

# Desert Health<sup>®</sup>

The Valley's Leading Resource for Health and Wellness

September/October 2024

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## BLUE ZONES PROJECT<sup>®</sup>

### Begins

By Lauren Del Sarto

Over the past few years, our valley has been abuzz with talk of becoming a blue zones community. The wait is now over and a coordinated effort throughout Riverside County is now underway, including both Palm Springs and Coachella, to implement policy and programs aimed at increasing the health and longevity of local residents.

Previously, we shared the Blue Zones Project's progress in assessing the viability of bringing their proven formula to our region. Their assessment proposals have been approved and over the past couple of months, the national team has moved into their foundation phase to build local teams and develop a blueprint for successful implementation.

Blue Zones is an initiative that employs evidence-based methods to help people live better and longer. The principles are based on the work of Dan Buettner, a National Geographic Explorer and Fellow, who set out to discover the places in the world where people live the longest and the healthiest (the blue zones regions) and how they got there. He narrowed it down to five: Okinawa, Japan; Sardinia, Italy; Nicoya, Costa Rica; Ikaria, Greece, and Loma Linda, California. Buettner documented his findings in the *New York*

*Times* bestseller, *The Blue Zones: Lessons for Living Longer From the People Who've Lived the Longest* and later the 2023 Netflix docuseries "Live to 100: Secrets of the Blue Zones."

Buettner and his team of researchers surmised that their common longevity was due to nine shared lifestyle habits which they dubbed the Power 9<sup>®</sup>: Move Naturally, Purpose, Downshift, 80% Rule, Plant Slant, Wine at Five, Positive Pack, Loved Ones First and Belong. The most important discovery was that people in the blue zone regions were not trying to do these things; their surroundings and cultures nudged them into these healthy behaviors as they moved throughout their days.

From their research, they created Blue Zones Project (BZP), a community-wide initiative that enhances health through environmental and lifestyle changes. Over 20 years, they have successfully teamed with 75 cities across the U.S. including SoCal's Beach Cities (Manhattan Beach, Redondo Beach, and Hermosa Beach) whose focus on healthy living has enhanced residents' happiness and overall well-being and saved the region millions. A recent Gallup news release (Aug. 2024) states that the region has saved an estimated \$182 million annually

*Continued on page 20*

## Hearts for Housing



Many of us have a heartfelt reaction when we see people living on the streets. The team at Bridges 2 Hope is combining that compassion with action and resources to help individuals find homes. In three short years, they have weaved together the many pieces of the puzzle to help rehabilitate 32 and find homes for 35 from our unhoused community.

The non-profit was founded in 2021 by Peggy Grabow, a registered nurse, who teamed up with Susan Veldey, also a nurse, peer support advisor Jacquie McClure and now President Michele Verdugo. The passion these four women have for their work stems from personal exposure to the significant struggles addiction, mental health and homelessness can create. Grabow has worked with the unhoused for over a decade and Veldey is a lifelong advocate for food insecurity and health access equality. McClure survived 18-months on the streets, while Verdugo proudly celebrates 29 years of sobriety and has helped family members

overcome addiction. They understand first-hand that it takes patience, time and trust to truly help the men and women of this vulnerable population, and they are faithfully there for them.

Bridges to Hope's (B2H) mission is to bridge the gap between the numerous organizations, medical teams and social services available to the unhoused and to build trust with those they serve. They do so by joining forces and setting up in the same outdoor location at the same time each week so individuals can come to them. They've done so faithfully for three years, rain or shine, and know the stories and names of their constituents. But more importantly, those they serve have come to know them as compassionate volunteers and professionals who sit and chat with them each and every week.

"Not everyone is ready for help," says Veldey, "But when they are, they know they have a trusting place—and trusting people—to come to."

*Continued on page 6*



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# Friends with Benefits

This time of year always reminds me of returning to school. Though it's been years since I backed my bags and left home for a college campus, the slight rise in temperature continues to invigorate excitement for change, renewal and seeing old friends. It's the "fall feeling" I look forward to each and every season.

When I consider what sparked the most excitement back then, it was definitely seeing my friends after months of being apart, many who I still call friends today.

Young adult friendships always hold a special place in your heart, but all friendships come with benefits as quality relationships may be a key to healthy longevity. This is according to the 80-year Harvard Happiness Study referenced by several articles in this edition (p.3 & p.5).

The topic arises in response to the loneliness crisis which is becoming more prevalent in both young and aging populations today. It is one of the key elements of the Blue Zone Project's Power 9®: a Positive Pack.

While much of the focus on longevity in blue zone regions is nutrition, an even more important part is the sense of purpose and belonging that members of those communities embrace and incorporate into their daily lives. We will experience the deeper meaning as the local Blue Zones Project unfolds, but for a sneak peak, watch the docuseries or read the book.

Today, one of the things I cherish most about our valley is the strong friendships I've developed through neighborhood, networking (p.23), socializing and sport (p.14). I also cherish the self-care practices, like meditation and yoga, I have adopted since moving here. With this edition, I learned even more about the principles of yoga off the mat (p.9) and the renewal and reflection the change of season inspires (p.12).

We live in a very special place filled with very special people. With summer behind us, it's time to gather once again and we look forward to seeing you out and about.

To old friends and new ~

*Lauren*  
**Lauren Del Sarto**  
 Founder/Publisher

Lauren with her WLF pack (p. 23).



An Independent Publication

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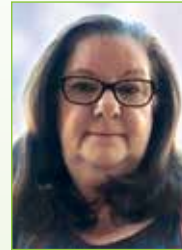
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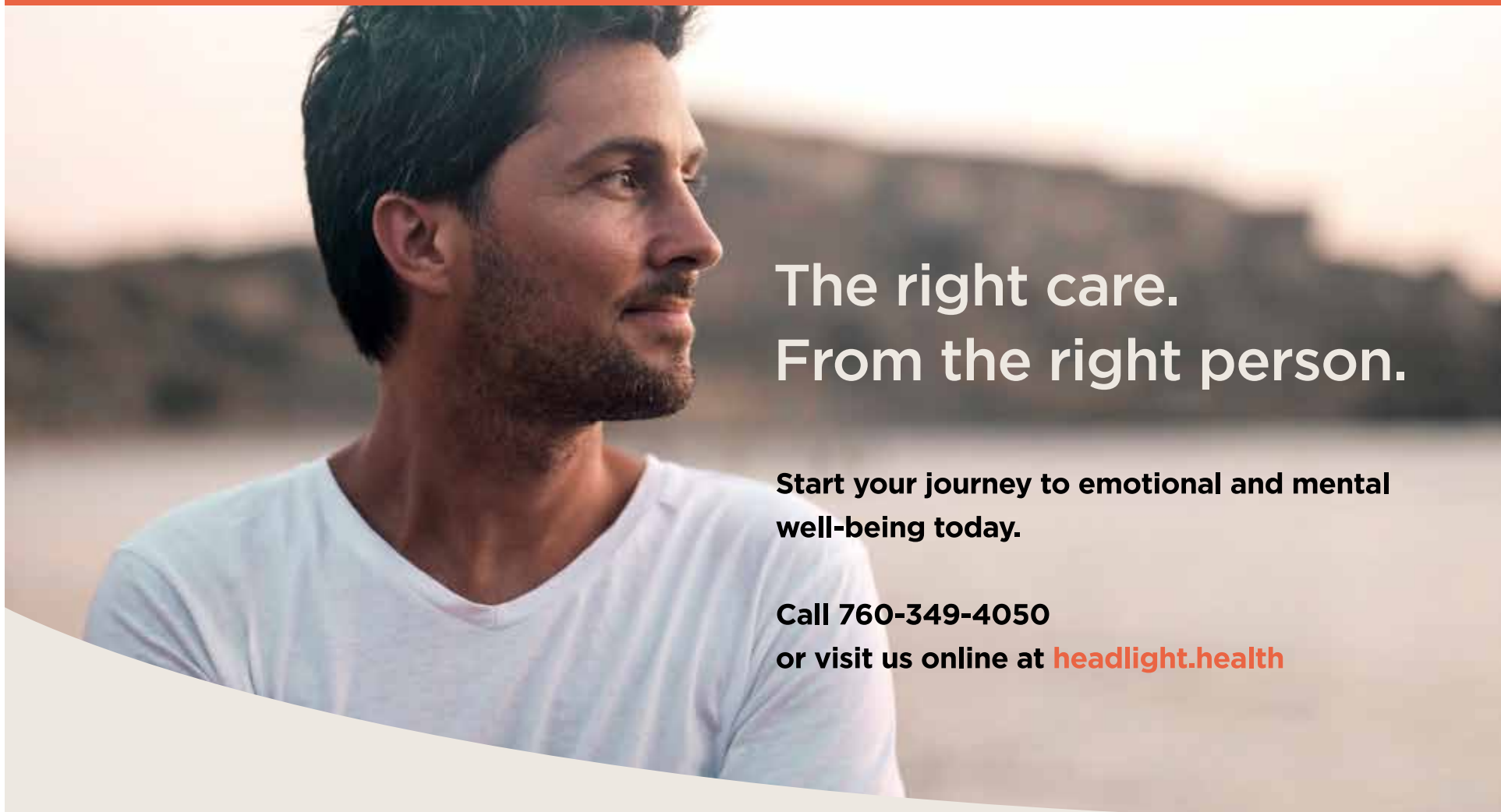
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## What Makes a Great Caregiver?

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

As a nurse and care manager who has worked in the homes and at the bedside of older adults for many years, I've had the privilege of witnessing the profound impact that a good caregiver can have on someone's life. I've also seen the unfortunate effects of when a caregiver isn't quite the right fit. Over time, I've learned a lot about what truly makes a caregiver exceptional—and why it matters so much.



Compassion and connection are important attributes to consider in a caregiver.

One of the most important things I've noticed is that the best caregivers are those who bring **genuine compassion and empathy** into the home. They aren't just there to complete a checklist of tasks; they're there to connect with the person they're caring for, to understand their needs, and to offer support in a way that feels personal and caring. When a caregiver truly cares, it shows in everything they do, from how they speak to their clients to how they assist with daily activities.

**Patience** is another quality that can't be overstated. I've seen caregivers who rush through tasks, treating each day like a race to the finish line. This approach often leaves the person they're caring for feeling stressed and overlooked. On the other hand, a patient caregiver knows that it's not only about getting things done, but also doing them in a way that respects the individual's pace and dignity. They're there to support, not to push, and that makes all the difference.

