinical therapist (LCSW, LMFT, LPCC), peer support specialist and family advocate.

Students surveyed after the event said they found it valuable. One student shared, "I learned there are so many other fields related to psychology beyond therapy, and there are different psychologists needed in different industries including schools, districts, clinics and social work. It helped me discover other jobs I could pursue revolving around psychology, which is my preferred field."

"I was especially inspired by one person describing their journey," expressed another student. "They started their career later in life, and if someone had told them this was possible 10 years earlier when their life was falling apart, they wouldn't have believed them. That idea stuck with me, that, regardless of hard times, you should always keep going and should never give up."

Learn more about the event by visiting <https://bit.ly/GetPsychedCV>. For more information on OneFuture Coachella Valley, visit [www.onefuturecv.org](http://www.onefuturecv.org) or call (760) 625.0422.



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**BLUE ZONES PROJECT**  
Community News

**Blue Zones Project Palm Springs and Blue Zones Project Coachella Announce Local Leadership and Hiring Opportunities**

Blue Zones Project, a first-of-its-kind population health initiative, is making exciting progress in Riverside County with the announcement of its local leadership for Palm Springs and Coachella. Geoff Kors, former Palm Springs mayor and city councilmember, has been appointed executive director for Blue Zones Project Palm Springs, while Angela Zepeda, recently re-elected Coachella city clerk and long-time advocate for community well-being, will lead as executive director for Blue Zones Project Coachella.



Geoff Kors

This development follows years of community anticipation and planning. In our May/June 2023 edition, *Desert Health* detailed the Blue Zones Project's feasibility assessment for Riverside County, which culminated in a total of five Blue Zones initiatives simultaneously launching in Riverside, Banning, Coachella and Palm Springs, while Mead Valley began a policy-focused Blue Zones Activate initiative. This strategy was devised for maximum impact on the county.

With sponsorship from Inland Empire Health Plan (IEHP), IEHP Foundation, Eisenhower Health, Kaiser Permanente, Molina Healthcare, Riverside University Health System-Public Health, and Riverside County, this evidence-based initiative is designed to transform the environments where people live, work, learn and play and lead to measurable improvements in community well-being, economic vitality and resilience.



Angela Zepeda

As executive directors, Kors and Zepeda will guide their respective communities in implementing policies and programs rooted in Blue Zones evidence-based principles. These efforts will focus on promoting active living, improving access to healthy foods, fostering social connections and addressing health disparities.

Kors shared, "The City of Palm Springs has established goals of increasing access and opportunity, improving the health and happiness of residents, and incorporating diversity, equity, and inclusion and sustainability goals into all areas of government policy. This project does not simply align with these goals, but supports and furthers them as it will reduce health disparities, increase active transportation options, improve parks and recreation, and address longstanding issues such as access to healthy food. This significant investment in creating community-wide change will have a long-term impact on our residents. By bringing resources and a proven program to create change, this collaboration is truly a gift to our communities."

*Continued on page 6*



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## Local Kinesiology Course Creates Intergenerational Connection

By Sarah L. Dunn, PhD, and Nicole Dabbs, PhD

Earlier this year, students majoring in kinesiology at California State University, San Bernardino Palm Desert (CSUSB) had the unique opportunity to enroll in two courses, Physical Activity and Aging, and Exercise Testing and Prescription. These courses allowed students to interact and connect with adult community members in the Coachella Valley over a three-week experience titled, "Well-Seasoned: Understanding and Managing Your Maturing Health."



A kinesiology student assesses blood pressure for a community member.

The time spent in the classroom provided opportunities for both generations to learn more about aging and the impact it has on cognition, motor control, bone, muscle, metabolism, and the cardiovascular and respiratory systems. Students met in small groups with community members, much like a private health consultation, to discuss the community members' overall health and wellness. Additionally, they assessed and prescribed exercise to keep the adults moving and staying fit in order to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

This program was seen as a positive, life-long learning experience for both the students and the older adults. The collaboration delivered unique and meaningful activities in the classroom aimed at improving functional performance and quality of life for all involved.

The program was designed to educate, assess and address aging health and wellness through the following modules:

- **Natural Aging Process** - Learning about bone, muscle and related bodily systems (heart, lungs, brain, etc.)
- **Assessment** - Checking current health and wellness status and behaviors
- **Personalized Prevention** - Discussing practical ways to improve and maintain health while minimizing disease risk

This spring semester, students enrolled in kinesiology courses at CSUSB's Palm Desert campus will again have the opportunity to match up with adult community members interested in discussing their health and wellness with students. These unique intergenerational partnerships exist to help transform students' understanding in the classroom and leave a lasting impression on all who take part.

The kinesiology department will be seeking volunteers from the community to take part and all who are interested in contributing their time are encouraged to reach out.

The CSUSB Palm Desert campus is dedicated to providing a transformative educational experience in the Coachella Valley. With a focus on academic excellence and community engagement, the campus offers undergraduate and graduate degree programs designed to meet the diverse needs of its students and the region.

To volunteer to take part in the program, please contact Professor of Kinesiology Sarah L. Dunn, PhD, at [sarah.dunn@csusb.edu](mailto:sarah.dunn@csusb.edu). Nicole Dabbs, PhD, is chair of the CSUSB kinesiology department. For more information about the CSUSB kinesiology program, visit [www.csusb.edu/kinesiology](http://www.csusb.edu/kinesiology).



Students and community members enjoy their time during the intergenerational visits.

Your Symptoms Are Helping You

Continued from page 3

information, we can give ourselves the best chance at health for years to come. As Chutkan writes:

Our bodies have an amazing capacity to wage war on viruses. We can inactivate them with stomach acid, we can trap and expel them in mucus, and we can halt their replication with a fever. These are incredibly well-designed systems that, when allowed to function properly without interference, can keep you safe in the face of harmful viral exposure. When you add in the powerful virus-fighting capacity of your army of gut bacteria, plus the battalions of immune cells they are able to muster, it truly is an impressive array of anti-viral capabilities.

Dr. Scherger is the founder of Restore Health Disease Reversal in Indian Wells, a clinic dedicated to weight loss and reversing chronic medical conditions. To schedule a consultation, call (760) 898.9663 or visit [www.restorehealth.me](http://www.restorehealth.me).

Blue Zones Project

Continued from page 5

Zepeda echoed his sentiment, adding, "Coachella has long been a city of vision and resilience, and our commitment to health and wellness is woven into the fabric of our general plan. We envision a future where every resident thrives physically, emotionally and spiritually. Blue Zones Project aligns perfectly with our efforts to create family-friendly neighborhoods, expand active transportation options, ensure access to nutritious food and provide safe, welcoming public spaces. By addressing health disparities and fostering equity, we are building a community where every individual has the opportunity to live a better, longer life – grounded in the strength of our history and inspired by the promise of our future."

The Blue Zones Project is now entering its foundation phase, building local teams and creating blueprints for implementation. This effort marks the beginning of a multi-year collaboration aimed at improving community well-being and advancing health equity. To support these transformative initiatives, Blue Zones Project is actively hiring full-time staff for both Palm Springs and Coachella.

Stay tuned for updates in upcoming editions as *Desert Health* continues to cover the progress of this inspiring project. With strong leadership, community engagement, and the support of key sponsors, Palm Springs and Coachella are set to embark on a journey toward a healthier, more vibrant future.

Residents interested in joining the Blue Zones Project teams in Palm Springs and Coachella can learn more about available opportunities at [www.bluezones.com/careers](http://www.bluezones.com/careers).





## Elevate Every Day

By Amy Austin, PSYD, LMFT

I believe our purpose on Earth is to elevate our positive experiences and lift each other up in an effort to make this world a better place. We can empower ourselves to do that. It's not always easy and may seem daunting at times, but any challenges we face can serve as opportunities. Even just one small step could ripple into a positive, transformative, generational change. And it's up to us.

So, how can we better ourselves collectively – despite our differences? I think the first step is to recognize our individual attributes, no matter how big or small, and share our strengths with another. As one of the most influential Jewish leaders of the 20th century, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, famously taught, “If all you know is aleph, teach aleph.” Aleph is the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet; so, even if you only know the letter “A,” you have something of value to offer.



*Elevating our own experiences can help elevate the experiences of others.*

**Be a light!** Author and therapist Shalvi Weissman said, “A candle in the sunshine is useless while a candle in the dark is a powerful tool.” It may be hard to comprehend how we can effect positive change as just one individual, but with a positive mindset and one good deed at a time, it is more than possible.

**Perform random acts of kindness every day.** Give of your time and money. Keep a charity box at home where children can put a penny in every day to learn the importance of giving. As Gandhi famously said, “If we could change ourselves, the tendencies in the world would also change.”

**Be willing to demonstrate empathy.** The only thing we get out of being right is being right. Showing compassion and empathy can create a mindset of unconditional, positive regard, prizing another as you prize yourself.

**Offer positives to others acknowledging their strengths.** Be interested as well as interesting. There is a quote in the Talmud, a central religious text for Judaism, that posits, when you pray for someone else you are given the blessing first.

Abigail Fagan, curator of the Museum of Everyday Life, reflects on stairs and how each step we take in life contributes to the whole. “I’m looking at my stairs right now... It’s not an object you can pick up and hold in your hand, but I think it’s incredible. It affords us the ability to go up and down easily. In that, there are abstract things like math, carpentry, weight-bearing loads and physics. There’s also beauty when you think of how many thousands have gone up and down, rushing or plodding, a baby crawling. The tread is worn in the middle. This thing is holding a record of our experience. It seems so generous.”

We have the power to empower ourselves to make this world a better place. When we elevate our own life experiences and the experiences of others, we just may start to see more clearly the many miracles that happen every day. All we have to do is look.

*Dr. Amy Austin is a licensed marriage and family therapist (MFC#41252) and doctor of clinical psychology in Rancho Mirage. She can be reached at (760) 774.0047.*

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## Living Wellness

with Jennifer Di Francesco



### To Human Is Hard

Daily, the phrase "To human is hard" enters my thoughts. This reality becomes even weightier with Oxford Dictionary's 2024 word of the year, "brain rot," defined as a "supposed deterioration of a person's mental or intellectual state, especially from consuming too much trivial online content." Just one more complexity to work to ward off as we navigate the new year.

As humans, we carry around a lot of baggage: insecurities, assumptions, expectations, old wounds, and now brain rot. We can reduce the list by diving deep and doing some "hard human work" in an attempt to overcome and achieve more balance and peace.

Some of the hardest parts of life's path present themselves when we don't do the hard human work. Often, we decide to put unaddressed issues on the backburner, and other times we don't even realize they are there – until they are.

Regardless of unaddressed life management, we must feel everything, be vulnerable and love ourselves through all the feelings. Because to be human is to ache with both sorrow and joy.

The adage that life is 10,000 joys and 10,000 sorrows is a good reminder. The more we can accept our messy human lives, the more we can bring kindness to ourselves and others. Choosing to stop fighting who we are helps us grow into who we are fully meant to be.