**Reliability** is also critical. I've seen situations where a caregiver's inconsistency causes real anxiety for the person they're supposed to be helping. When you're relying on someone to assist with your daily needs, you need to know that they'll be there when they say they will, and be ready to help. A dependable caregiver provides that sense of security, which is so important, especially as we age.

**Communication** is another area where great caregivers stand out. It's not only about talking but also about really listening and understanding. I've seen caregivers who take the time to understand the concerns and preferences of the person they're caring for and this attention to detail leads to better, more personalized care. On the flip side, when communication breaks down misunderstandings and missed needs can occur, creating frustration for everyone involved.

**Respect** for independence is something I always look for in a caregiver. The goal is to support the person, not to take over their life. The best caregivers know how to strike that balance—encouraging independence wherever possible, but stepping in to help when it's truly needed. This respect for autonomy helps maintain the person's self-esteem and sense of control, which is so vital for their overall well-being.

**Flexibility** is another hallmark of a good caregiver. Life is unpredictable, and needs can change from day to day. A caregiver who can adapt to these changes without missing a beat is invaluable. I've seen caregivers who are easily able to adjust their approach to meet the changing needs of the person they're caring for, and this adaptability can significantly enhance the quality of care.

Continued on page 9

## The Power of Connection as We Age

Communication and coping can open doors

By Manish Sheth, MD, PhD

Aging should be something to look forward to: more time to travel and spend with family and friends. After all, it's a part of life, albeit one that comes with a variety of changes—physical, emotional and social. One major challenge, especially as more seniors choose to live alone, is building social connections. Studies show that a lack of social connection is akin to smoking 15 cigarettes a day.<sup>1</sup> Conversely, adequate social connection improves survival rates by 50%.<sup>2</sup>

We seek connection throughout our lives, be it at school, work or home. However, as the years pass and those familiar environments change, social interactions often decrease, leading to feelings of isolation. Loneliness can affect anyone, but it often becomes more pronounced for older adults. This can have serious implications for physical health, including increased risks of heart disease, stroke and cognitive decline. Understandably, many people confess to not reaching out or forming new connections due to health issues, a lack of confidence or a fear of burdening others.

A lack of social connection can be a sign of underlying mental health challenges. Just as we seek advice for financial health, we should seek advice for our mental health. With the right strategies and support, coping effectively and finding fulfillment in later life is possible.

Many folks in our community have moved here from other parts of the country to enjoy their later years, and some find it harder to build new social connections. Talk therapy can be a wonderful tool for navigating loneliness or other challenges that come with relocating, whether these feelings are temporary or more enduring.

During a recent conversation on a flight, a senior from the community stated that she has been connected with the local "Y" for decades, which gives her a social outlet and keeps her physically healthy. Yet she finds that people always seem busy, and worries her doctors and others see her as merely a number. If we seek more social connections and are unsure where to start, a therapist can be a great resource.

Some find comfort in a consistent relationship with a therapist, while others prefer to dip in and out as needs arise. Therapists can offer guidance during life transitions, such as grieving the loss of a loved one, adjusting to retirement or struggling with a lost sense of purpose. As you journey through this stage of life, therapy can help you cultivate self-compassion, recognize your inherent worth, and rediscover purpose in your experiences.

As our bodies and our lives evolve, there will be moments of loneliness or uncertainty. But it can also be a time to embrace new experiences, nurture connections and prioritize mental well-being. Allow yourself the grace to experience all of life's emotions and be kind to yourself by seeking a little guidance when you need it.

Dr. Sheth is a practicing psychiatrist and co-founder and president of Headlight Health, a local mental health practice serving the Coachella Valley. He is also a member of Desert Doctors and can be reached at (760) 349.4050 or visit [www.headlight.health](http://www.headlight.health).

Editor's note: For more on this topic, see "Good Friends, Greater Health" p.5.

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## Pets as Medicine

By Kelly Lewallen, LMFT, CED-S

We often get calls to our office from prospective clients interested in meeting specific staff members featured on our website. Those receiving the most requests include Bobby, director of fun; Tug, VP of treat acquisitions; and Miss Lulu, our anxiety specialist. You guessed it; they fall under the professional category of *Canis lupus*, aka dog.

These three associates work diligently for their kibble. Tug works off-site, at our administrative offices providing stress release to those teams of humans. Lulu is in high demand with our younger clients, who find her calm presence reassuring. And clients can't help but snuggle the adolescent Bobby, who simply wants to wiggle with happiness.

Why are these people (and most of us) drawn to animals? We evolved together and have had mutually beneficial relationships for tens of thousands of years. But pets are a lot of work! We must house them, feed them, take them for walks...the list goes on. Still, somehow they make us stop what we are doing, or scroll social media endlessly to watch their playful and precious antics.

Numerous studies have shown that having family pets can significantly contribute to the reduction of mental health issues. The presence of a furry companion in the household can offer companionship, reduce feelings of loneliness and provide a sense of routine and responsibility. Interacting with pets has been linked to lower levels of stress, anxiety and depression, as well as increased levels of oxytocin, the "feel-good" hormone. Pets can offer unconditional love and support, creating a comforting and calming presence in the home. In essence, welcoming a family pet into your life can be

an asset in promoting overall mental well-being.

Pets also promote fitness. We get out of our chairs and away from our screens to play with them, walk them and throw the ball again and again (and again?). Cats purr in our laps, birds perch on our shoulders and talk with us, and fish can provide a calming presence. Equine therapy is also used widely for clinical practice.

Pet companionship can give people with depression and anxiety a reason to push past their diseases. The responsibility of a family pet can assist children in developing their sense of competence and healthy ego. Pets bring so much joy and reduce loneliness. During COVID, the shelters were emptied and for some people today, their pet is a primary companion.

When clients lose a pet unexpectedly, we explore the possibility of not "waiting to grieve," but rather to rescue another animal to project their love and caring onto. Pets are often the best medicine we can prescribe to enhance emotional and mental well-being.

Kelly Lewallen is CEO of Desert Marriage and Family Counseling 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).



Pets add joy and can contribute to a reduction in mental health issues.



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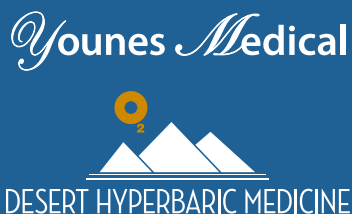


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## Cancer Recurrence Monitoring

Advancements offer peace-of-mind

By Annissa Ceja, ND

The fear of recurrence is one of the greatest challenges of surviving cancer. Sometimes fleeting, sometimes lingering, the uncertainty can be a source of concern for many cancer survivors, including myself. Recent advancements in medical technology now offer new ways to monitor for recurrence, giving people a sense of control and peace that once seemed out of reach.

When I first learned about circulating tumor DNA (ctDNA) testing for recurrence monitoring, it felt like a monumental breakthrough. Here is a way to detect the earliest signs of cancer's return through a simple blood sample long before it shows up on a scan or causes symptoms. Studies on the new technology continue and released results are very promising.

As a doctor, I understood the science behind it—small fragments of DNA released by cancer cells floating in the bloodstream; their presence, if detected, directly correlates with an increased risk of recurrence or metastasis. As a naturopathic doctor with a focus on integrative oncology, I have thought about all the possible interventions if a test came back positive. But as a survivor, what resonates most with me is the reassurance that a negative test could offer.

The power of ctDNA testing lies in its specificity. It's tailored to the individual's cancer, analyzing the unique genetic material of their tumor biopsy. This powerful tool can monitor for residual disease post-treatment and early recurrence in a very personal way. For my patients and myself, this means a way to stay vigilant without being consumed by anxiety—a way to live our lives with a little less fear.

Desert Health Publisher Lauren Del Sarto has written about her cancer journey and experience with the multi-cancer early detection (MCED) test Galleri, so let me touch on the difference. While Galleri also detects DNA circulating in the blood, which may be ctDNA from a cancer tumor, its focus is on methylation rather than identifying specific mutations in ctDNA. The difference is that tests like Signatera (ctDNA) look at your tumor tissue and look for those particular mutations in the circulating DNA. It is more specific for cancer recurrence because you must have a previous tumor biopsy as a reference before running a ctDNA test. So, the main difference is that the ctDNA test focuses on identifying and tracking specific mutations linked to a patient's known cancer. Another important note is that while Galleri is yet to be covered by insurance, as of February of this year, Natera tests are covered for several stage II-IV cancer types including breast, colon, ovarian and as monitoring for immune checkpoint inhibitors.

But ctDNA is just one part of the picture. In my residency, I've also seen the benefits of functional lab testing, which looks at a broader range of biomarkers that can indicate potential health issues before they become serious. These tests can reveal underlying imbalances, like chronic inflammation, immune dysfunction and oxidative stress, which are known to contribute to cancer recurrence. By working closely with cancer survivors to proactively address these issues, naturopathic doctors help empower them to create a healthier internal environment, making it less likely for cancer to return.

Combining ctDNA with functional lab testing provides a comprehensive approach to post-treatment cancer care. While ctDNA keeps a close eye on any possible recurrence at the molecular level, functional testing helps us manage the broader aspects of health that might influence recurrence. Together, they form a powerful combination, empowering cancer survivors to address identified risks and take charge of their health.

Continued on page 9





## Good Friends, Greater Health

By Susan Murphy, PhD

In the hustle and bustle of adult life, it's easy to overlook the significance of friendships. Yet, these relationships play a crucial role in your overall well-being. Unlike the friendships of your youth, adult friendships often require more effort to maintain but offer profound rewards. They provide emotional support, ward off depression and anxiety and contribute to a sense of belonging and purpose.



Studies show that the quality of relationships is the strongest predictor of long-term health and happiness.

A group of close friends can buffer you from the stress and mental health issues life can bring. It's not just about having many friends but having high-quality friendships that provide support and companionship. Adults with strong social connections have a reduced risk of many health conditions like obesity and high blood pressure and tend to live longer than those with fewer social connections. In fact, The Harvard Study of Adult Development found that quality of relationships is the strongest predictor of long-term health and happiness.<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, the amount of time and energy to develop friendships as adults may seem overwhelming, which leads many adults to stay in existing unhealthy relationships or decide to forego social opportunities altogether. It takes about 50 hours of contact to form a friendship and closer to 200 to form a close long-lasting friendship.<sup>2</sup>

What are some strategies for making friends as an adult?

**Be intentional.** Adult friendships are created by design, not default. Decide you want to befriend more people and that you will give the time and energy it takes to develop successful friendships.

**Leverage your hobbies.** Nothing brings people together more than shared interests. Join clubs or groups that align with your interests, values and hobbies like a book club, Mahjong group, investment club or fundraising group for your favorite charity. These activities will naturally place you in the company of like-minded people, making it easier to strike up conversations and forge friendships.

**Take a class.** Education not only expands your knowledge; it also expands your social circle. Sign up for classes that interest you like painting, language courses, personal development or current events. These courses will provide a conversation starter with classmates who share your curiosity.

**Take initiative to reach out to others.** Don't just wait for others to initiate a conversation. Most people are shy, so be assertive and say "Hi" first with a welcoming smile, give a sincere compliment, invite others to join in your plans.

**Be patient and persistent.** Building friendships takes time, so don't be discouraged by setbacks or slow progress. Keep putting yourself out there, and don't give up after a few failed attempts.

**Be open and say "yes" more often.** Be open to new invitations and experiences, even if they push you out of your comfort zone. Saying yes to social gatherings, work events, or community activities increases your chances of meeting new people. Every friend was once a stranger!

**Don't gossip - be kind.** Trust is the basis for any friendship. When you gossip about another friend, you are showing that you are not trustworthy. No one will trust that you are not gossiping behind his/her back when they are not present. The only thing to do behind someone's back is give a pat!

**Be a great listener.** An anagram for "Listen" is "Silent." Listening is a crucial skill in any relationship. Be Silent! Show genuine interest in others' lives, ask open-ended questions and give them your full attention.

**Keep discreet information confidential.** Some secrets are "juicy" and you may be tempted to share them. Don't do it! Again, it will break the trust with your friend.

**More don'ts.** Don't be clingy. Don't hog the conversation. Don't gossip. Don't talk about your health all the time. Don't be negative. Don't bring drama.

**Implement the five-minute rule.** The five-minute rule limits discussion about personal health issues to five minutes. Then the conversation must focus on other topics.

**Be open minded and receptive to new people of all ages.** Approach the process of making friends with a sense of curiosity, openness and gratitude, and you will expand your horizons and expand the joy in your life.

You have the power to turn strangers into friends, bringing magic into your everyday interactions. The good news? Friendships can be made and maintained at any age; it's never too late to form new friendships or strengthen existing ones. Make new friends and keep the old. One is silver and the other gold.

Dr. Susan Murphy is a best-selling author, business consultant and speaker in relationships, conflict, leadership and goal-achievement. Her newest book, *Leading Successful Teams: How To Create a Winning Culture*, will be published this fall. Visit [www.DrSusanMurphy.com](http://www.DrSusanMurphy.com).

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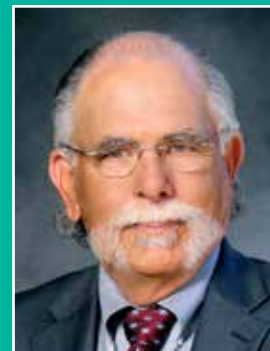


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## DIAGNOSTICS

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## Career Exploration and Preparation

By Students Kimberly Ramos and Miranda Gonzalez

The Palm Springs Academy for Learning Medicine (PALM) at Palm Springs High School offers academic classes focusing on medicine, certifications and practical skills development. The academy aims to help students achieve academic success, personal growth and career readiness through a supportive and engaging learning environment.

One of the significant advantages of this four-year program is witnessing how the real world works. We have many opportunities to improve our skills and learn from our mistakes. PALM provides job shadowing and internship opportunities that help strengthen students' knowledge and allow them to participate in hands-on experiences. These experiences enable students to try and attain goals, however if they fall short, they are exposed to important teaching moments. By experiencing and analyzing errors, students gain a more thorough understanding, eventually improving their abilities and knowledge.

Taking part in internships and job shadowing demonstrates one's commitment to the field and a proactive approach to learning. The experiences also help build relationships with mentors and classmates. These are wonderful benefits as they help build essential skills such as professionalism, patient communication and empathy.

Team unity is another important aspect gained from being a part of PALM as working together keeps everyone informed on protocols and procedures and ensures consistent patient care.

Furthermore, the benefits of our academy extend beyond the classroom. In addition to participating in our internships, students are required to undergo interviews to enhance their interviewing skills. PALM also assists students with resume writing as we start to build our portfolio with community service hours and leadership roles within the academy. Even if our future career choices don't align with the medical field, we inherit valuable life skills from our academy that prepare us for college and future careers.

The Palm Springs Academy for Learning Medicine builds opportunities for students allowing them to develop hands-on skills in a professional environment. This academy is an excellent and positive influence on students and, not only shapes the careers of tomorrow's leaders, but also strengthens our community today.

This fall, Kimberly Ramos and Miranda Gonzalez start their junior year in the PALM program. For more information on valley medical academies, visit OneFuture Coachella Valley at [www.OneFutureCV.org](http://www.OneFutureCV.org) or call (760) 625.0422.



PALM students celebrate their academy on PSHS athletic field bleachers.

### Hearts for Housing

Continued from page 1

Every Tuesday from 6-8p at the corner of Washington and Country Club in Palm Desert, B2H offers a warm meal, water, clothing and shoes while Volunteers in Medicine and Eisenhower Health's street medicine team offer medical care. Psychologist Brian Wexler, PhD is there to offer mental health services while Behavioral Health Specialist Sam Murillo of Riverside University Health System's Justice Outreach Team is there to help open the door for substance abuse prevention, treatment and behavioral health services.

"Bridges to Hope offers a safe place for me to sit with the people I am trying to help," says Murillo, another caring heart who has walked the walk. "I've built rapport and trust over time and that's what it takes sometimes to break down the barriers."

Every other week Overflow 9:12 offers mobile showers, haircuts, toiletries and undergarment essentials, while Broken Chains and Celebrate Recovery provide Narcan training and product to combat drug overdose.

When individuals are ready to take the next steps to help themselves, B2H is there to assist. The team takes time to identify needs and desires—from finding Taz sized 30x30 jeans to opening the door of Matthew's new apartment, from providing transportation to helping with ID card and food stamp applications.



B2H clients Tyler and Cassie gratefully maintain employment and their new apartment.



Matthew shows his appreciation on move-in day.

For those who show promise in remaining clean and sober, B2H brings together community organizations to help secure housing including Jewish Family Services which facilitates housing and adult protection services, and the Coachella Valley Association of Governments (CVAG).

All B2H offers clients is through volunteerism, donations and grants—from their weekly meals, furnishings, clothing and transportation, to the time, care and respect they provide the people they serve. Individuals and businesses can assist by sponsoring a weekly meal (like caterer Thom Emery who sponsors a monthly barbecue) or providing necessities like flashlights, sleeping bags, and backpacks for those entering treatment. Home sponsorships include furnishings, a kitchen or bathroom set up, or an initial food stock.

"Bridging the gap starts with care and respect which is the most important thing you can offer members of our unhoused community," says Verdugo, "because it's easier to help someone when you know who they are."

For more information about Bridges 2 Hope and how you can help, visit [www.thebridges2hope.com](http://www.thebridges2hope.com) or (760) 831.0840, [Bridgestwohope@gmail.com](mailto:Bridgestwohope@gmail.com). Editorial by Lauren Del Sarto. Front photo featuring (left to right): Peggy Grabow, Michele Verdugo, Susan Veldey and Jacquie McClure.





## Plan B: “What’s Next?”

*A client story from Alzheimers Coachella Valley*

Our plan was in place. After 40 years of hard work, we retired, sold our house and moved to the desert. We were living our dream.

Then at our annual wellness checkup, my husband received the news - mild cognitive impairment - which two years later was diagnosed as vascular dementia. I had been in health care as a nurse for 40 years. I knew what our journey was going to be as I would watch the man I loved slip away one day at a time. I became the caregiver.

After anger and sadness, I needed a plan to move forward. Thank goodness we were people of faith; otherwise I do not think we would have made it. I started a journal and would like to share notes hoping to assist others and save them some pain and guilt.

- **You cannot do this alone.** Reach out to family, friends, support groups, Alzheimer’s groups and your medical team .
- **Have your affairs in order.** Ensure that all legal matters, advanced directives, trust/will and financial matters are in place; schedule an appointment with a trusted attorney.
- **Do your homework.** What resources are you going to need in the future: in-home care, a day program, assisted living, respite care, etc.? What are the costs? Does Medicare cover any of this? Meet with your accountant or financial advisor.
- **Safety is the primary goal.** In creating a safe living environment, home is normally everyone’s first choice; however this may change over time.
- **Routine is key.** Maintaining a regular routine of daily habits helps your loved one adapt. As the caregiver you will become the educator to others.
- **Taking care of yourself is essential.** Statistics show that 30% of those caring for another with a terminal illness will pass away before those with the disease.'

What I found most challenging was selecting others to assist in care. I learned the hard way that using an agency is the best means of ensuring competent, licensed, insured individuals to help. An agency freed me from the burden of background checks, bonding, drug testing and training, but I still had to communicate my expectations and requirements to the agency. If you hire assistance, it is important to let the individual alone to bond with your loved one; otherwise you'll be tempted to assist.

The other challenge on this journey is accepting that change is constantly occurring and our role is to adapt, which is easier said than done. This is why it is mandatory that we carve out time to rejuvenate.

I never dreamed my life would take this turn but it did. Because I could no longer provide my husband the level of care and safety that he needed, I finally had to place him in a residential home. He passed away in hospice surrounded by myself and caring staff. I now believe I provided the best care I could and that included dignity and loving care until the end.

This is not the story most of us wish to think about as we age. However, we need to at least have a Plan B so that we are not in crisis should we or our loved ones develop dementia; it’s our insurance policy in case we need it. I share this in hopes that it serves as a gift to you and your family.

*Alzheimers Coachella Valley is a community resource for dementia support and education. For more information, call (760) 776.3100 or visit [www.cvalzheimers.org](http://www.cvalzheimers.org).*

Reference: 1) <https://www.agingcare.com/discussions/thirty-percent-of-caregivers-die-before-the-people-they-care-for-do-97626.htm>.