In the poem, "The Guest House," the ancient poet Rumi wrote: This being human is a guest house. Every morning a new arrival. A joy, a depression, a meanness, some momentary awareness comes as an unexpected visitor. Welcome and entertain them all!

Our ability to remain receptive to our ever-changing guest house rests in taking cues from nature. To combat what we perceive as "hard," we can look for the "soft." Soft invites acceptance. Pause and take in your environment without reacting to it or looking for short-term gain, which is often not as rewarding as anticipated. We can look at trees that go dormant for long periods of time and appreciate transition, knowing we possess these same tendencies within. Similarly, a wildflower does not bloom every season and does not feel obligated to do so.

Recently, the non-vascular, spore-bearing land plant moss provided me with lessons. Moss uses the environment by absorbing CO2 and emitting oxygen. It reinforces earth by minimizing erosion and is strong enough to deteriorate stone. In many cultures, moss represents renewal, resilience and the interconnectedness of all living things. What a powerfully light, soft verdant teacher.

When challenged with the human experience, try this mantra: "Be soft like moss." This simple phrase can move us from a state of hard ego-posturing to soft, mindful receptivity, welcoming peace and openness.

May our lives be soft like moss as we work hard to be fully human.

Jennifer Di Francesco is a wellness explorer and desert adventurer and can be reached at [www.coachellabellaboho.com](http://www.coachellabellaboho.com).



Appreciating soft features of nature can help soften our mindset and open receptivity.

## East Meets West in Treating Shingles

By Diane Sheppard, PhD, LAc

Shingles is a brutally painful infection from the varicella-zoster virus known as chicken pox. As the acute infection from chicken pox fades, the virus remains dormant in the body, sleeping inside nerve cells. Later in life the virus can reactivate in the form of shingles.

The condition is most likely to develop in people with a weakened immune system, those receiving chemotherapy, or those over 50 years old who have been ill, under stress or experienced trauma.

When activated, shingles can cause burning, itching, stabbing, shooting or excruciating pain that patients often describe as "zingers." Then, within a week, a nasty rash may appear as a band of blisters or patches – little bumps filled with milky white pus. The rash is generally on one side of the body as the virus travels along specific nerve roots. It can occur anywhere on the body, but typically wraps around the torso or chest from the back to the breast, on the neck, or above and around the eyes.

The varicella-zoster virus is spread through direct skin-to-skin contact with the fluid that oozes from the open blisters. Those with shingles can't spread the disease to another person, but they can spread the chickenpox virus.

In the field of western medicine, shingles is treated with anti-viral medications such as valacyclovir (Valtrex) or acyclovir (Zovirax) and with gabapentin and opioids for nerve pain.

When I was studying to become a doctor of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), I worked in Guang'anmen Hospital, an intercostal neuralgia clinic in Beijing. There, I treated shingles, or "she chuan chuang," with treatments dating back to the Ming and Qing dynasties.

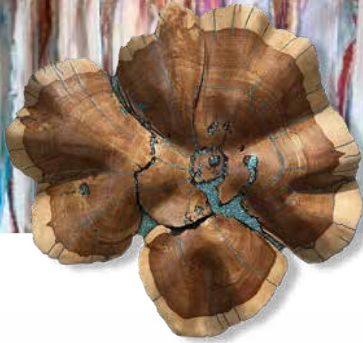
In TCM, shingles is treated with acupuncture combined with herbal concoctions. Examples of external herbal applications are Herba Polygoni Perfoliate, an annual flowering plant with anti-inflammatory and antiviral properties and sometimes licorice root.



Complementing western medicine with eastern therapies can assist in healing shingles.

Continued on page 15





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## A Healthy State of Mind

By Candice Nicole

January seems to scream “time for healthier habits!” Everywhere you turn, you hear advice on the latest trend certain to whip you into shape: Go vegan. Cut out carbs. Try high intensity training. Fast. Take up pickleball.

Is all of this advice truly motivating? How do you know what activity or diet is best for you? What change is actually going to make a difference?

In giving or receiving health advice, it’s important to remember every person on this planet is made up of differences – different body types, metabolisms, health conditions, mineral and vitamin needs and deficiencies, energy levels, food tastes and motivations – and what is right for one person may not be right for you.

However, there is one thing that all who succeed in gaining greater health have in common: a healthier state of mind.

Living your best health is not about trying one thing or another; it’s about committing to a healthier lifestyle that delivers positive improvements in the way you look, feel and live. Those improvements are the true motivators for long-term success.

I like to call it a “live-style” commitment, because it is something you live and breathe every day by choice. It may seem challenging at first, but living a healthy lifestyle is something you will come to love.

Changing your mindset starts with the little things. Gauge your feelings in each moment of your life whether with friends for coffee, a family dinner, on a phone call, reading a text, exercising, choosing a dish to eat, traveling, or caring for a child or parent. Stop and take note, “How am I feeling right now?” Does this thing, place, person, text, conversation, visit, food, bring me joy? Does it fill me up, help me grow, make me smile? Do I leave the experience with a positive feeling? A positive answer supports a positive state of mind while a negative answer may inspire motivation for change and healthier choices.

A healthy state of mind starts with each choice we make. Add things to your life that make you feel better without being detrimental to your overall health. Place high importance on your surroundings, relationships, foods, supplements, the faith that keeps you grounded, and exercise and hobbies that make your spirit soar. These are all absolutely, unconditionally necessary for a healthy life.

Remember, it’s not a race and change doesn’t happen overnight, but it does start with a healthier state of mind.

Candice Nicole is a health advocate and founder of HUmineral, a producer of plant nutrient mineral supplements. She can be reached at [info@HUmineral.com](mailto:info@HUmineral.com) or (818) 400.7657. For more information, visit [www.humineral.com](http://www.humineral.com).



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## Craniosacral Therapy for Dementia

Promising results for prevention and treatment

By Shari Jainuddin, NMD, BCB

Craniosacral therapy uses a gentle, non-invasive technique for a multitude of conditions, including the prevention and treatment of dementia. This treatment focuses on the cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) surrounding the brain and spinal cord (the central nervous system) and permeating the fascia. On its own, CSF is tightly regulated, released in a pulsing rhythm from ventricles in the brain and drained through the venous and lymphatic system, completely renewing itself 4 to 5 times each day. This action is strongest during sleep, when the brain “bathes” itself. CSF is critical for protection (shock absorption), delivery of nutrients and waste removal.<sup>1-3</sup>

A craniosacral practitioner uses light touch to feel (described as “listening to”) the craniosacral rhythm, assessing for restrictions of flow and movement. Various light touch techniques are then implemented to gently restore CSF flow and rebalance movement. This therapy is very calming to the nervous system and used to treat many conditions including chronic pain, migraines, traumatic brain injuries and concussions, anxiety and depression, digestive issues, TMJ and more. Research has shown that CST also has positive outcomes for patients with post-concussion syndrome (including improved memory) and dementia (reduced agitation and aggression).<sup>4,5</sup>

While a complete understanding of dementia processes is still being debated and researched, one common variable is chronic inflammation in the body that eventually leads to inflammation in the brain.<sup>6,7</sup> This source of inflammation is commonly associated with diabetes, referred to as “type 3 diabetes,” or other preexisting inflammatory diseases. In terms of epigenetics, chronic inflammation is a trigger for disease onset. Hence, reducing chronic inflammation has gained traction in the prevention and treatment of dementia and Alzheimer's disease (AD) – and this is where craniosacral therapy holds much promise.

Inflammation in the brain restricts the flow of CSF to certain areas, blocking the delivery of nutrients and removal of waste and thus allowing more damage to occur. Research shows a significant impairment in CSF flow in persons with dementia and AD.<sup>8-10</sup> Craniosacral therapy works to reduce inflammation by facilitating the flow, and subsequent renewal, of CSF; thus, enhancing delivery of nutrients and removal of waste. Because of this, it has become a therapy worthy of our attention for the prevention and treatment of dementia and AD.

Please note that craniosacral therapy should not be considered as a singular approach but should be included as part of a holistic health plan, one that also includes optimizing health and reducing chronic inflammation. (See “Anti-Inflammation: The Greatest Health Influencer,” *Desert Health*, July/Aug 2024).

*Dr. Shari Jainuddin is a naturopathic primary care doctor at One Life Naturopathic. She has conducted research on Alzheimer's disease at the Feil Family Brain & Mind Research Institute at Weill Cornell Medical College and offers biofeedback training and craniosacral therapy. For more information, call (442) 256.5963 or visit [www.onelifenaturopathic.org](http://www.onelifenaturopathic.org).*

References available upon request.

## Healthy Dreams of Snakes

By Kathleen O'Keefe-Kanavos

How do dreams, snakes and medicine relate to the new year? Let's take a look back as we move forward into 2025.

On Jan. 29, we close the door to the Chinese Year of the Dragon and open the door to the Year of the Wood Snake, representing introspection, intuition and adaptability.

The snake is also a universal, timeless symbol that shows up in our dreams and dreams of snakes have been documented for centuries. Often, snakes have symbolized healing because they shed and regenerate skin, a type of deathless rebirth. They are among the top three to five animals that appear in dreams, representing different meanings to cultures around the world.

For example, in India, a kundalini snake dream may be considered a mystical doorway to an awakening energy shift. The kundalini theory, an Eastern spiritual concept of enlightenment, is that kundalini is a serpent-like energy coiled up at the base of the spine and is believed to assist in human evolution. If you have this dream with one snakehead or many, it is said that you may raise your level of wisdom.

In ancient times, to dream of a snake was to be healed by the dream. Because of this, there are two different snake symbols used in the field of medicine. The ancient Aesculapius staff has one snake while the modern caduceus staff has two. The image of a single snake around a staff is tied to Asclepius, the Greek god of medicine, who presided over the Asclepieion dream and healing temple in Greece. Hippocrates, father of Western Medicine, claimed to be a direct descendant of Aesculapius and today, the Hippocratic Oath begins, “I swear by Apollo, the physician, and

by Aesculapius...” The ancient staff of Aesculapius is the current American Medical Association logo. The U.S. Army Medical Corps also adopted the two-snake caduceus staff as its insignia in 1902.

Although the symbols have shifted, the message remains the same: snakes have a connection to health.

Snake dreams may also mean financial health. A client shared her dream which took place around a boardroom table. Coiled in the center was a large brown, two-headed rattlesnake. One face was always on her while the other face scanned the partners. Each time someone spoke, the snake would rattle its tail and drown out the speaker. Upon awakening, the client decided not to invest in a business she was considering – a good decision as that venture ended up failing. The intuitive precognitive dream may have been a warning that helped save her finances.

As we enter a new year, it may be wise to embrace all dreams, even deadly two-headed rattlesnake nightmares. Who knows what we may learn when we turn inward and reflect on the symbols that show up in our dreams. In 2025, may the ancient force of the snake be with you.