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## Visceral Manipulation

A drug-free approach for chronic conditions

By Melissa Mercogliano, PT, DPT, OCS

Visceral manipulation (VM) is an osteopathic technique developed by French osteopath and physical therapist Jean-Pierre Barral. Dr. Barral spent hours studying anatomy in the cadaver lab and observed soft tissue connections within the abdominal cavity to the rest of the skeleton. He began to perform manual therapy techniques on live patients to improve organ mobility with favorable outcomes.

According to Barral, VM "recreates, harmonizes and increases proprioceptive communication in the body to enhance its internal mechanics for better health." He adds that the manual manipulation also improves the mechanical, neurological and vascular functioning of the internal organs.<sup>1</sup>

The therapy uses hands-on techniques to "listen" to the body. The clinician feels lines of tension in the body through specialized evaluative techniques allowing them to determine which organ needs to have increased mobility. The treatment relieves tension on the rest of the organs or skeleton and can improve posture, mobility, flexibility and function often resulting in reduced pain.

All of the body's organs are connected to each other and to the skeleton through fascial connections. Fascia is a three-dimensional continuum of connective tissue surrounding the bones, muscles, nerves and blood vessels throughout our body.<sup>2</sup> These tissues can become dysfunctional, shortened, damaged or scarred from multiple sources: trauma, infections, illness, allergies and surgery. The tissue injury can lead to poor function, acute/chronic pain and/or decreased mobility.

Once the tissues have altered function or poor mobility, an individual may experience symptoms including constipation, GERD, gastroparesis, hiatal hernia, abdominal pain, bloating, menstrual cramps, nerve pain, headaches, back or neck and shoulder pain. Often patients are screened by a physician or other medical specialist and the various tests show normal results. Traditional physical therapy may be prescribed, but symptoms continue.

Studies support utilizing VM to relieve a number of different conditions. Research on lower back pain was performed by Villalta Santos et al,<sup>3</sup> in 2019 and Altinbilek et al.<sup>4</sup> in 2023. Subjects were put into two groups with both receiving conventional physical therapy and only one of the groups also receiving VM. The VM group showed better lower back mobility and reduced pain. A 2018 study by de Oliveira Silva et al.<sup>5</sup> on 28 participants demonstrated decreased neck pain in one visit using VM techniques.

Several studies have also been conducted using VM to improve organ mobility to decrease constipation.<sup>6,7,8,9</sup> Results included improved bowel transit time, bowel movement regularity, decreased report of bloating and abdominal pain, along with reduction in the need for medications and improved quality of life. There are also two studies<sup>10,11</sup> with up to 140 participants on kidney mobility improvements leading to decrease urinary infections and lower back pain.

While excellent studies have been completed showing positive results for VM, further research is warranted for this safe, gentle, drug-free therapy with no known side effects.

Melissa Mercogliano, PT, DPT, OCS is a board-certified doctor of physical therapy and a Barral Institute trained provider working at Dynamic Physical Therapy in Palm Desert. She can be reached at (760) 501.6655. For more information, visit [www.barralinstitute.com/therapies](http://www.barralinstitute.com/therapies).

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# Yoga: So Much More than the Mat

By Alison Mullins, MS, IAYT, IHHC

Thoughts of yoga often invoke extreme flexibility, contorted limbs, yoga pants, messy buns and mala beads. The practice itself is much deeper, much richer, and can be a tool for living a more mindful life; a life where you never need to touch your toes but only the depth of your own heart.



The eight principles of yoga expand far beyond the practice of movement.

Yoga is actually an eight limbed path and only one of those limbs is movement, known as asana. The asana practice is what brings most to the yoga mat—the strength of the poses, the movement of the breath, the sweat and the sweetness of the final resting pose are enough to keep people coming back. Much more occurs without the student's awareness. These are the pieces that can be taken off the mat and into one's life.

By developing a yoga practice off the mat, one can become more mindful of many aspects of their own lives. It is through this awareness one can begin to make subtle changes in behaviors, choices and habits that may not be serving them to achieve their highest potential or greatest good.

For example, the first two limbs of the yoga practice are the yamas (abstinences) and niyamas (observances). These are considered the ethical practices of yoga, but really are ethical practices of life. They invite us to take a deeper look into how we take responsibility for ourselves as we engage in the world by consciously choosing alternate behaviors. They guide us deeper into the ideas of non-harming, truthfulness, non-stealing, non-possessiveness, maintaining vitality, discipline, contentment, purity, self-study and devotion. Each practice has within it a unique lesson, one you can return to time and again as life ebbs and flows.

The fourth limb, pranayama, focuses on breath control. Why is this important? The breath follows the mind, and the body follows the breath. When the mind is busy, the breath is quick, shallow; thereby the body moves more quickly, making it difficult to relax. When we learn to control the breath through these practices, we can learn to quiet the mind and relax the body. This is one of the benefits on the mat as well; students don't often realize it is happening, but know they feel amazing after every class!

The fifth limb, pratyahara, teaches us to withdraw the senses, remove distractions. In this fast-paced world where everything is literally at our fingertips 24/7, this is an invaluable practice. Closing the eyes is one of the simplest ways to withdraw; to quiet the mind as the sense of sight brings so much information to the brain. By simply closing the eyes and removing the external stimulus, even briefly, the heart rate slows, the breath deepens and the mind quiets. The same goes for silence. I needn't say more than this: LISTEN and SILENT are spelled with the same letters; the quieter you are, the more you can hear.

The sixth limb, dharana, teaches us about focused concentration. Again, our culture is no longer designed for us to do one thing at a time. This is a practice that really guides us deeply into learned concentration. With increased recognition of brain health, mental acuity, the rise of adult ADD, anxiety and depression, dharana is a valuable practice to employ at any stage of life.

The seventh limb, dhyana, is meditative absorption. This is where we can truly integrate the breath, the removal of the senses and the focused concentration so the benefits of meditation can be felt. Numerous studies point to the power of a meditation practice for the improvement of health and wellness.

The eighth limb is known as samadhi, 'sama' meaning 'same' or 'equal' and 'dhi' meaning 'to see'. This practice brings us to see life as it is without the interference of the mind, the outside distractions, the judgements, etc. Referred to as enlightenment or bliss the state is best described as a place where one can just be with what is. Yes, this is a practice.

Much like a musician plays the same notes again and again to create a melody, we too can practice these principles again and again to bring a melodic quality into our daily lives.

Alison Mullins is a certified holistic life and health coach, yoga therapist, sound healer and founder of Coppermoon Rising. She offers private and corporate wellness programs combining the "8 Pillars of Wellness" and the "8 Limbs of Yoga" to create a life of balance. Contact Alison at [alison@coppermoonrising.com](mailto:alison@coppermoonrising.com) or visit [www.coppermoonrising.com](http://www.coppermoonrising.com).

## What Makes a Great Caregiver?

Continued from page 3

Lastly, a positive attitude can truly lift the spirits of the person receiving care. I've seen firsthand how a caregiver's warmth and positivity can turn a challenging day into a more manageable one. Positivity brings a bit of light into the home, making each day a little brighter and more enjoyable. It's that dance in the kitchen or shared laughter over coffee that leaves a lingering smile, long after the caregiver has gone home.

In my years as a local nurse advocate, I've seen the profound impact that the right caregiver can have. They're more than helpers—they're companions, confidantes and a vital part of ensuring that the person they care for can live their life with dignity, comfort and joy. So, when you're looking for a caregiver, think about these qualities. Finding someone who not only meets your physical needs but also supports your emotional and mental well-being can make all the difference in your day-to-day life.

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 dedicated to unraveling the mysteries of health care processes and advocating for patients, families and caregivers. (760) 851.4116. [www.myhealthmyadvocate.com](http://www.myhealthmyadvocate.com).

## Cancer Recurrence Monitoring

Continued from page 9

As a doctor, I've always believed in the power of knowledge. And as a survivor, I've come to appreciate how much peace that knowledge can bring. These new technologies allow us to move from a reactive stance, waiting for something to go wrong, to a proactive one, where we're actively working to prevent it.

The fear of recurrence may never completely disappear, but with advances like ctDNA and functional lab testing, we can face that fear with greater empowerment.

Dr. Ceja is a primary care naturopathic doctor and resident at Live Well Clinic in La Quinta and can be reached at (760) 771.5970. For more information, visit [www.livewellclinic.org](http://www.livewellclinic.org).

Sources: 1) <https://www.cancer.gov/news-events/cancer-currents-blog/2024/colorectal-cancer-ctdna-may-guide-adjuvant-therapy>; 2) <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41523-024-00626-6>; 3) <https://www.natera.com/oncology/billing>



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## Outdoor Medicine

By Shari Jainuddin, NMD, BCB

Let's zoom out for a moment, look down at Earth, and consider how we have survived and evolved to live on this incredible planet. The air we breathe and ground we walk upon are part of that equation. However, in recent history, we have insulated ourselves from these elements through our built environment and rubber-soled shoes. While protecting ourselves from the elements has played a part in our survival, these advances have also removed us from their healthful benefits.

Nature's medicine has been used to treat disease for centuries. In "Silver Linings of COVID-19" (Nov/Dec 2020), I discussed the integration of outdoor therapy into the modern medical system. First introduced by Arnold Rikli, MD in 1848 for treating tuberculosis, the therapy was then rediscovered 73 years later by physicians at Beth Israel Hospital for the same purpose. In 1918, "open air" treatment was used to treat the Spanish flu.<sup>1</sup>

Knowing what we know now about the importance of vitamin D for a robust immune system, this makes sense. Vitamin D is internally activated by exposing skin to the sun, and its researched benefits include enhanced bone strength, as well as improved mental, cardiovascular and nervous system health to name a few.<sup>2-4</sup>

Another important aspect of being outdoors is putting your feet in contact with the Earth. The practice of "grounding" (simply going barefoot) continues to grow as scientists unearth its positive effects on health. Every cell, chemical and molecule in our body (and the Earth) is based on physics, maintained through charges. Chronic exposure to altered environments from technology and insulation from the Earth as a result of our built environment changes our electrical potential. Touching the Earth directly rebalances our electrical potential to that of the Earth and influences physiological processes. Evidence suggests that grounding has anti-inflammatory effects including stabilizing the nervous system, decreasing agitation and stress, improving mood, accelerating healing, and reducing pain.<sup>5-9</sup>

Forest bathing, or Shinrin-yuku, is a practice of dedicating time to slow down and immerse (bathe) yourself in nature while increasing the awareness of your senses. Considering that trees and plants oxygenate air and provide volatile oils containing antimicrobial and mood-enhancing properties, this is understandable. These are just a couple of the countless variables that exist in a forest environment. Research has shown that spending time amongst nature has positive physiological and psychological effects including lowering blood pressure, improving depression, anxiety and stress, and improving immune function.<sup>10-14</sup>

In our harsh desert climate, caution must be taken with sun exposure and grounding. Accessibility of green spaces (forests) is also limited, thus, the need for such therapies is even more important. While no exact time for outdoor exposure has yet been determined, general recommendations are approximately 10-20 minutes of skin exposure to the sun, 20-30 minutes of grounding and an hour or more of forest bathing per day.

It is my hope that this encourages you to venture outside to access the many health benefits nature provides.

*Dr. Shari Jainuddin is a naturopathic primary care doctor at One Life Naturopathic and also offers biofeedback training and craniosacral therapy. For more information, call (442) 256.5963 or visit [www.onelifenaturopathic.org](http://www.onelifenaturopathic.org).*

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## Nourishing Our Minds through Food

*A look at the gut-brain connection*

By Bryan Paul Blackwell, CHHC

Understanding the phrase, "Our gut is our second brain," empowers us to take control of our health. The food we eat directly influences our gut health, which in turn affects our brain function. Thus, a healthy gut leads to a healthy mind, while an unhealthy gut can contribute to mental and cognitive disorders.<sup>1</sup>

We know that a diet high in processed foods, sugar and unhealthy fats can lead to inflammation in the gut creating inflammatory cytokines which then move to the brain and disrupt normal brain function. This is why you might feel foggy, irritable or generally "off" the next day after a night of indulging in pizza and beer. The extra calories are not the only problem; it's the inflammation in your gut affecting your brain.

Research now demonstrates the role our diets play in the development of severe conditions like dementia and Alzheimer's.<sup>2</sup> High sugar intake can lead to insulin resistance and type 2 diabetes, which are closely linked to cognitive decline.<sup>3</sup> This is why Alzheimer's is now referred to as type 3 diabetes. The pancreas, which regulates blood sugar, can fail due to a poor diet, leading to elevated glucose levels and, eventually, to brain dysfunction.<sup>4</sup> When the pancreas fails, it can no longer regulate blood sugar levels effectively, leading to high glucose levels that can damage brain cells and contribute to cognitive decline.

Another critical aspect of gut health is the balance of our microbiome, the trillions of bacteria living in our digestive system. These microorganisms are crucial in digesting food, absorbing nutrients and maintaining immune function. An imbalanced microbiome, often caused by poor dietary choices, can lead to a leaky gut, where toxins and bacteria escape into the bloodstream. This not only triggers inflammation but also can directly impact brain health, contributing to mood disorders and potentially other mental health issues.<sup>5</sup>

I've personally experienced the powerful connection between gut health and overall well-being. As a stage 4 cancer patient, I went through treatment that took a severe toll on my body, especially my gut. After years of struggling with digestive issues, I discovered the profound impact that diet has on my health. Nourishing my gut with the right foods dramatically improved my digestive health, mental clarity and mood, and I am a ten year cancer survivor.

The connection between our gut and brain is complex, but essential, and a strong reminder of the need for a holistic approach to health. By understanding and respecting this connection, we can make better food choices that support our gut health and enhance our mental well-being.

Remember, you only have one body and one mind. Treat them well, and they will serve you well in return.

Bryan Paul Blackwell, co-owner of Barefoot Balance Holistic Health Coaching, is a certified health coach specializing in integrative nutrition and digestive health. He can be reached at (760) 895.8233. Visit [www.barefootbalance.com](http://www.barefootbalance.com).

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## What Are You Masking?

By Judy Nemer Sklar

There is a saying that you have three faces. The first face is the face you show to the world. The second is the face you show to your close friends and family. The third face is the face you do not show and is the most authentic reflection of who you are.

Not everyone might agree with that statement, but for some, the greatest fear is that if you show the world your true self, the world won't even notice you. But remember that no one brings the same imagination, creativity and spirit to the world in the same way as you do. Being authentic allows your unique magic and potential to come alive.

We wear many masks to suit our roles in life. Wearing a mask is sometimes necessary, such as professional settings or dealing with a difficult person. Masks help navigate an uncomfortable situation, but knowing when to remove it is the challenge.

We live in a world that often makes us feel we should be something we're not. Our friends may appear to have a perfect life online, but we often can't see their authentic selves. Reasons for donning masks may include fears of insecurity, power or anger, and fears the world will discover who we really are. Unfortunately, we sometimes forget what is truly important in this complicated world.

Masks have existed since ancient times, and throughout the years, artists and writers have used mask-making to evoke power, mystery and communication. Making a mask is one way to consider using creativity to explore the many faces we wear, including the ones we keep concealed and the ones we reveal to others. We can create a mask using paints, collages and embellishments to spark imagination and exploration. The art-making process allows for storytelling, play and self-discovery.

What could happen if you let go of the mask? When we're constantly playing roles, we rarely stop to question why we need to wear them. But removing the mask can be a truly liberating experience. You might find relief in being authentic; a freedom you never knew was possible.

The Brazilian poet and author Deborah Leipziger writes about the masks we choose to wear, "If I must wear a mask, let it be a mask of flowers. Violets and magnolias, pansies. Buds of all kinds, wrapped around my ears, covering my lips. Let me smile in the iris, a flower, the first syllable."

I suggest you let Leipziger's poem spark your imagination. The world is eagerly awaiting the real you. Take a moment to reflect on the masks you wear. This act of self-reflection is a powerful tool for rediscovering yourself.

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@judynergsklar.com](mailto:judy@judynergsklar.com).



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## Quality Pillow Time

By Candice Nicole

Many of us still are not getting enough sleep. Phones and other electronics, binge watching the latest streaming service series, or our never-ending work and family obligations can put quality pillow time on the back burner. Let this article be a friendly reminder of how crucial sleep is for maintaining health.

Sleep, diet and exercise are paramount for intracellular health and regeneration of our bodies. Either independently or in combination, optimizing each of these areas plays a significant role in daily physical and mental acuity and performance, as well as how we respond to illness. Once you begin to make small daily changes in each of these areas, you will notice significant improvements in how you feel and in your overall well-being.



Our quality of sleep affects function down to the cellular level.

Insufficient sleep quantity or quality leads to decreases in general health affecting numerous systems including cardiovascular, mental and cellular health; poor glucose regulation and increased pro-inflammatory cytokines. Poor sleep can also increase systemic inflammation, the primary cause of most chronic disease.

Sleep also plays a large role in mental health and cognitive function; as the amount of sleep time declines, mental health suffers. Ever notice how lack of sleep can make you crabby and agitated? Those unhappy emotions can be a sure sign that you need more shut-eye.

Our sleep patterns shift with life changes and aging. Good restorative sleep is incredibly important for stem cell production and for overall restoration of the body, especially as we age. Proper sleep allows the body to regenerate and rejuvenate as it provides time for our body to repair damaged tissue by increasing growth hormone and stem cell production. The energy conservation theory states that sleep allows for the body to repair and replenish cellular components necessary for biological functions that become depleted throughout the waking day.

Have trouble falling asleep? Mindfulness meditation has been shown to improve sleep quality and lifespan by decreasing ruminative thoughts and emotional reactivity. It has been proven to decrease stress and improve general health, which suggests that both sleep and stress levels play an important role in overall health, separately and in combination.

Let's remain mindful to gift ourselves a high-quality diet, less stress, increased exercise and quality pillow time. Remember, when we are sleeping, we are repairing, so rest well, my friends!

Candice Nicole is a health advocate and founder of HUmineral food derived mineral nutrients. 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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## Harvest Strength and Peace

Yogic perspective for autumn renewal

By Jennifer Yockey

As the air begins to cool and sun's intensity subsides, autumn invites us to shift our energy inward, reflecting the natural world's preparation for the cooler months ahead. In our modern, fast-paced lives, it's easy to miss these subtle cues for renewal and introspection. However, by embracing yogic principles and practices, we can align ourselves with the season's energy, harvesting both strength and peace for the journey ahead.

The yogic perspective teaches us that we are intimately connected with the rhythms of nature. Just as trees shed their leaves, we too can release what no longer serves us, making space for new growth and deeper self-understanding.

This autumn, let's explore how we can apply ancient wisdom to our contemporary lives, cultivating resilience and inner calm amidst the whirlwind of our daily responsibilities.

### Grounding through change

Autumn is a season of transition, and change can often bring uncertainty. The practice of grounding becomes essential during this time. In yoga, we often start our practice by connecting to the ground beneath us, our selves and our breath. This grounding is practice for when we step off our mat and into our lives.

**Wellness wisdom:** Begin your day with a simple grounding meditation. Stand barefoot on the earth, if possible, or simply feel your feet firmly planted on the floor. Take five deep breaths, imagining roots growing from the soles of your feet deep into the earth. This practice can help you feel stable and centered, ready to face whatever the day may bring.

### Harvesting inner strength

As the season shifts, it's an ideal time to focus on building both physical and mental strength. In yoga, we understand that true strength comes from a balance of effort and ease, of holding on and letting go.

**Wellness wisdom:** Incorporate a few minutes of core work into your daily routine. Try holding plank pose for 30 seconds, gradually increasing the duration as you build strength. Remember to breathe deeply, finding steadiness in the challenge. This practice not only strengthens your physical core but also builds mental resilience and focus.

### Embracing the art of letting go

The falling leaves remind us of the beauty in release. In our lives, holding onto past hurts, outdated beliefs, or unnecessary possessions can weigh us down, preventing growth and renewal.



The yogic perspective teaches us how intimately connected we are with the rhythms of nature.



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## Understanding Hair Loss

By Farris Sandhu, MD

Hair loss is a common and challenging condition affecting millions worldwide. Hair loss is often associated with aging, however, other factors including genetics, hormonal changes, stress and illness can contribute to hair loss at any age. The condition can occur in stages and result in different types of hair thinning and baldness.