*Kathleen O'Keefe-Kanavos of Rancho Mirage is a survivor, author, dream expert, speaker, TV/radio host/producer and has been featured on Dr. Oz and The Doctors. Her new book, “Dreams That Can Save Your Life,” is available now. For more information, visit [www.kathleenokeefekanvas.com](http://www.kathleenokeefekanvas.com).*

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## Nourishment: Beyond the End of Your Fork

By Alison Mullins, MS, CHHC, IAYT

When we think of nourishment, we tend to think of only food. What about nourishing the rest of ourselves? While we all try to eat healthy, make the right choices and stay balanced, we can falter from time to time and find ourselves trying to get back on track. Many of us set New Year's resolutions to this very ideal: "This year, I'm going to be healthier!"

As you set your resolution, I challenge you to look beyond your plate as nourishment goes far beyond what you put in your mouth. Food can be packed with nutrients that fuel and energize us, but so can other elements in our lives – our jobs, relationships, spiritual and emotional enrichment, physical activity, and what we read, watch and listen to. All of these things can either be superfoods, leaving us full, rich and ready for more, or junk foods, making us feel good in the moment but leaving us empty or depleted soon after.

Joy is a huge component of a nourished life. When you look at your life now, do you feel joy? Does your day-to-day schedule with lists and obligations make you feel happy? If the answer is no, you could easily surmise that your life is not fully nourished. However, if you flip that script to view obligatory acts as choices, you may begin to adopt a different perspective.

Just as we choose what we eat, we can choose nourishment from all of life's offerings. We can choose to read books and publications that feed our souls and our minds, listen to podcasts about living a purposeful life, or watch documentaries on growing our own food to maximize the nutritional offerings on our table. When we shift our thinking to see opportunities instead of obligations, activities become more nourishing and less depleting.

Let me share some simple examples. When paying bills, be grateful for that which you are buying and your ability to pay. If you are a parent to young children, use every opportunity to connect with them. When making their lunch, have them make yours with little input. I guarantee joy will meet your heart when you open the lunch to whatever your child has prepared.

If you have aging parents, engage them in meaningful conversation about their childhood rather than only asking how they feel or if they took their meds. Try not to focus the conversation on whether they are doing what you think is best for them. You'll be surprised what you both learn and may have a much more enjoyable time.

Looking deeper, are there areas in your life that may require action to change perspective? Perhaps a job or career change is in order, or a friendship has run its course. Maybe you need to deepen your education to further your career or seek professional guidance regarding a relationship. While these things may feel scary, they can also provide great nourishment as you make choices for the direction of your life. Much like choosing berries over pie for dessert, you are in control of what you put on your plate of life.

When your plate is full with nourishment, you awaken light and are ready to begin each day with excitement and anticipation. Believing you are worthy of such a life, and understanding where you may be lacking, is the first step to having a full plate with joy as the main dish.

Alison Mullins is a certified holistic life and health coach, yoga therapist, sound healer and founder of Coppermoon Rising. She can be reached at alison@coppermoonrising.com or www.coppermoonrising.com.



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## Planting Seeds and Chasing Dreams

By Judy Nemer Sklar

Another year. We made it! Every new year, we are hopeful that our most promising ideas await and our best lives are yet to come.

We reflect on the past year's joys, triumphs, heartbreaks and disappointments and look forward to the following chapters of our lives, hoping to gain more insight and experience as we move closer to becoming the people we strive to be.

We navigate our lives as if we are tending to a flower garden. We plant seeds and watch them grow, watering them when the soil is dry and offering them shade from the sun. Some flowers don't make it, others flourish, but we are grateful for the process and the beauty we have helped create.

I began planting seeds in my metaphorical garden as a child. My first love was the joy I found in reading books, imagining worlds I hoped to explore. It was magic. Equally, I loved art – the colors, the movement of the paint on paper, and the absolute pleasure I found in expressing myself. As I grew older, my love of learning, teaching and curiosity about the world grew.

You're never too young to plant seeds and discover what brings magic to your life, and you don't have to be an artist to do so. We are all born creative, and there is no better time than childhood to develop self-expression and curiosity.

Can you remember what you found magical as a child? Did you love music or dance, or look to the stars hoping to be an astronaut? Then, somewhere along your journey, did you put what you thought were fanciful notions to bed?

Often, my adult students tell me they have forgotten these "childish" dreams and pursued other goals, but deep in their hearts, they feel those childhood passions were the seeds of their gardens. I remind them that while I believe one is never too young to plant a garden, it is essential to remember that one is never too old.

No matter our age, we can always find new things to learn, create and explore. Perhaps revisit a childhood passion. Take a class online or preferably with others. As human beings, we feel better when we connect. Take a walk in nature. We are more creative outdoors, and our minds are more open to new ideas.

Why not tend to your garden this year? Develop a mission statement to guide you and point you in the direction you want to take. Below is mine from years ago. I am still planting seeds, hoping new flowers will grow for many years to come.

"Like an explosion of stars across the sky, like splattered paint, I keep moving and leaning into the creative process. I hope to inspire, create and continue learning from others, dazzle with colors, smile at whimsy, and always fall head over heels in love with art."

Judy Nemer Sklar is an expressive arts facilitator, artist, writer and owner of Creative Life Workshops for Health and Wellness. She can be reached at (760) 902.5467 or judy@judynemersklar.com.



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## Benefits of Infrared Sauna Therapy

By Cristal Salcido, ND

The body is wise, and sometimes, all it needs is a little help to stimulate its natural ability to heal. Infrared saunas can offer that assistance as they use gentle, radiant heat that penetrates the skin and delivers a host of therapeutic benefits. Unlike traditional saunas that rely on heated air, infrared saunas use biogenetic radiation to warm the body directly, making the experience more comfortable and effective.

One of the primary benefits of infrared saunas are their ability to promote detoxification. Sweating is one of the best ways for the body to eliminate toxins, and infrared saunas stimulate deep sweating by raising the core temperature. Sweating can help expel heavy metals, chemicals like solvents and pesticides, and other toxins that accumulate in our tissues due to environmental exposure and lifestyle factors. Additionally, infrared heat improves circulation, enhancing oxygen and nutrient delivery to cells while helping remove metabolic waste. It also supports cardiovascular health by mimicking the effects of moderate exercise, potentially lowering blood pressure and increasing heart rate variability.



Infrared sauna therapy can relax and rejuvenate.

Infrared saunas not only mimic physical activity, but they can also help with exertion recovery. The infrared heat penetrates muscles and joints, reducing stiffness and lactic acid buildup, increasing mobility and blood flow to areas in need of repair. For these same reasons, infrared saunas are particularly beneficial for those experiencing chronic pain such as arthritis or fibromyalgia.

As a natural intervention, infrared saunas can also help reduce mental and emotional stress by providing a serene environment to relax and reset. The gentle heat encourages the release of endorphins, our body's natural feel-good chemicals, and activates the parasympathetic nervous system, our rest-and-digest response. This can help counteract the effects of chronic stress, improving sleep quality and mental clarity.

Infrared saunas also promote healthier skin. The increased circulation stimulates collagen production and delivery of nutrients, supporting cellular regeneration. Sweating also helps cleanse the skin of impurities, reducing the appearance of acne and improving overall tone and texture. Therefore, regular infrared sauna therapy may contribute to a more youthful, glowing complexion.

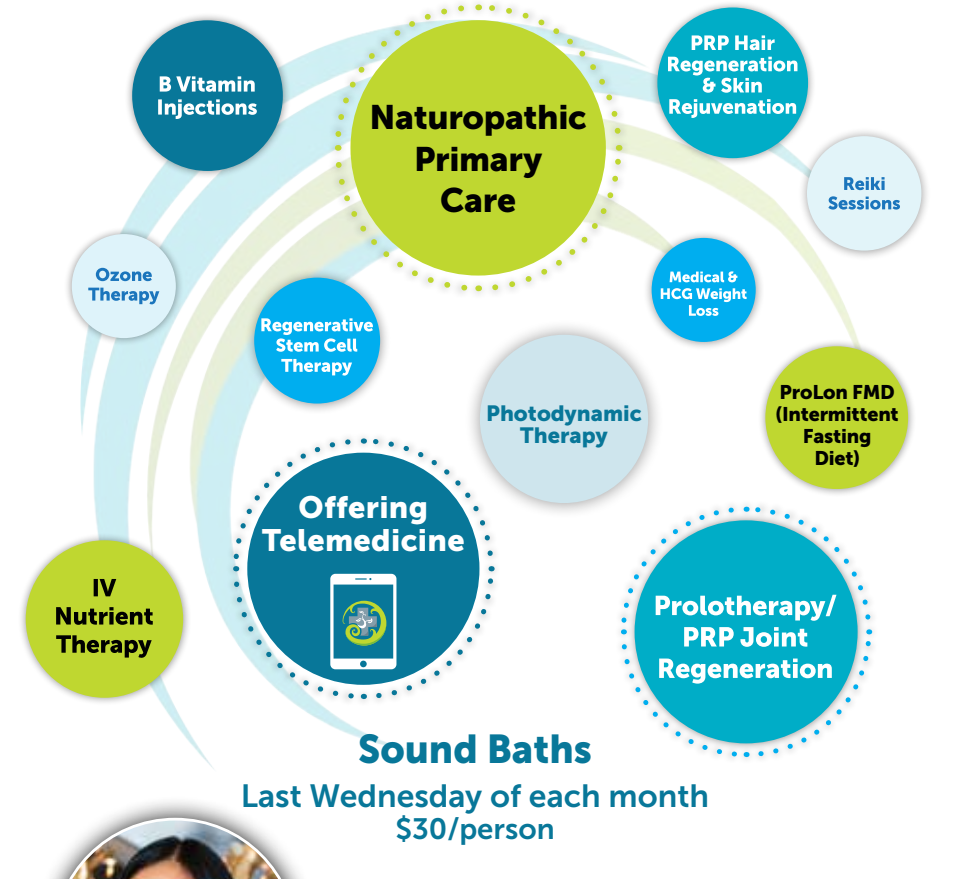
Incorporating infrared sauna therapy into your routine can be a transformative step toward better health. Whether you are looking to detoxify, manage pain, relieve stress or rejuvenate your skin, consider this gentle yet powerful therapy to support your body's inherent healing abilities. With regular use, the benefits of infrared saunas can support a healthier, more vibrant you.

Dr. Salcido is a primary care naturopathic doctor at Live Well Clinic. Her focus is functional psychiatry utilizing naturopathic principles to work on root causes of mental health imbalance. She can be reached at (760) 771.5970 or [www.livewellclinic.org](http://www.livewellclinic.org).

Sources: 1) <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/23833705/>; 2) <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10286597/>; 3) <https://ui.adsabs.harvard.edu/abs/2019InPhT.10202991C/abstract>




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## Your Best Health Handbook

By Lauren Del Sarto

The vast array of books on healthy foods, latest diets and proper habits can be overwhelming. They all seem to say something different and it's hard to know which recommendations are right for you.

What if you could hire a doctor to read them all and provide you with the best recommendations specific to your health?

Well, your personal assessment has arrived. Our valley's own Joseph E. Scherger, MD, has written a brief compilation of book reviews and the latest science in the field of functional medicine entitled "Restore Health: Disease Reversal" (2024).