### The impact of COVID on hair loss

The global pandemic added another layer to this problem. COVID has been linked to significant hair shedding for many, including younger adults and children. Research has increasingly shown that COVID can lead to telogen effluvium,<sup>1</sup> a type of hair loss where a significant number of hairs prematurely enter the shedding phase of the hair growth cycle. The stress of illness, coupled with the body's focus on fighting off the virus, diverts resources away from non-essential functions like hair growth. This condition typically begins two to three months after recovering from COVID and can last for several months.<sup>1</sup>

### Common causes of hair loss<sup>2</sup>

Androgenic alopecia, commonly known as male or female pattern baldness, is the most prevalent cause of hair loss, affecting millions in the U.S. It is primarily driven by genetic factors and hormonal changes, particularly an increased sensitivity to dihydrotestosterone (DHT). In men, it typically manifests as thinning at the temples and crown, eventually leading to baldness. In women, hair loss usually affects the crown and frontal hairline.

**Hormonal changes.** Hormonal fluctuations are another significant contributor, particularly in women. Conditions such as pregnancy, childbirth and menopause can lead to temporary or permanent hair thinning. The drop in estrogen levels during menopause can accelerate hair loss and change the density of the hair itself.

**Medical conditions and treatments.** Certain medical conditions such as thyroid disease and iron deficiency anemia can lead to hair loss. Cancer treatments like chemotherapy are well-known for causing rapid hair shedding due to their effects on rapidly dividing cells, including hair follicles.

**High stress levels and nutritional deficiencies.** High stress levels and inadequate nutrition, particularly deficiencies in iron, protein, biotin or zinc, can also trigger temporary hair loss which can become chronic if the underlying issues are not addressed.

Due to these varying factors, diagnosing the specific cause of hair loss is important to implement the appropriate treatment plan. The effectiveness of treatments varies widely among individuals. The most commonly used are minoxidil (Rogaine) and finasteride (Propecia). Minoxidil is a topical solution that helps stimulate hair growth and slow down hair loss and is available over-the-counter. Finasteride is an oral medication that works by reducing DHT levels. It is approved for use in men, but not recommended for women, especially those of childbearing age, due to potential side effects. Both medications demonstrate efficacy, particularly when treatment is started early. However, they both must be continued indefinitely to maintain results as stopping often leads to the resumption of hair loss.

### Regenerative approaches to hair restoration

**Low-level laser therapy (LLLT)/red light therapy:** LLLT, often referred to as red light therapy when using red wavelengths, involves the use of specific wavelengths of light (typically 630 to 1100 nanometers) to penetrate the scalp and stimulate hair follicles. This non-invasive treatment is FDA-approved for treating hair loss in both men and women and studies show that it can increase hair density and thickness, making it a



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**Joseph Scherger, MD, MPH**  
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promising option for those looking to combat hair thinning. The type of red light used in LLLT is specifically designed to stimulate hair growth, which differs from red light therapies used for other purposes, such as skin treatments.<sup>3</sup>

**Microneedling with exosomes:** Microneedling involves using fine needles to create micro-channels on the scalp, which stimulates the body's natural healing process. When combined with exosomes—tiny vesicles derived from stem cells that promote cell communication—this treatment can significantly enhance hair growth by activating dormant hair follicles and improving scalp health.<sup>4</sup>

**Platelet-rich plasma (PRP) therapy:** PRP uses concentrated platelets derived from the patient's own blood and injected into the scalp. Platelets contain growth factors that can stimulate hair growth and improve hair density. PRP is often used in combination with other treatments like microneedling for enhanced results.<sup>4</sup>

**NeoGraft FUE (follicular unit extraction):** This advanced hair transplantation technique uses FUE to harvest hair follicles individually from areas of the scalp where there is more density, and transfer them to balding areas. The minimally invasive procedure leaves no linear scars and offers a more natural-looking hairline compared to traditional methods.<sup>5</sup>


Hair loss can be challenging, but understanding its causes and exploring available treatment options can be empowering. Consulting with a specialized medical professional is essential to determine the best course of treatment tailored to your individual needs to achieve a fuller, healthier head of hair.

*Dr. Sandhu is founder and CEO of Amara Regenerative Aesthetics; a Diplomate, American Board of Internal Medicine; and Member, Board of Anti-Aging Medicine and the American Board of Aesthetics Medicine. She can be reached at (760) 895.4140. For more information visit www.AmaraRA.com.*

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**Local 50+ Pickleball Turns Pro**  
*CV Scorpions join national league*

By Lauren Del Sarto

America's fastest growing sport is getting serious. The latest organization to form around this backyard to big leagues phenomenon is the National Pickleball League (NPL), featuring professional team competition exclusively for the Champions Division, ages 50+. The league will conclude their second season with their championship tournament in October.

Proudly joining the league of 12 national teams drafting top players from across the country is the newly formed Coachella Valley Scorpions. Established by local pro Kim Jagd, a former pro volleyball player who turned to pickleball ten years ago at 49, and local real estate exec Rob Zwemmer, the Scorpions are the first and only Champion Pro team in California.

"In a record nine months, the Coachella Valley Scorpions have gone from a passion Rob and I had to a full blown company," exclaims

Jagd who led the Indianapolis Indy Drivers to the NPL's first title last season. "We've drafted an incredible group of 14 professional players, landed Vince Vaughn [actor] as a famous majority stakeholder, proudly secured Agua Caliente Casinos as our new Presenting Sponsor and are in position to vie for the league championship in October!"

NPL teams consist of up to eight men and eight women players. The Scorpions roster includes: top-ranked player and bestselling *Pickleball Mindset* co-author Dayne Gingrich (Santa Barbara), Piet Aldrich (Solana Beach), Joe Frasca (Colorado Springs, CO), Keith Jain (Carlsbad), Julene James (Bluffdale, UT), Lily Kordic-Mueller (Carlsbad), Maggie Murch (North Vancouver, BC), John Riedy (Carlsbad), David Smith (Spirit Lake, IA), Chrishawn Spackman (Gulfport, FL), Johan Svensson (Lakeland, TN), Brenda Tilford (Highland, CA) and Stacy Zelenski (Morro Bay, CA).

Similar to our valley's other professional franchise, the Coachella Valley Firebirds, the Scorpions are keeping community enthusiasm and outreach top of mind. The team plans to host camps, clinics and special events for community members and youth and will host an NPL competition during the 2025 season.

"We are excited to elevate passion for the sport across generations in the Coachella Valley," add Jagd. "Pickleball is a spirited game that unites youth, families and seniors and reminds us all that competitive sports can be enjoyed at any - and every - age. We couldn't be more excited about the future."

To learn more, visit [www.scorpionspickleball.com](http://www.scorpionspickleball.com) or follow the team on Instagram: @ScorpionsPickleball and Facebook: [www.facebook.com/ScorpionsPickleball](http://www.facebook.com/ScorpionsPickleball).



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## Leveling the Playing Field From Paralympics to playgrounds

By Mike Rosenkrantz

Each year following the Olympics, the Paralympics take place featuring 23 sports and 549 events across 269 sessions. Like the Olympics, these games feature elite athletes pursuing their dreams of becoming the best in the world in their featured sport. And like adapted sports for recreational athletes, the games are important because everyone – no matter their ability – should be able to participate at every level.

Paralympic history began in 1948 at a war veteran hospital in Stoke Mandeville, located 60 kilometers north of London. German neurologist Sir Ludwig Guttman was looking for a way to help his paraplegic patients, all World War II veterans, rehabilitate more quickly. In 1952, he was instrumental in establishing the International Stoke Mandeville Games that became the Paralympic Games in 1960. Taking place in Rome, Italy, the first Paralympics featured 400 athletes from 23 countries. Today, over 4,400 athletes from 150 countries take part.

As with the Olympics the Paralympics represent a greater population. An estimated 1.3 billion people worldwide experience significant disability representing 16% of the world's population, or 1 in 6 of us. According to 2021 U.S. Census Bureau data, there are about 42.5 million Americans with disabilities, making up 13% of the civilian noninstitutionalized population. These are huge numbers of people who deserve the same opportunities as everybody else, and thus, access, inclusion and leveling the playing field do matter.

In the Coachella Valley, we are fortunate that there are many opportunities for people with disability to participate in whatever they wish; not only sports and physical health opportunities, but also social interactions and connections leading towards positive emotional health.

The larger question is how to create greater societal inclusion so that all feel welcomed, respected and appreciated. This doesn't happen overnight; however, there are still places where accessible restrooms and parking spaces don't exist. If you are able-bodied, you may find that surprising, but these basic barriers are just the beginning in creating a safe, friendly and welcoming community for all.

Educating children during school hours is certainly a good starting point for beginning the conversation about diversity, access and inclusion. SoCal Adaptive Sports' "Sports for everyBODY" program seeks to do just that and has worked with over 5,000 children throughout the region over the past two years. Attending and watching adaptive sporting events such as the Paralympics is another way to increase awareness, compassion and understanding.

Creating greater societal inclusion is possible and begins with having greater awareness and opportunities available to everybody. Leveling the playing field starts with each and every one of us.

Michael Rosenkrantz is CEO and Founder of SoCal Adaptive Sports and can be reached at (760) 469.9207 or [mike@socaladaptivesports.org](mailto:mike@socaladaptivesports.org). For more information visit [www.socaladaptivesports.org](http://www.socaladaptivesports.org).

Source: 1) <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/disability-and-health>



The shared joy of sports can be a great equalizer for all populations.

### Harvest Strength and Peace

Continued from page 12

**Wellness wisdom:** Practice a "letting go" ritual. Write down something you're ready to release on a leaf (real or paper). Take a moment to reflect on why you're ready to let this go, then burn the leaf safely or bury it in the earth. Follow this with a few rounds of deep breathing, imagining yourself lightened and freed.



A gratitude journal can train our minds to recognize the positive in life.

#### Nurturing inner peace

As the external world prepares for winter's quiet, we can cultivate a sense of inner peace and calm. This doesn't mean withdrawing from the world, but rather finding stillness amidst the motion of life.

**Wellness wisdom:** Create a 5-minute "peace pause" in your day. Find a quiet spot, set a timer and simply sit. You don't need to meditate formally - just observe your breath and the sensations in your body. This "mini-retreat" can refresh your mind and bring a sense of spaciousness to your day.