After more than 40 years as a primary care physician working within "the system," Dr. Scherger became disenchanted with prescribing medications in an attempt to help patients who returned to his office again and again. He began studying the growing field of functional medicine, based on prescribing food and lifestyle changes instead of drugs, and became immersed in the field's science and life-saving results.

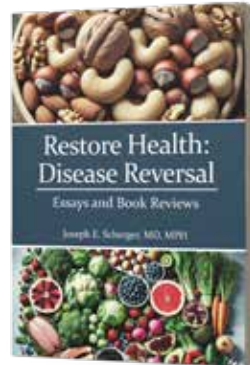
A prolific reader and educator, Scherger has spent much of his time learning and assessing nutritional science, and how the foods we eat affect specific medical conditions, overall well-being and longevity. Over the years, we have featured many of his assessments in *Desert Health* and he has now brought them together in his latest book.

He frequently reminds readers that most chronic diseases are reversible with a healthy diet and lifestyle. He has seen this with hundreds of his patients who have weaned off medications and reversed heart disease, type 2 diabetes, hyperlipidemia, cancer and more.

In "Restore Health," Scherger packs a plethora of invaluable information in 100 easy-to-read pages, including which books to read for what conditions; what, when and how to eat, sleep and extend longevity; lists of superfoods, recommended supplements, meal plans and more.

Whether you are starting on your path to greater wellness, or moving further along on your journey, you are certain to learn life-enhancing lessons from this brief yet comprehensive health handbook.

"Restore Health: Disease Reversal: Essays and Book Reviews" is available at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com). For more on Dr. Scherger and his online resources, visit [www.restorehealth.me](http://www.restorehealth.me). Lauren Del Sarto is founder/publisher of *Desert Health*.



## A New Era of Possibility Exploring Earth's frequency shift

By Delphine Channels

The world feels different lately, doesn't it? People are talking about rapid change, heightened emotions and a growing sense that something profound is happening – both within and around us. This conversation, particularly vibrant in spiritual communities, often centers around a concept known as the Earth's frequency shift. Some call it a journey toward the "fifth dimension." But what does this mean, and how might it affect us all?

**The science of resonance.** Every living being on Earth exists within a field of energy. Scientists have measured the Earth's natural frequency, known as the Schumann Resonance, which hums at approximately 7.83 Hz. This resonance is created by electromagnetic waves generated by lightning strikes and other atmospheric activities within the cavity between the Earth's surface and the ionosphere. For decades, this frequency has been considered a steady rhythm, much like the planet's heartbeat.<sup>1</sup>

In recent years, researchers have reported spikes and fluctuations in this frequency. While the science behind why this happens is still emerging, some interpret these shifts as a reflection of collective human consciousness – our thoughts, emotions and intentions aligning with the Earth's energetic field.<sup>2</sup>

Interestingly, research has suggested that the Schumann Resonance may influence human health and consciousness. A notable 2002 study by environmental scientist Neil Cherry, PhD, proposed that this resonance could serve as a biophysical mechanism affecting human well-being.<sup>3</sup> Cherry's research explored its synchronization with brain wave frequencies, as well as its potential role in regulating melatonin production, a hormone critical for sleep and stress management. Such findings offer a bridge between the physical and metaphysical, highlighting a potential interplay between Earth's energetic shifts and our inner worlds.

In the spiritual community, these changes are often described as part of a "dimensional shift." When this happens, humanity is said to move from the third dimension, characterized by separation and fear, into the fifth dimension, rooted in unity, love and higher awareness. While this may sound mystical, there is a message that can resonate universally: wide-scale changes usher in a time of transformation, where old systems and ways of thinking can be questioned, and new possibilities for how we live and connect can emerge.

When we experience major shifts, they invite us to let go of fear, scarcity and judgment and embrace higher-frequency emotions like compassion, gratitude and joy. Whether or not one sees this specific time in Earth's history as a dimensional leap, the call to live more consciously is a message we can all appreciate.

**A personal and collective opportunity.** What does this mean for the individual? As the Earth's energy changes, many people report feeling a range of physical and emotional effects. Some describe heightened intuition, vivid dreams or even physical sensations like fatigue or restlessness. Others feel drawn to simplify their lives, spend more time in nature, or deepen practices like meditation, breathwork or mindfulness.

On a collective level, a frequency shift offers an invitation to envision a brighter future. Imagine a world where we collaborate rather than compete, where empathy replaces judgment, and where humanity acts as stewards of the Earth rather than its conquerors. These shifts start within each of us, as we align our thoughts, actions and intentions with a more hopeful, harmonious vision.

Change is inevitable, but how we respond to it is our choice. By grounding ourselves in gratitude, focusing on connection and nurturing our well-being, we can navigate periods of transformation with greater ease and grace.

Whether you see this frequency shift as science, a dimensional shift or metaphor, this new year is a time to stay curious and open – to embrace the possibility that life is offering us an opportunity for growth, healing and collective evolution. As we align with these higher frequencies, perhaps we'll find that the shift we've been waiting for has been within us all along.

Delphine Channels is a life coach, host of the *Delphine's Circle* YouTube interview series (@DelphinesCircle) and founder of *Harmoneum.com*, an online community for coaching and daily practices launching in February 2025. [Delphine@Harmoneum.com](mailto:Delphine@Harmoneum.com).

References available upon request.





# Food Is Love

By Edie Jones-Poland, MD

When was the last time you prepared food for a loved one? Whether it was the favorite dish of a child returning home from college, fresh groceries and soup for a sick friend, or a celebratory feast to mark the new year, food is at the heart of relationships. It is a focal point when people gather because it does more than nourish our bodies – food nourishes our souls.

But what happens when our food choices no longer serve us? As a physician and health coach, I've witnessed firsthand how challenging it can be to change our eating habits. Food is far more than calories and macronutrients; it is deeply tied to our emotions, traditions and how we interact with those we love.

From our first breath, food is linked to love and care. As infants, being fed is one of the first ways we feel comfort; it's how we begin to form connections to our loved ones. As we grow, food becomes a way to celebrate milestones and show affection. I have a distinct memory of eating simple, nutritious meals around my grandmother's table while listening to Paul Harvey on the radio. I credit my healthy eating habits to her style of meal preparation. Our lifetime of experiences shapes our food choices and how we connect to others.

Because food is closely woven together with the culture that shapes our lives, it can be difficult to change eating habits. There is a mountain of evidence that shows food affects how we feel, and how we feel affects what we eat.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, the meaning we give to food may clash with our goals of adopting a healthier lifestyle. Here are a few tips to help you move toward healthier choices:

**Pause and ask yourself questions.** It can be a valuable exercise to bring awareness to our food choices by asking ourselves:

- How does this food or meal make me feel?
- Are there emotions driving this food choice?
- Can I make a small adjustment to enhance the nutrients without losing the meaning of this food?

**Write it down.** I highly recommend keeping a journal to track food choices in order to record the emotions we experience as we consider and enjoy our meals.

**Create new memories with food.** Learning about new foods and new preparation techniques allows us to forge new memories and traditions. Here are a few ways to have meaningful, lasting change:

- **Honor the emotional connection** - Keep your time-honored recipes but fine tune them by swapping healthy ingredients.
- **Involve loved ones** - Invite family and friends along on the journey, which will add meaning for everyone together.
- **Start small** - The tiniest amount of change can have a massive impact.

As we all continue the journey toward lifelong health, please be kind to yourself. Everywhere we go, even to the grocery store and the kitchen, we carry with us a lifetime of experiences and traditions that shape our identity. Lasting change is possible once we bring awareness to our emotional ties to food and acknowledge the importance of food in how we experience and share our love with the world.

*Edith Jones-Poland, MD, is a family physician and functional lifestyle coach with Circe Coaching and can be reached at (760) 773.4948. For more information, visit [www.circecares.com](http://www.circecares.com).*

Reference: 1) <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7322666/>

## East Meets West in Treating Shingles

Continued from page 8

Through my studies and clinical practice, I have learned that positive results rely on applying the principles of "same treatment for different diseases" and "different treatments for the same disease." As such, consideration of the individual patient's characteristics and clinical symptoms is essential to determine treatment protocols.

When the affected skin is bright red with a burning quality of pin-prick pain and accompanied by irritability, dry mouth, thirst and constipation, the condition is what TCM calls "the pathogenic fire" accumulating in the blood system. It should be treated by clearing heat and cooling the blood to purge the fire. Acupuncture treatments would focus on clearing heat and TCM would recommend heat-clearing herbs.

When the pimples fill with milky fluid, TCM calls this "toxic damp heat" in the spleen channel. A patient will often have poor appetite, loose stools and bloating. Acupuncture treatments would then focus on venting heat and resolving toxicity and dampness; herbs to drain toxic damp heat are recommended.

A central factor in TCM is Qi, the vital energy and life force within us. When Qi and blood are weakened by illness or old age and cannot rid the virus, then the lesions will be partially erupted. Severe electric pain that radiates and shoots along the nerve pathways can develop as a result, and movement can worsen the condition. This is called Qi and blood stagnation, referred to in western medicine as postherpetic neuralgia. It can last one to six months or more, sometimes longer depending on the individual.

Shingles can be a serious and life-altering condition. Vaccinations recommended for those aged 50 and older do not completely protect from shingles. However, they can reduce the severity and duration of the disease.

We must remember that shingles can be prolonged by a constitutionally weak immune system and medications such as immunosuppressants. To maintain a strong immune system, I always recommend avoiding alcohol and sugar, eating plenty of bitter greens, leafy vegetables, radishes and ginger and drinking lemon water every day. These remedies help fight against shingles and are recommended by both western and eastern styles of medicine alike.

*Diane Sheppard is a licensed acupuncturist and doctor of traditional Chinese medicine with AcQPoint Wellness Center. She can be reached at (760) 345.2200. For more information, visit [www.acqpoint.com](http://www.acqpoint.com).*



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**Back on Course**

*Solutions for a pain-free swing*

By Jeff Smith, DO and Angela Renzulli, MAc



*New treatment options may get golfers back on course sooner.*

A well-executed golf swing is a seamless combination of precision and poise, and one of the most powerful states of flow one can experience. Yet, for many, this joy is cut short by an all-too-common adversary: back pain. Protecting the spine is vital to staying on course.

A golfer's spine is the engine behind their swing. Each phase of the golf swing – backswing, downswing, and follow-through – demands rotation, flexibility and stability from the spine. According to studies, up to 30 percent of amateur golfers experience back pain annually, highlighting the game's physical toll.<sup>1</sup> A healthy spine ensures proper alignment and mobility, enabling golfers to maintain accuracy, distance and consistency while reducing the risk of injury. The lumbar and thoracic spine are particularly crucial in generating power and ensuring control.

Repetitive motion, poor swing mechanics, overuse and natural aging of the spine are common culprits behind golf-related back problems. Lumbar strains, disc injuries and facet joint irritation are among the most frequent issues.<sup>2</sup> The intense rotation required in the swing can place significant stress on the lower back, leading to inflammation or even chronic pain. These injuries not only disrupt the game but can take a heavy emotional toll, limiting time on the course and diminishing satisfaction and social connections that make golf so rewarding.