#### Cultivating gratitude

Autumn is traditionally a time of harvest, reminding us to appreciate the abundance in our lives. Practicing gratitude can shift our perspective, helping us find joy even in challenging times.

**Wellness wisdom:** Start a gratitude text chain. Each evening, write down three things for which you are grateful. They can be as simple as a warm cup of tea or as profound as a supportive relationship. This practice trains our minds to notice the positive, cultivating a sense of contentment and peace. And having a friend or two along for the practice never hurts.

As we move through this season of change, remember that yoga is not just a physical practice but a way of life. By integrating these principles and practices into our daily routines, we can harvest strength and peace, navigating the autumn months with grace and resilience.

This autumn, let's commit to nurturing ourselves with the same care and attention we might give to tending a garden. By grounding ourselves, building strength, letting go of the unnecessary, cultivating peace and practicing gratitude, we prepare ourselves to weather any storm and appreciate the unique beauty each season of life brings.

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 visit [www.gatherlaquinta.com](http://www.gatherlaquinta.com).



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## YOUR FINANCIAL HEALTH

By Michele T. Sarna, CFP®, AIF®



### Retirees Beware

Recently, the *New York Times* published an article by Tara Siegel Bernard entitled, "How One Man Lost \$740,000 to Scammers Targeting His Retirement Savings." The victim, a retired lawyer, was convinced by scammers that he was part of a government investigation. The scheme involved several individuals posing as investigators, IRS agents and authorities. They convinced him to transfer his 401k and other financial accounts to "a secure place, largely by using bitcoin, ATMs and wire transfers." He also gave them full access to his laptop instructing him not to tell anyone including his family.

This reporting read like a plot for a blockbuster movie, but it wasn't. It was a true story of someone's life savings being swindled in a matter of months. As if this wasn't bad enough, the majority of the money swindled was retirement savings which prompted taxable events upon the assets being liquidated.

Although we all are targets of scammers, a primary focus is retirees. Here are tips to safeguard at any age:

1. Keep informed about the latest scams targeting retirees, such as Medicare fraud, investment scams and phishing schemes. Awareness is the first line of defense.
2. Always verify the identity of any person or organization requesting personal or financial information. Contact the company directly using a known, official number, rather than trusting contact information provided by the caller.
3. Avoid urgent requests or high-pressure methods. Scammers often use high-pressure tactics to rush decisions. Take your time, and don't be afraid to say no or hang up if something feels off.
4. Don't share personal information over the phone or via email. Unless you've solicited the call, keep sensitive information private.
5. Secure your devices. Ensure all computers, smartphones and tablets are protected with automatically updated antivirus software and firewalls.
6. Engage identity theft protection services. These services monitor for suspicious activity and offer assistance for a fee.
7. Use strong passwords. Password phrases are harder to hack. Try not to use the same password on multiple sites.
8. Review credit card transactions regularly. Most credit card companies and banks will refund unsolicited transactions up to a certain amount.
9. Review your credit reports from all three reporting agencies: Equifax, Transunion, and Experian. You are entitled to one free report annually. You may want to freeze your credit as well. This is a free service and you may unfreeze it at any time.
10. Get help. Inform close family members. Don't be afraid or embarrassed if you think you are a victim of fraud. Scammer's today are extremely sophisticated.

*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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## Going Organic...with Hair Color

By Ana Cetina

Today many of us choose natural body products as healthier options knowing that what we apply is absorbed into our skin. But what about our regular trips to the beauty salon? Fortunately, healthier options can be found there as well.

When it comes to color, choosing organic over traditional options is becoming increasingly popular and important. Organic hair color is derived from natural plants and minerals, often combined with oils that help to protect the scalp. This is particularly relevant today, as many individuals are experiencing allergies, autoimmune issues and hair loss. These factors highlight the benefits of opting for organic hair color, which is gentler on both the scalp and hair.

Significant advantages of using ammonia-free hair color include a reduction in risk of allergic reactions and protection of the hair cuticle from damage. It is also less harmful to the respiratory system. Organic hair color avoids harmful chemicals like paraphenylenediamine (PPD), which is commonly found in many hair dyes and can lead to allergic reactions. Even if you have never experienced a reaction, it is possible to develop one over time, especially with darker shades that contain larger dye molecules.

Another hair dye ingredient which can trigger harm is resorcinol, which can irritate the skin and is considered an endocrine disruptor. Research shows that it can affect thyroid function and may manifest in hyperthyroidism and an enlargement of the thyroid gland.<sup>1,2</sup> The World Health Organization warns that repeated exposure can lead to increased sensitivity and potential allergies.

The application for organic color is quite similar to conventional hair dye, requiring a 30 to 45 minutes process. You can expect complete gray coverage, and one of the standout features is how your hair fades naturally without harsh lines, unlike traditional dyes. This is largely due to the absence of PPDs. Additionally, organic hair color is free from strong odors; instead of ammonia, it utilizes an organic compound that gently penetrates the hair shaft. Color lasts just as long and it is safer for both you and the environment.

To keep your hair color vibrant and maintain your scalp's natural oils, using sulfate-free and vegan shampoos is essential. Remember, our skin absorbs what we apply, making it crucial to choose products wisely.

Ana Cetina is founder and owner of Cetina Raw Natural Beauty with 14 years in Palm Springs. For more information or to book a consultation, visit [www.cetinasalon.com](http://www.cetinasalon.com), or call (760) 778.1374.

References: 1) Ghisari M, Bonefeld-Jorgensen E.C. (2009) Effects of plasticizers and their mixtures on estrogen receptor and thyroid hormone functions. *Toxicology Letters* 189: 67-77; 2) Divi R, Doergel D. (1994) Mechanism-Based Inactivation of Lactoperoxidase and Thyroid Peroxidase by Resorcinol Derivatives, National Center for Toxicological Research.

## Retinal vs. Retinol

### Understanding the differences

By Brook Dougherty

Is the beauty industry tempting us with another ingredient we don't need or is the new retinal worth the hype? Retinol has been a skincare staple for years, but now, retinal (retinaldehyde) is being marketed like it's a scalpel-free version of a face lift. Right or wrong? Wrong. Nothing is like a scalpel-free facelift. But retinal is pretty darn fabulous.

Both retinal and retinol are members of the retinoid family. They are derivatives of vitamin A, long celebrated for its anti-aging benefits. Retinal is more potent, requiring fewer conversion steps to become active in the skin. This happy situation leads to faster and more noticeable results to remedy the pesky trio that plagues us as we age: age spots, wrinkles and rough texture. Due to its faster action, retinal is particularly beneficial for mature individuals dealing with age spots or melisma (darker patches and spots).

Like hot air circulating through the beauty world, many myths surround retinoids:

"Retinal and retinol thin the skin." Reality: They stimulate collagen production, leading to thicker, more resilient skin.

"Retinal and retinol cause extreme sun sensitivity." Reality: While they can increase photosensitivity, using them at night and applying sunscreen during the day mitigates this risk.

"Retinal and retinol are too harsh for sensitive skin." Reality: Many formulations, especially those made with retinal, are suitable for sensitive skin.

"Retinoids are only for anti-aging." Reality: They are effective for various skin issues, including acne and texture improvement.

"Retinoids will make your skin look worse before it gets better." Reality: Possibly true when used for acne, but when used on mature skin, retinoids hit the ground doing good things.

There's a common belief that retinoids should be used only at night, while vitamin C should be reserved for daytime. This stems from the idea that retinoids can make the skin more sensitive to sunlight and that vitamin C, being an antioxidant, provides protection against environmental damage during the day. In fact, studies show that using retinal and vitamin C together can enhance their effectiveness, even within the same routine or product.<sup>1</sup>

Bakuchiol, a plant-based alternative to retinoids, also enhances retinal's effectiveness. Finding these ingredients in the same product is a good way to give your skin a noticeable dose of oomph. To attain maximum glow, it's a great idea to use a vitamin C product in the morning right after cleansing, followed by a serum and moisturizer. For night, add the retinal product with vitamin C alone or alongside your nighttime moisturizer.

For mature skin, especially in a desert environment, retinal is worth exploring. Its superior potency and ability to target hyperpigmentation, wrinkles and texture make it a valuable addition to any skincare routine. Paired with complementing ingredients like vitamin C and bakuchiol, retinal can be the new star of your tool kit.

Start slow, protect your skin from the sun, and pay attention to how your skin responds. With consistent use, retinal can be a game-changer in your skincare journey.

Brook Dougherty of Indio is the founder of JustUs Skincare and welcomes your questions. She can be reached at (310) 266.7171 or [brook@justusskincare.com](mailto:brook@justusskincare.com). For more information, visit [www.justusskincare.com](http://www.justusskincare.com).

Reference: 1) <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/15767769/>



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## Living Wellness

### with Jennifer Di Francesco

### Inviting Joy into Physical Activity

The Summer Olympic Games invited much joy into many households. Spectators witnessed inspiring athleticism in a myriad of sports generating nationwide awareness and sparking ideas on our individual approach to movement and physical activity.

A recent study featured by the World Health Organization (June 2024) cited that 1.8 billion adults (31%) do not meet their recommended levels of physical activity: 150 minutes per week of moderate to intense physical activity. This trend of inactivity has increased 5% between 2010 and 2022.<sup>1</sup>

The study notes that many people over sixty are less active than other adults. On the other end of the spectrum, 81% of adolescents are not getting enough physical activity either. If these trends continue, lack of physical activity will become a silent threat saddling our nation with an even higher chronic disease burden.

The idea of exercise feels daunting for many. However, it has been proven that exercise can deliver a psychological uplift and mitigate depression, anxiety and mood disorders.<sup>2</sup> Thus, physical movement can aid the mental health epidemic.

How do we spark joy into the idea of exercise? By thinking creatively about how enjoyable activities can include exercise, we may be able to access our inner child and find fun-filled recreation.

This season I tried silent ecstatic dancing in Joshua Tree. A group of us were scattered across the sandstone outcroppings with headphones while moving to music together in our own comfortable expressive space. It was a unique idea and a great two-hour "exercise."

A friend of mine uses drumming for exercise. He burns 250-350 calories an hour, meeting his allowance of movement while making rhythm. Other fun activities involving exercise are hula hoop, jump rope, dancing classes and water aerobics.