For years, golfers facing back pain were limited to traditional treatments like painkillers, physical therapy, or, in severe cases, surgery. But today, regenerative medicine is transforming how we address these injuries. Treatments like umbilical cord allografts and platelet-rich plasma (PRP) therapy are designed to heal damaged tissues, reduce inflammation, and promote regeneration – all without invasive procedures.

By harnessing the body's natural healing mechanisms, these therapies can restore spinal health and functionality, allowing golfers to recover faster and get back to what they love. They can provide long-term relief from both injury and chronic pain, and enhanced range of motion and flexibility for a more powerful and precise swing. Treatments are effective, safe and becoming increasingly popular among athletes given their proven results. Many are even turning to regenerative medicine for its preventative and strengthening effects.

For many golfers, the course is more than just a playing field – it's a sanctuary. Back pain doesn't just hinder physical performance; it disrupts the emotional connection to the game. Whether playing with family, competing in local tournaments or enjoying a peaceful day outdoors, back pain can rob golfers of these experiences. Regenerative medicine provides a solution that goes beyond physical healing, empowering golfers to reclaim their passion and play pain-free.

*Dr. Smith is an interventional spine and sports medicine specialist and medical director of Prospera Regenerative in Indian Wells. Angela Renzulli is a master of acupuncture and regenerative medicine consultant. (760) 459.2490. www.prosperaregen.com.*

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# The Emotional Challenges of Caregiving

By Arlene Gotshalk

Caring for others can be filled with emotions. When you care, you are making a sustained emotional investment in another's well-being. However, many of the emotions caregivers experience are stressful. According to the Family Caregiver Alliance, some of the primary emotions caregivers experience are anger, resentment, grief, sadness, frustration, guilt, loneliness and depression.

The care recipient may be a parent, spouse, child, relative or friend. Their needs often take precedence over your own, and your roles in the relationship may change. Many of these changes trigger stress for the caregiver and can include loss of the relationship as it used to be, difficulty maintaining other relationships and responsibilities, overwhelming demands and physical exhaustion, dealing with a complex health care system and lack of community resources, managing hard-to-have discussions about the future including financial planning and legal documents, and recognizing that life hasn't turned out as you hoped.

The care recipient may also have strong feelings about receiving care. Life and health changes can affect their sense of dignity and independence. While you cannot change or fix their situation, you can be a stronger and more successful caregiver if you take action to manage your own emotions.

There are many facets to caregiving and each day can feel like you are in uncharted territory. Finding balance between exploring, coping, understanding and finding a way forward is necessary. Unless your care recipient has cognitive impairment that limits their abilities, try involving them in finding the best path to their care.

Dr. William Haley, a professor of aging studies at the University of Florida, was quoted in the *New York Times* saying, "There comes a point where every caregiver goes, 'Oh, I'm on another planet now.'" Caregivers experience a rollercoaster of emotions that can feel unpredictable and jarring. As a result, they often feel they are falling short of their own and others' expectations, and feel guilty that they are not doing enough.

Through every emotion, remember to be kind to yourself the way you would be to a friend. Self-compassion is essential to your overall well-being. It's important for caregivers to recognize and acknowledge what they are feeling.

Suggestions for managing your feelings include:

- Notice when you're struggling. Ask yourself, "What are my strong feelings about? What are they telling me?" Extend tenderness and grace to yourself in difficult moments.
- Read about others' experiences and challenges with caregiving.
- Set boundaries on how much you can do in a day. There are times when not everything is an emergency.
- Talk with people you trust or a therapist who can listen and support you.
- Join support groups which offer a safe and trusted place to share your feelings. These communities are available in person and online.
- Use some quiet moments when your care recipient is restful or asleep to support yourself. Self-care is essential and can take any form that is good for you, such as taking a walk, reading a book, working on a puzzle, listening to music and meditating. Journaling is also a great way to express your thoughts, feelings and concerns.

Managing the emotional challenges of caregiving can be done compassionately and successfully with the right tools. Help is available as many organizations offer support, assistance, and counseling. Take action and make sure you have the emotional support you need to take care of you and your loved ones.

Arlene Gotshalk is the author of "CareGiving Toolkit" and can be reached at (831) 588.3373 or [info@caregivingtoolkit.com](mailto:info@caregivingtoolkit.com).

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## Redirecting Relationships from Disasters to Masters

Continued from page 4

sarcasm to put your partner down. It usually includes an air of superiority, meanness, and can even lead to emotional abuse. According to Gottman's research, contempt is the biggest indicator of divorce.

- An example of contempt: "Once again, I walked into this filthy house after a long day working hard for this family. Why would I expect anything else? I should have known how sloppy you would be, way back when I first met your family."


**Stonewalling** occurs when one partner withdraws from the interaction. Just as it sounds, this occurs when someone in the conversation acts like a stone wall by withdrawing, shutting down and refusing to engage. It may seem like the partner doesn't care about the other one and is often a response to feeling physiologically flooded. The person stonewalling may look away, remain silent and perhaps cross their arms over their chest. Stonewalling can be especially damaging because it denies the partnership the chance for resolution.

- An example of stonewalling: "I'm not going to dignify your criticism with a response. I've had a tough day, too."

So, what can you do when you identify these four horsemen in your relationship?

- Discuss these communication habits with your partner and the damage they can cause.
- Instead of **criticism**, try what I call a "gentle startup." Express what you notice, share your feelings and state your needs:
  - An example of a gentle startup: "When I come home at the end of the day and see dishes in the sink (what you noticed), I feel so tired and frustrated (sharing your feelings), and I really need to walk into a peaceful environment (what you need)."
- Instead of **defensiveness**, take responsibility for your part.
  - An example of validating your partner: "You are right. The dishes are a mess (validation). I didn't do them even though I said I would."
- In the case of stonewalling, consider agreeing to take a 20-minute break to stop the feeling of being flooded with emotions. During that time, breathe deeply, go for a walk or find something that calms you down so you can address the conflict in a positive way. Be sure to return to the discussion at the agreed upon time.
- Work to build a culture of appreciation. Catch your partner doing something right and express that to them as often as you can. For every negative action toward your partner, Gottman believes you need to counter that with at least five positive actions for a healthy relationship.
- If you notice your partner using one of the horsemen, let them know gently and ask them to try communicating differently.
- If you catch yourself using the horsemen, apologize and try again.
- Create your own special way to stop conflict in its ugly tracks. At my house, we say, "I don't like where this is headed. Let's REBOOT!"

Dr. Susan Murphy is a best-selling author, business consultant and speaker on relationships, conflict, leadership and goal-achievement. Her newest book, "Leading Successful Teams: How To Create a Winning Culture," will be published soon. Contact her at [Susan@DrSusanMurphy.com](mailto:Susan@DrSusanMurphy.com) or visit [www.drSusanMurphy.com](http://www.drSusanMurphy.com).



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## Lessons Learned by Logging Off

*The benefits of a play-based childhood*

By Kelly Lewallen, LMFT

From the 90s until 2015, I helped families as a therapist, particularly with the problem of overwhelmed and exhausted children. Their kids were involved in every activity: ballet, piano, soccer, swim, and more. At the time, I told them to drop at least one activity, and instead, spend more time together as a family at home. I suggested they play Candyland, watch a movie or prepare a meal together. They could also allow their kids more free-play time with other children.



Outdoor play helps develop confidence and interpersonal interaction.

Now, times have changed. While kids and their parents are spending time at home together, EVERYONE is on a device. We are plugged in and disconnected. Yet, it's become the social norm. Kids beg parents, "All my friends have phones, and I'm the weirdo who doesn't know what's going on. You are making me a social outcast!" How painful for a loving parent to hear. Many parents give in because other parents have, which makes it easier to just say yes.

However, there is a sacrifice. Children are experiencing maladaptive behaviors and are being exposed to those of others. They may learn that they can say hurtful things to others virtually without direct consequence. They can be hurt by what others say, sitting alone reeling from the interaction and not knowing how to effectively process their emotions. They can pick up negative values and behaviors.

In the past, children were outside playing with other kids face to face. They learned how to settle differences, negotiate, and pick up on important non-verbal cues. They developed confidence and learned they can fall, get back up and get on with it.

We have gotten away from free play because many are worried about children's physical safety, and understandably so. The problem is we have given them free exposure to the virtual world and are not caring for their emotional and developmental safety.

However, there are some parents raising well-adaptive, confident and self-reliant children. Their secret: they allow their children a healthy dose of free play. They play together in the yard, build forts, climb trees (occasionally need stitches) and learn independence and how to master their fears. They play pick-up football or with dolls or "teacher." These parents are still somewhere in the background, and might allow their kids to ride bikes alone around the neighborhood, despite the judgment of neighbors.

Many allow their kids a phone, but not until they are about 15 or 16 years old, and then only with limits. Typically, they allow their children to use phones for one hour a night, after homework. Then, the phone is on the charger in their parent's room and the parents must have the passcode. Any phones given earlier in life are flip phones or "dumb phones" for communication with parents and family only.

I have seen this to be extremely helpful for many children in their mental and emotional development. One of my favorite quotes is from clinical psychologist Wendy Mogel, PhD: "Prepare your children for the road, not the road for your children."

Teach your children how to keep themselves and their friends safe, and then send them out into the world to practice these skills.

Kelly Lewallen is CEO of Desert Marriage and Family Counseling (#37832) and a member of Desert Doctors. She can be reached at (760) 777.7720. For more information visit [www.desertmarriagefamily.com](http://www.desertmarriagefamily.com) or [www.desertdoctors.org](http://www.desertdoctors.org).

Sources: 1) "The Anxious Generation" by Jonathan Haidt; 2) "The Coddling of the American Mind" by Jonathan Haidt



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### A Calm Space on Campus

sifted sand with Zen rakes to create patterns. Plants and flowers line the border and a pergola provides shade and structure for growth.

"Zen means you are getting into a space where you can relax your mind from the worries of the world," said CVUSD Superintendent Frances Esparza, PhD, at the ribbon-cutting ceremony. "Once you cross here, you can leave all of that behind. I'm so happy everyone came together to give our students and staff this space for themselves."

"Balancing extra curriculars is stressful," says student Allison Lopez, president of CVHS' Health Academy HOSA. "At the wellness center, everyone's very respectful and understanding. I'm excited to have the Zen garden where students can experience more peace."

The Zen garden was funded, mostly, through a grant from the Anderson Children's Foundation. Materials were provided by Southwest Boulder & Stone, and labor and materials were supplied by Black Oak Construction, Inc., along with labor and support from CVUSD Maintenance & Operations.

Tate is grateful to all who made this dream a reality. "These types of things don't happen unless you have leadership that is open in their hearts and minds to nurturing mental well-being."

He hopes the space will inspire other schools in the valley to create their own Zen gardens where students and staff can sit, relax and reconnect with nature and themselves.

Wendy Fink is lead editor of Desert Health; [wendyeilene@gmail.com](mailto:wendyeilene@gmail.com). For more information on the Zen garden, contact Jason Tate at [jason.tate@cvusd.us](mailto:jason.tate@cvusd.us).

Continued from page 1



A serene respite at CVHS

Wellness Specialist and Zen garden champion Jason Tate



Left to Right: Peter Sanchez (Southwest Boulder); Jason Tate; Brianna Uhlhorn (Anderson Children's Foundation); Dr. Frances Esparza, Socorro Sanchez and "Trini" Arredondo (CVUSD); and Dr. Michael Williams (CVHS)





## “I Want to Grow Old at Home”

### Guidance for safe, independent living

By Tammy Porter, DNP, MLS, RN-BSN, CPHQ, CCM

As a nurse advocate and community care coordinator, I have heard many of my clients express a heartfelt desire to age in their own homes, where they also want to receive end-of-life care. Staying in a familiar environment, surrounded by cherished memories and a sense of independence, is deeply comforting. Here's how you can thrive while living independently at home:

**Home safety.** A safe home environment is essential for aging in place. Falls are one of the leading causes of injuries among adults over 65, but many hazards can be easily addressed. Start by inspecting your home for potential risks and make sure to:

- **Eliminate tripping hazards:** Remove loose rugs, secure electrical cords and keep pathways clear of clutter.
- **Enhance bathroom safety:** Install grab bars in the shower and near the toilet, use a non-slip mat in the tub and consider a shower chair if needed.
- **Improve lighting:** Ensure all areas of the home are well-lit, especially hallways, staircases and entryways. Motion-sensor lights can be particularly helpful at night.
- **Rearrange for convenience:** Place frequently used items within easy reach to avoid the need for climbing or bending.
- **Review medications:** Do this with your provider or pharmacist for any meds that may decrease balance and lead to a fall.



Aging at home requires preparation and planning.

**Stay connected and establish a support network.** Aging at home can sometimes lead to feelings of loneliness or isolation, which can impact mental and emotional well-being. Staying socially connected is vital for a happy and fulfilling life. Here are some ways to maintain meaningful relationships:

- Schedule regular calls or visits with family and friends.
- Join local senior centers or community groups where you can participate in activities and make new friends (many local centers offer transportation).
- Explore online communities or virtual clubs that align with your interests, such as book clubs, crafting groups or exercise classes. Set up a tea tray and participate via computer!

**Plan for care needs.** As you age, your care needs may change. Planning ahead ensures you're prepared to handle these transitions smoothly. Here are some steps to consider:

- **Create a care plan:** Work with a nurse advocate or care coordinator to assess your current needs and anticipate future ones. This might include personal care, medical assistance, transportation or household tasks.
- **Explore caregiving options:** Determine whether you'd prefer to hire a professional caregiver, rely on family support or use a combination of both. Be financially ready for this option, which will be your biggest expense in being able to stay home and independent.



Having a health industry advocate available as needed is an important part of independent living.

**Stay active and eat healthy.**

- **Exercise regularly:** Engage in activities that suit your abilities, such as walking, yoga, swimming or tai chi. Even light stretching can improve flexibility and balance.
- **Eat a balanced diet:** Focus on whole foods, lean proteins and plenty of fruits and vegetables. Staying hydrated is equally important.
- **Keep up with medical care:** Schedule regular check-ups and screenings to catch potential health issues early.

**Use technology for independence.** Modern technology can make aging in place easier and safer. There are countless tools available to help older adults maintain their independence. Consider these options:

- **Medical alert systems:** Devices that allow you to quickly call for help in an emergency
- **Medication management tools:** Pill organizers with alarms or smartphone apps that remind you to take your medications
- **Smart home devices:** Voice-activated assistants, such as Amazon Alexa or Google Home, that control lights, adjust the thermostat, and even make phone calls
- **Video calling platforms:** Ways to stay in touch with loved ones through Zoom, FaceTime or similar services

**Know you're not alone!** Aging at home doesn't mean going it alone. There are many resources available to support you, from local programs to professional services. Here are a few to explore:

- **Community programs:** Many organizations offer services like transportation, meal delivery and home maintenance for seniors.
- **Health care advocacy:** A nurse advocate can help you navigate medical appointments, coordinate care and ensure your needs are met.
- **Government resources:** Explore programs like Meals on Wheels, Medicare benefits or state-specific senior assistance programs.

Choosing to grow older in your own home is a deeply personal decision. It offers the priceless gift of independence and the comfort of familiar surroundings. Remember, you don't have to do this alone – there are people and tools ready to support you on this journey. Because at the end of the day, there truly is no place like home.

Dr. Porter is CEO and founder of MyHealth.MyAdvocate in Palm Desert. She is an experienced health care professional with over 30 years of nursing practice unraveling the mysteries of health care processes and advocating for patients, families and caregivers. She can be reached at (760) 851.4116. For more information, visit [www.myhealthmyadvocate.com](http://www.myhealthmyadvocate.com).

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## YOUR FINANCIAL HEALTH

By Michele T. Sarna, CFP®, AIF®



### Ring in the New Year: Financial Updates for 2025

It's that time again to start fresh by reflecting on the past 12 months, reviewing and modifying goals, and setting expectations for the year ahead. Here are some important 2025 updates to help with your financial planning:

**Saving for retirement.** This year, the IRS increased retirement savings limits for 401k plans to \$23,500, the maximum an individual can defer to their company retirement plan. The 401k catch-up contribution for those 50+ remained the same at \$7,500. The limits apply to traditional 401k contributions as well as ROTH 401k contributions. You may elect to contribute to both pre-tax and post-tax money types in your 401k, but remember, the combined contribution amount cannot exceed the annual limit. In addition, SECURE ACT 2.0 (a federal law enacted to encourage saving for retirement) added a new higher catch-up contribution limit of \$11,250 for those aged 60 to 63. Given these additions, if you want to make or change contributions, always check your current employer's plan provisions before doing so.

**Individual Retirement Accounts (IRAs)** also remain the same as last year at \$7,000 and the catch up at \$1,000. SIMPLE IRAs increased by \$500 to \$16,500. The SIMPLE IRAs catch up remains \$3,500.

**Social Security wage base limit.** In 2025, the social security tax of 6.2 percent will suspend once your compensation rises above \$176,100. Please note Medicare does not have a wage base limit.

**Health savings accounts (HSAs).** HSA limits for 2025 are \$4,300 for individual coverage and \$8,550 for families. Those over 55 years old may contribute an extra \$1,000 to their HSA. To be eligible for an HSA, you must be enrolled in a high deductible HSA-eligible health plan; not be enrolled in Medicare; not be claimed as a dependent on another's tax return; and not have a full-purpose health care flexible spending account (FSA). While HSA accounts provide triple tax benefits, tax-deductible contributions, tax-free growth, and tax-free withdrawals for qualified expenses, it's important to keep in mind the penalties that may occur if used improperly.

**Flexible spending account (FSA).** A health care FSA is another way to save costs on health care through your employer. The 2025 limit is \$3,300. Contributions are deducted per paycheck on a pre-tax basis. Eligible health expenses may be paid through your account, or you may submit eligible receipts and get reimbursed. This type of account is a use-it or lose-it account, and because of this you must be careful when electing the annual amount. Some employer plans may allow for extension into the following year or a carryover for a short period of time. It's important to check the benefits specifications before setting up an FSA.

These are just a few of the updates for this year. When planning for your financial future, always speak to an expert to ensure you understand what's to come – so you can make the best decisions for your needs.

*Michele Sarna is a certified financial planner™ with Beacon Pointe Advisors and can be reached at (760) 932.0930 or msarna@beaconpointe.com.*

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## The Benefits of CO2 Laser for Vaginal Rejuvenation

By Pam Gossman, DNP, APN, BC-FNP, CPHQ

As women age, their bodies undergo many changes – especially when it comes to vaginal health. Hormonal fluctuations during menopause, the physical demands of childbirth, and the natural aging process can all lead to issues including vaginal dryness, decreased elasticity, urinary incontinence and reduced sensation during intimacy. While these changes are common, they can affect a woman's overall well-being, self-esteem and confidence.

Fortunately over the past couple of years, women's sexual health is making its way to the forefront as a growing wellness trend. As such, many promising products are making their way to market including CO2 laser vaginal rejuvenation, a non-invasive treatment that effectively addresses both function and comfort.

CO2 laser therapy utilizes fractional CO2 laser technology to gently deliver micro-pulses of laser energy into the vaginal tissues. This energy stimulates the body's natural collagen and elastin production, which strengthens and rejuvenates the vaginal walls. As new, healthier tissue forms, women often experience improved elasticity, increased moisture and enhanced muscle tone, which can alleviate symptoms such as vaginal dryness, discomfort and laxity. Additionally, CO2 laser treatment helps with urinary incontinence, improving bladder control and reducing the frequency of leaks.

What makes CO2 laser therapy so effective is its ability to target both the superficial and deeper layers of vaginal tissue, providing comprehensive rejuvenation. The procedure is non-invasive, requires no anesthesia and typically takes only 20 to 30 minutes with minimal discomfort. Most women report mild, temporary sensations of warmth or tingling, but there is no significant downtime. You can return to your normal activities immediately after the procedure.

While results can be seen after just one session, a full treatment plan typically involves 2 to 3 treatments spaced out about 4 to 6 weeks apart. As collagen production continues, many women experience lasting benefits, including improved vaginal tightness, enhanced lubrication and a reduction in urinary incontinence. These changes not only help restore physical comfort but can also improve sexual satisfaction, making intimacy more enjoyable and fulfilling.

CO2 laser vaginal rejuvenation is ideal for women experiencing post-menopausal symptoms, those recovering from childbirth or those who simply want to restore vaginal health.

This gentle and non-surgical alternative to more invasive treatments has transformative benefits. With this new therapy, women are able to reclaim their comfort, intimacy and overall confidence so they can feel their best at every stage of life.

Pam Gossman is a doctor of nursing practice and owner of Desert Glow Medical Aesthetics and Wellness. She offers medical wellness programs and aesthetic procedures and can be reached at (760) 565.3990 or at pam@desertglowspa.com. For more information, visit www.desertglowspa.com.

## Strength, Balance, Peace: 3 Gifts of a Yoga Practice

By Jennifer Yockey

In today's fast-spinning world, the ancient practice of yoga offers three transformative gifts that extend far beyond the mat: strength, balance and peace. While many newcomers seek yoga for its physical benefits, long-time practitioners discover that these elements contribute to overall well-being and transform both body and mind.

### Strength: more than muscle

When we think of strength in yoga, we may picture held postures or flowing movements. Indeed, yoga builds remarkable physical strength, but its true gift of strength runs deeper. Through consistent practice, we develop mental fortitude and emotional resilience through challenging poses that teach us to breathe through discomfort, trust our capabilities and cultivate patience with our progress. This translates directly into daily life, helping us face challenges with steadiness and determination.

The strength we build extends to our inner resolve. As we learn to hold difficult postures with steady breath, we simultaneously learn to hold space for difficult emotions with the same steadiness. This emotional strength becomes particularly valuable during life's inevitable storms, allowing us to remain grounded when circumstances feel overwhelming.

### Balance: finding center in a tilting world

Balance in yoga begins with physical postures – standing on one leg, finding equilibrium in twisting shapes or maintaining stability in flowing sequences. Yet this physical practice serves as a gateway to a more profound form of balance. As we coordinate breath with movement, we learn to balance effort with ease, strength with flexibility, and activity with rest.

This practice of finding our center translates beautifully into daily life. Over time, we begin to notice when we're pushing too hard and need rest, or when we're holding back and need to challenge ourselves. The balance we cultivate helps us navigate work and our personal lives, relationships and solitude, and the acts of giving and receiving. It's about finding that sweet spot where we're engaged but not overwhelmed, ambitious but not stressed, connected but not depleted.

### Peace: the ultimate gift

Perhaps the most profound gift yoga provides is the pathway to inner peace. Through mindful movement and breath awareness, yoga naturally guides us into the present moment – where true peace exists. The physical practice serves as an anchor, drawing our scattered attention back to our breath and body, creating a moving meditation



Yoga practice helps build strength.



Balancing postures help beyond physical balance.

Continued on page 24

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## 6 Reasons to Grow Your Own Food

By Natalie Meyerhoff, MEd

Have you always dreamt of growing your own food? While growing your own vegetables, herbs and fruit can be a rich and fulfilling hobby, it also offers numerous benefits backed by science and research. Here are the top six reasons why you should consider growing your own food:

**Improved nutrition and food quality.** Homegrown produce is fresher and more nutrient-dense than store-bought alternatives. Did you know fruits and vegetables grown in nutrient-rich soil have profoundly higher levels of vitamins, minerals and antioxidants compared to those harvested commercially? This is because home gardeners can control the quality of the soil and avoid the preservatives and chemicals used in industrial farming.

**A healthier diet and reduced pesticide exposure.** Growing your own food also allows you to avoid commercial agriculture's pesticides and herbicides which often remain even after washing. By opting for organic gardening methods or simply growing food in your own yard, you greatly lower the risk of chemical exposure and enjoy cleaner, safer produce.

**Environmental sustainability.** Home gardening is an environmentally-friendly practice that contributes to sustainability for humans and wildlife. Growing your own food also helps reduce the carbon footprint associated with food production and transportation. By cultivating local seasonal produce, you lower greenhouse gas emissions by reducing the need for long-distance food transportation. Additionally, personal organic micro-farming uses no synthetic fertilizers and thus reduces the strain on water resources, an important factor in our desert community.

**Economic savings.** Growing your own food can also lead to huge savings on groceries, especially if you already buy organic produce and herbs. The investment of initial costs (raised beds, fencing, seeds, soil and tools) pay off quickly and creates economic stability through reduced dependency on commercial food markets in unstable times.

**Mental health benefits.** Did you know gardening helps reduce stress, anxiety and depression? Being surrounded by or tending to plants can provide numerous therapeutic benefits, promote mindfulness and boost mood significantly improving mental well-being. Just 30 minutes of gardening can reduce cortisol levels and improve feelings of relaxation and happiness.<sup>1</sup> It allows busy individuals time to reconnect with nature, providing a sense of peace, purpose and accomplishment, and reducing the mental strain of our modern life.

**Educational and community benefits.** Gardening is also an excellent way to foster learning for both individuals and families. Family and community gardening projects have been linked to improved social connections and stronger bonds. These activities encourage cooperation, promote local food security, and raise awareness about sustainable practices, benefiting families, neighborhoods and society as a whole.<sup>2</sup> Growing your own food offers numerous benefits. Many have seen firsthand the significantly positive impact that home vegetable gardening can have on their personal well-being, their family's well-being and the environment. So, what are you waiting for? Start growing today!

Natalie Meyerhoff is a University of California master gardener and founder of Thyme & Space Gardens. She can be reached at hello@thymeandspacegardens.com and (760) 896.1446. Visit www.thymeandspacegardens.com.

References: 1) <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S016920462030325X?via%3Dihub>; 2) <https://gardening.cals.cornell.edu/lessons/program-tools/benefits-and-research/key-findings/>



The benefits of a home garden outweigh the time and cost.

# Thank You!

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## Gluten-free in Italy

By Lauren Del Sarto

This year, Tommy and I had the opportunity to return to Italy. With a desire to slow down and indulge in the best regional cuisine, we decided to skip the cities and head to the countryside. A friend recommended Le Mandrie Di San Paolo, an agriturismo farm outside of Assisi, where everything served is made on property, and I couldn't think of anything better! So, we headed to the Umbria region where the small hill town was located.

Umbria is known as Italy's "cuore verde" (green heart) for its agriculture and landscape, which was enticing for me as a gluten-free (GF) vegetarian. The region also produces succulent gold-green olive oil, rich red wines, a variety of sheep's milk cheeses and many diverse grains. Heaven!

From previous research, I knew we'd find plenty of GF options. Few are aware that celiac disease is an epidemic in Italy and citizens diagnosed (over the age of 10) receive a monthly stipend of 140 euros to purchase GF foods.<sup>1</sup> As such, restaurants there offer far greater variety of GF options than in the United States.



Mushroom carpaccio, one of many unique and flavorful vegetarian dishes

However, many have asked me if the wheat in Italy is "better" and OK to eat if you are gluten-sensitive. The short answer is: some of it. It seems to come down to two things: the type of grains used and agricultural regulations. In the United States, 60 percent of the wheat produced is red wheat which is soft and fluffy and has a longer shelf life. It also contains more proteins, including gluten, which makes bread doughy.<sup>2</sup> Italians use a variety of flours, but those made from wheat still contain gluten, so you have to ask about the type of flour used. Those with celiac should certainly stick to those certified as GF.

I asked the proprietors at Le Mandrie if any of their beautiful breads were made without wheat and was introduced to one containing six different GF grains, including garbanzo bean and buckwheat. The family makes it themselves and is proud to tell you everything about it. It was perfect and WOW did it taste incredible with their



Homemade bread at Le Mandrie, Assisi, Italy

Continued on page 23





# Vegan Clam Chowder

By Wendy Fink

At the height of winter, it's always nice to have a few go-to soup recipes. An especially hearty one with a healthier twist is this vegan clam chowder, inspired by the classic New England Clam Chowder. It's sure to warm you up!

Serving Size: 6

Ingredients:

- 1 cup roasted cashews
- 1½ cups non-dairy milk
- 3 tablespoons vegan butter
- 12 oz oyster mushrooms divided
- 1 medium sliced leek and 1 medium sliced carrot
- 1 pound potatoes cubed
- 5 cloves minced garlic
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme
- 1 tablespoon miso paste
- 2 bay leaves
- ½ cup dry white wine (or sub vegetable broth)
- ¼ cup flour (sub gluten-free all purpose flour)
- 4 cups water
- 1 lemon to juice
- 1 teaspoon salt
- Fresh parsley for garnish
- Optional: Sourdough bread bowl (or sub gluten-free bread bowl)

Directions:

1. Bring a small pot of water to a boil. Add cashews and let soak.
2. In a large pot over medium heat, add 1 tbsp of the vegan butter and 4 oz of oyster mushrooms, stirring about 8 minutes until brown and crispy. Add ¼ tsp salt and stir. Remove mushrooms from pot and set aside.
3. Add remaining 2 tbsp of vegan butter to pot. Add remaining 8 oz of mushrooms and sliced leeks. Stir about 5 min until leeks soften and mushrooms start browning.
4. Add carrot, minced garlic, thyme and ½ tsp salt. Cook for 2 to 3 minutes Add miso paste and stir in.
5. Add dry white wine to deglaze. Use spatula to scrape up browned bits from the bottom. Cook out the alcohol, about 2 minutes.
6. Add flour and stir through. Cook 1 minute until mixture thickens.
7. Add water 1 cup at a time, stirring between each.
8. Add bay leaves, potatoes and ½ tsp salt. Bring to a boil, then cover and simmer, stirring occasionally, for about 8 minutes until potatoes are cooked.
9. Drain cashews and transfer to a high-speed blender along with non-dairy milk. Blend on high until smooth and set aside.
10. When potatoes are cooked, remove bay leaves and add the cashew cream and lemon juice. Season, and top with chopped parsley and the reserved oyster mushrooms.



This recipe was adapted from Sweet Simple Vegan at [www.sweetsimplevegan.com](http://www.sweetsimplevegan.com). Wendy Fink is lead editor of Desert Health.

## Gluten-free in Italy

Continued from page 22

orchid-grown olive oils. I tried their other homemade breads, only in moderation as they made me feel fuller. They also make a GF tagliatelle (flat noodle pasta) which was so good I had it every other night.

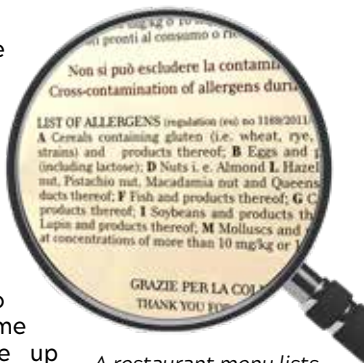
Besides the type of grains, wheat sensitivity may also have to do with the way grains are commercially processed. In the United States, the herbicide glyphosate is sprayed on genetically modified crops<sup>3</sup> and while the FDA states the chemical is not harmful to humans, it is harmful to bacteria. This is bad news for our gut microbiome



Le Mandrie's exceptional gluten-free tagliatelle

which is made up of a lot of bacteria. Some countries including Germany and France have banned the use of glyphosate, and a European Union (EU) ban is set to begin in 2033. Meanwhile, Italy's restrictions on the chemical are among the most significant in the world.<sup>4</sup> Many regions in Italy pride themselves on preserving and using traditional farming methods. Strict labeling systems such as "DOP," which translates to "Protected Designation of Origin," certify that food products are produced, processed and packaged in a specific region using only traditional methods and ingredients.

I was most impressed to learn that if a product contains any of the 14 main allergens – from gluten and eggs to mustard and sulfites – as an ingredient or processing aid, the EU requires that information be included on the label or menu.<sup>5</sup>



A restaurant menu lists the 14 allergens required by the European Union.

References: 1) <https://deserthealthnews.com/story/gluten-free-globally/>; 2) <https://www.goodrx.com/well-being/diet-nutrition/gluten-europe-vs-united-states/>; 3) <https://www.nbcnews.com/data-graphics/toxic-herbicides-map-showing-high-use-state-rcna50052>; 4) <https://www.pan-europe.info/press-releases/2016/08/italy-places-important-restrictions-use-glyphosate#>; 5) <https://www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/allergen-guidance-for-food-businesses>

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## Fan Favs and Phenoms Tee It Up at The American Express

By Lauren Del Sarto

Golf is among the few sports where fans exercise along with the players. Watching your favorite pros finish an 18-hole round can have you walking four or more miles, but only if you are watching live and not from the comfort of your couch.



17-year-old professional Blades Brown

Tournament season is here and you won't want to miss the live action at The American Express returning to PGA West and La Quinta Country Club Jan. 16 - 19. Some of the world's best are back in an impressive field that includes world number one **Scottie Scheffler** and number two **Xander Schauffele**, along with **Billy Horschel**, **Patrick Cantley** and **Justin Thomas** all in the top 20 in the Official World Golf Ranking. Fan favorites **Ricky Fowler**, **Tony Finau**, **Jason Day** and **Zach Johnson** are also slated to compete.



Watching golf live can be a great workout.

Then there are the young phenoms setting records and providing some of the most extraordinary displays the sport has ever seen. Those attending last year's event witnessed amateur **Nick Dunlap** take the title in an exciting one-stroke victory. Just 20 years old at the time, Dunlap became the first amateur winner on the PGA TOUR since **Phil Mickelson** in 1991. While he was unable to claim the \$1.5M prize money due to his amateur status, the victory propelled him into national acclaim and he turned pro four days later. His success on tour

continued and his ranking moved from number 4,121 at the close of 2023 to number 31 at the end of 2024 (when he also celebrated his 21st birthday).

Dunlap returns with hopes of reclaiming his title, and this time, the large payoff that comes with it. However, tough competition includes the sport's latest phenom, 17-year-old **Blades Brown** who turned pro this month and will be making his professional debut at The American Express. The Nashville native is only the third person to win medalist honors as a U.S. Amateur and U.S. Junior joining **Tiger Woods** and **Bobby Clampett**. He was just 16 at the U.S. Amateur where he shot 64 to break **Bobby Jones'** 103-year-old record and become the youngest medalist in the history of the event.



Fan favorite Ricky Fowler

Needless to say, we are in for some great golf at this year's tournament. Come see the action live, get in your steps as you follow your favorites and witness these new talents, then reward yourself with a beverage and bite at one of the event's many hospitality hubs. Ticket holders can also enjoy post-play concerts on Friday featuring country's own **Little Big Town** and Saturday featuring rock n' roll legends **Journey**.

*The American Express takes place Jan. 16-19 at PGA West and La Quinta Country Club. Tickets start at \$70 and include numerous hospitality venues and both concerts. American Express® Card Members receive a 20% discount on tickets. Children 15 and under are free with paid adult admission. Visit [www.theamexgolf.com](http://www.theamexgolf.com). (Photos by The American Express.)*

**Strength, Balance, Peace: 3 Gifts of a Yoga Practice**

Continued from page 21

that calms the nervous system and quiets the mind.

This peace isn't about escaping life's challenges; rather, it's about finding stillness within them. Regular yoga practice helps us develop what ancient yogis call "witness consciousness" – the ability to observe our thoughts and emotions without being completely swept away by them. This creates space between stimulus and response, allowing us to respond to life's challenges with clarity rather than reactivity.

The beauty of these three gifts lies in their interconnected nature. Physical strength supports emotional resilience; balance in body promotes balance in life choices; and both contribute to a deeper sense of peace. As we continue our practice, we may discover that these gifts multiply and deepen, creating a foundation for lasting wellness that supports us through all of life's seasons.

Whether you're considering your first yoga class or returning to your practice after time away, remember these gifts await you on the mat. They develop naturally through consistent practice, each session building upon the last, creating positive changes that extend far beyond the physical realm.



Yoga instills peace in many aspects of life outside of practice.

As we step into 2025, the invitation to begin or renew your yoga practice couldn't be more timely. The new year naturally inspires reflection and fresh starts, making it the perfect moment to step onto your mat. Remember, every master yogi was once a beginner, and every long-term practitioner has experienced times of returning after a pause. Your yoga practice isn't a linear journey – it's a circular one that allows for new beginnings, gentle returns and continuous growth.

The first step is often the hardest, but it's also the most transformative. This year, give yourself permission to begin exactly where you are. The gifts of strength, balance and peace await – and there's no better time than now to unwrap them.

*Jennifer Yockey is an E-RYT500 yoga instructor, an IAPRC professional life and recovery coach and owner of GATHER Yoga + Wellness. She can be reached at (760) 219.7953 or for more information, visit [www.gatherlaquinta.com](http://www.gatherlaquinta.com).*

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# Women + Wealth + Wellness Take Center Stage

The Confidence Summit: Women + Wealth + Wellness (CW3) is a one-day transformative event designed to empower women in managing their financial and personal well-being. The event will take place Feb. 7 at the Omni Rancho Las Palmas Resort & Spa in Rancho Mirage and all are encouraged to attend.

The summit was created by Robert L. Schein, managing director, partner, and chief investment officer of Hightower's Blanke Schein Wealth Management. Schein partnered in this venture with Bronwyn Ison, a wellness advocate who dedicates her career to promoting a healthy mind and body for women seeking personal and professional success.

Guests can expect a day filled with inspiring talks, practical workshops and networking opportunities. CW3 will feature up to 20 speakers covering topics such as "Building a Resilient Financial Future: Strategies for Every Stage of Life" and "Juggling Dreams: How to Balance Ambition and Well-Being." Keynote speaker Stephanie Link, chief investment strategist and portfolio manager at Hightower and a regularly featured guest on CNBC, will share her expertise on financial strategies.



CW3 creators Rob Schein and Bronwyn Ison



A variety of panels will feature professionals to educate and inspire.

includes lunch and concludes with a happy hour, providing ample opportunities for attendees to connect and share experiences.

The CW3 summit offers a unique opportunity for women to gain the knowledge and tools needed to thrive in all aspects of life. The goal of this event is for guests to leave feeling inspired, empowered and confident about their decisions around health and wealth.

For tickets and information, visit [www.cw3confidencesummit.com](http://www.cw3confidencesummit.com).



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Events are held at The Classic Club  
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WLF is a nonprofit organization bringing together women leaders of the Coachella Valley to network, volunteer and fundraise for the advancement of the next generation.

For more information and tickets, visit  
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# DESERT WOMAN'S SHOW

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**JAN. 9**

**Women Leaders Forum: Women Wealth Warriors**

Start the year building and sustaining wealth. WLF's panel of financial experts will share how to create your own plan, prepare for unexpected life events and retirement, and more. Sponsored by Blanke Schein Wealth Management and open to all. Classic Club, 5:30-7:30p. Tickets \$48-\$65 include dinner and glass of wine. [www.WLFDesert.org](http://www.WLFDesert.org)

**JAN. 16-19**

**The American Express**

The 66th annual PGA TOUR tournament returns to PGA WEST and La Quinta Country Club for four days of world-class golf. Fans will enjoy free access to select hospitality venues and post-round concerts on Friday and Saturday. Tickets from \$70. Receive a 20 percent discount with your American Express card at [www.TheAmexGolf.com](http://www.TheAmexGolf.com). (See p.24)

**JAN. 23**

**Go Figure: The Randy Gardner Story**

Go behind-the-scenes with two-time Olympian Randy Gardner, featuring a personal Q&A following the screening of his life story, "Go Figure: The Randy Gardner Story." The event will be held at the Palm Springs Cultural Center and will benefit The Desert Figure Skating Club. 6:30p. Tickets \$15-\$50. [www.eventbrite.com](http://www.eventbrite.com).



**JAN. 25**

**Palm Springs Health Run**

Come for the USA Track & Field certified 10K and 5K races and the 1K Fun Run and bike ride, and stay for the festivities including classes by national fitness experts, 80 health and wellness exhibitor booths, an awards ceremony and luncheon along with interactive demonstrations. Ruth Hardy Park, 8a-1p. [www.PalmSpringsHealthRun.com](http://www.PalmSpringsHealthRun.com)

**FEB. 6**

**Women Leaders Forum: The Power of Allyship**

Explore the collective power of women who advocate for others. This panel discussion will feature a diverse group of women leaders sharing their inspiring stories on bravely breaking through barriers. Sponsored by The HUE-niverse and open to all. Classic Club, 5:30-7:30p. Tickets \$48-\$65 include dinner and glass of wine. [www.WLFDesert.org](http://www.WLFDesert.org)



**FEB. 7**

**The Confidence Summit: Women+Wealth+Wellness**

This one-day event will feature panels, speakers and resources specifically designed for women including tips to help maintain financial wellness and achieve your best health. Omni Las Palmas Resort, Rancho Mirage, 8:30a-6:30p. Tickets \$200. [www.CW3Confidencesummit.com](http://www.CW3Confidencesummit.com). (See p.25)

**FEB. 15**

**17th Annual Desert Woman's Show**

Enjoy a full day of fashion shows, shopping, guest speakers and an Italian cooking demonstration from Chopped champion Antonello Zito. Renowned fashion correspondent Lisa Pliner will also share tips and trends. Combo tickets include the ever-popular Greater Palm Springs Food & Wine Festival with over 30 tasting stations from your favorite valley restaurants and wineries. Classic Club 10a-4p. Tickets from \$15. [www.marloproductions.com](http://www.marloproductions.com). (See more below)



## Desert Woman's Show Celebrates 17

The Desert Woman's Show returns to the Classic Club on Saturday, Feb. 15 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. with a full day of health, beauty and fashion.

The show begins Saturday morning with a heartfelt and purposeful start as the annual charity golf tournament tees off, benefiting The Unforgettables Foundation. This tournament is more than just a game - it's an opportunity to make a profound impact on families in need after the loss of a child.

Once again, the first 500 general admission tickets to the Desert Woman's Show are free, courtesy of long-time sponsor Desert Care Network. Attendees can also purchase a combination ticket that includes the ever-popular Greater Palm Springs Food & Wine sampling area featuring your favorite Coachella Valley restaurants, tasty wines, premium spirits and mocktails.



Chef Antonello Zito

The Desert Woman's Show promises not only insightful breakout sessions, fantastic food and wine, but also a dazzling display of fashion. The main stage will host two entertaining fashion shows, showcasing fabulous styles from local boutiques across the desert. Adding to the glamour, the event will feature Lisa Pliner, a renowned fashion correspondent, celebrated shoe designer, philanthropist and author who will share her insights into current trends and styles, making this a must-attend experience for fashion enthusiasts.

New in 2025 is the opportunity for all attendees to enter to win a \$5,000 shopping spree courtesy of The Shops at Palm Desert! And foodies should prepare to be dazzled as we welcome the culinary maestro himself, celebrity Chef Antonello Zito. With his impressive credentials as a Chopped television series champion and as a proud owner of two restaurants, Puglia Italian in Lake Arrowhead and Palm Springs' Palmina by Puglia, Chef Zito will take you on a mouthwatering culinary journey through the heart of Italy. His cooking demonstration promises to not only tantalize your taste buds with rich flavors that define authentic Italian cuisine, but to also inspire your inner chef.

The Desert Woman's Show opens for VIP guests on Saturday, Feb. 15, at 9:30 a.m. with general admission at 10 a.m. and runs until 4 p.m. This event is graciously sponsored by Desert Care Network, Blanke Schein Wealth Management, The Lighthouse Cannabis Boutique, Clark's Nutrition, The Shops at Palm Desert and "It's A No Grainer" cookbook author Barbara Rogers. Media partners include Desert Golf & Tennis Magazine, Coachella Valley Weekly and Desert Health. We hope to see you there!

For tickets and more information, visit [www.marloproductions.com](http://www.marloproductions.com) or contact event producer Diana Marlo at [Diana@MarloProductions.com](mailto:Diana@MarloProductions.com).





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