If the idea of walking incites a yawn, add in the mission to search for birds. Keep your eyes and ears open as you walk. If you see or hear a bird, stop and listen. I became so interested in birds during my walks that I downloaded bird songs. After identifying birds, I used an app on my mobile device to send a bird song back to the birds. I became a keen observer of their response.

Every single one of these playful activities constitutes movement and activity.

The summer Olympics featured many fascinating sports that sparked curiosity, including fencing. Dating back to ancient civilizations, this self-defense movement might not be found in every city as a form of exercise, yet Tai Chi is very similar to an ancient self-defense activity based on martial arts. This gentle impact movement can be found in many communities today.













Let us imbue levity into our lives, levity mixed with delightful distractions that can bring about a daily dose of joy and out-of-the-box ways to incorporate more movement.

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

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## Making Life More Meaningful

By Amy Austin, PSYD, LMFT

I was waiting in line at the market recently and the cashier asked if I wanted bags. I replied that I had left my reusable ones in the hallway while running out in a hurry. The gentleman in line behind me said he leaves his bags in the car ready to go. I replied, "I usually do as well." Being neighborly he responded, "It's the thought that counts."

I smiled and left the store thinking, is it the thought that counts or purposeful actions following thoughts that count? We can talk the talk, but do we walk the walk?

In today's hurried, topsy-turvy world, life is not always a walk in the park. However, being mindful of our actions along the way is certain to add more meaning.

A more rewarding life is a well-intentioned life where the familiar is challenged and robotic lives are exchanged for purposeful ones. One way of welcoming this "aliveness" is to be willing to peel back the onion with introspection, emerging happier and more fulfilled on the other side.

Hanna Perlberger, author, attorney, spiritual teacher and coach posits, "When we don't confuse the 'good life' with an 'easy life' then we can embrace challenges as a means of self-discovery. And when we don't expect our lives to be simple, then we can tap into our significance."

In *Toward a More Meaningful Life* Rabbi Simon Jacobson writes, "We may find ourselves face-to-face with the existential fear and loneliness that people have long wrestled with: that we are alone in our universe, that life lacks purpose and direction. In overcoming our terror, we answer the challenge to define our true beliefs, who we are and the values we live by. At such moments, we have an opportunity to discard old patterns of behavior and outfit ourselves with new ones."

Beyond inward self-discovery is outward giving. Belonging and contributing to our communities can be an integral part of finding personal satisfaction and deeper meaning. Rabbi Jacobson posits, "Personal growth is necessary, but not an end in itself. When we humbly acknowledge our role in life and recognize that the world does not revolve around our ego, we put aside our vanity and act responsibly. We realize that each of us is integral in shaping the world, but that none of us has the power—or the responsibility—to do it alone."

Making life more meaningful also begins at home by establishing reciprocally loving interpersonal relationships. The Lubavitcher Rebbe stated, "Better a difficult peace than an easy quarrel." Make your home a secure refuge, a safe place where peace and loving kindness are a priority; an environment where random and very conscious acts of kindness are performed daily towards one another. In Hebrew this is called, "shalom bayis" or peace in the home.

There is a verse in Psalms (39:4) that says, "Remind me that my days are numbered." You cannot add more time in the day, but you can live life to the fullest every minute of each day with the realization that it's never too late to live a more meaningful life. There is no time like the present, so let your path towards a more meaningful life start today.

*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.*





## Building a Care Team

By Arlene Gotshalk

One in three adults in the U.S. is an informal family caregiver for someone who is aging or has health issues,<sup>1</sup> equating to 53 million unpaid caregivers.<sup>2</sup> Providing part-time or full-time assistance to loved ones can be both challenging and stressful.

Building a care team to provide support can help minimize feelings of overwhelm. The skills of the team can be tailored to specific needs, preferences and circumstances of the caregiver and the individual. In addition to providing practical help with caregiving responsibilities, a care team can also increase efficiency and expand options when problem solving.

Care team members often include family members, close friends, neighbors, community organization volunteers or others who may help with day-to-day tasks and emotional support. To the best of their ability, the team should engage the recipient in care that is patient-centered, meeting the specific needs of the person and the family. When possible, include professionals such as the care recipient's general physician, therapist, and/or social workers who can provide information and suggest care plans.

A care team's responsibility begins with an assessment of the recipient's health and needs. From there, the team can set goals for best outcomes on the caregiving journey, and create a plan of care while establishing an effective means of communication with the team, care recipient, family and the treating physician. It is helpful to document the care plan, and to communicate updates so everyone is on the same page. Patient confidentiality must be respected.


Before joining a care team, it is helpful to think through your own feelings about the care recipient and their situation, the kind of help you can provide, what you can do, and how much time you can give. Specific tasks can be delegated including managing medication; transportation and support to doctor visits and physical therapy; tracking legal and financial matters, or offering social or emotional support. The list may include:

- Check in, visit and provide meals and food; secure supplemental food services.
- Help choose doctors and communicate with them.
- Guide the care recipient through the health care system, advocating and monitoring care to ensure safety and clear communication with providers.
- Identify and coordinate transportation needs.
- Feed and exercise pets.
- Identify and manage child care needs.
- Sign up for Medical Alert Emergency Response Services.
- Interview and secure in-home care providers.
- Secure respite care for family relief, or explore residential care facilities when care recipient and family are ready.

Caregiving does not happen when it is convenient for you. Effective teamwork reduces stress and leads to less caretaker complications, better management of chronic conditions and improved outcomes. Team collaboration provides a support network that addresses not only medical needs but also emotional, psychological and social aspects of care. A care team can lighten the load and enhance the quality of life for both caregivers and the person receiving care.

*Palm Desert resident Arlene Gotshalk is author of CareGiving Toolkit, a guide she created to assist others after feeling exhausted and frustrated caring for her aging parents and disabled husband. She can be reached at (831) 588.3373 or info@caregivingtoolkit.com.*

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Arlene's many years of caring for her veteran husband and aging parents coupled with 30 years in education and business administration has led to the creation of a Sanity Saving Survival System.

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## Barriers to Better Health

### Eliminating toxic foods

By Joseph E. Scherger, MD, MPH

I recently watched the classic heartwarming movie "Swiss Family Robinson" about a family shipwrecked on a Polynesian island. Beyond battling with pirates and wild animals, they make a home and thrive on the abundant foods found on the island. There are no foods in bags or boxes...no food labels... nothing is processed. If we are careful and discriminating, we can also eat only the foods they found on the island.

Unfortunately, in today's world, we are inundated by foods that make us sick. Unhealthy foods are so abundant, that a healthy diet is more challenging than ever. Are toxic foods a fact of modern life or can we avoid them?

By knowing the range of toxic foods, we can eliminate most of them. If we keep the damage to a minimum, our resilient bodies will do the rest.

What are these damaging foods? From my research, the categories seem to be increasing and competing for which are the most harmful.

**Sugar and carbs.** About 80% of Americans have metabolic dysfunction,<sup>1</sup> also known as insulin resistance, from excess sugar and refined carbohydrates. Since all carbohydrates become sugar in the body, we overwhelm our ability to turn sugar into energy unless we are a marathon runner or engage in extreme forms of exercise. The sugar and carbs we do not burn for energy turn into fat through insulin. Excess fat then triggers inflammation and increases the risk for cardiovascular disease and cognitive decline. To lose body fat we must become ketogenic from a very low carb diet and intermittent fasting.

**Grains and dairy.** Foods that contain inflammatory proteins are another major category of toxic nutrients. Our ancestral diet did not contain grains such as seeds of grasses, or dairy. These contain

proteins like gluten which can disrupt the microbiome in our gut causing "leaky gut" and leading to numerous diseases and chronic inflammation.

**Packaged and processed.** Recently I reviewed the book *Ultraprocessed People* by Chris Van Tulleken, MD. Ultraprocessed foods are factory made and contain numerous ingredients you would not find in a household kitchen. When we eat such foods, we have an inflammatory reaction resulting in a wide range of problems such as brain fog and irritable bowel disease.

Food companies make their products so sweet that the taste can lead to food addiction. Rather than add sugar, most processed foods will have high fructose corn syrup. This common sweetener is foreign to our digestion and leads to fatty liver and chronic inflammation.

Processed foods use vegetable or seed oils that are highly inflammatory. Catherine Shanahan, MD goes into detail in her new book *Dark Calories* about how these processed vegetable oils are toxic to our bodies in many ways.

It is easy to see how most Americans regularly consume a variety of toxic foods. This affects individual health. I wonder how the ingestion of such harmful foods may influence the anger, intolerance and polarization we see all around us today.

As a primary care physician, I often find myself on the other end of this lifetime consumption. The good news is that - at any age - change can result in enhanced health and longevity. It's never too late, and awareness is a good place to start.

*Dr. Scherger is 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).*

Reference: 1) <https://www.unc.edu/posts/2018/11/28/only-12-percent-of-american-adults-are-metabolically-healthy-carolina-study-finds/>

Blue Zones Project Begins

Continued from page 1

in health care expenses and points to the BZP's involvement as an important aspect of these results.'

**What can we expect?**

In August, we sat down with the BZP's national team to review their timeline and brainstorm prospective leaders from within our community. Their goal is to hire executive directors for each city in the next couple of months and continue with the blueprint planning phase through March 2025. Preliminary planning has already taken place as community stakeholders attended workshops over the past several years to identify objectives and aspirations for improved health specific to their region, and to develop criteria around people, places and policy.

In April of next year, the transformation phase is slated to begin as a community-wide movement to change surroundings, systems, policy, accessibility and behaviors through access, education and involvement. This effort will continue for three years through 2028.

The transformation phase is when we will start to see BZP offerings in our daily lives through resources, workshops, programs, cooking classes, gatherings, presentations, social support systems referred to as "moais" (pronounced MO-i), and more.

"Many think that the Blue Zones Project model is all about diet and exercise, but it's so much more," says Vice President of Operations Mark Ishikawa. "It's about creating a sense of community, along with purpose and a sense of belonging for the members of that community."

**Funding: investing in wellness**

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, Riverside University Health System - Public Health (RUHS-PH) was looking for evidence-based programs that would improve overall health and wellness of Riverside County residents.

"We were aiming for quick and tangible results that would help us see the most current health landscape, not necessarily something that would show up years later," says Shunling Tsang, MD, deputy public health officer for Riverside County.

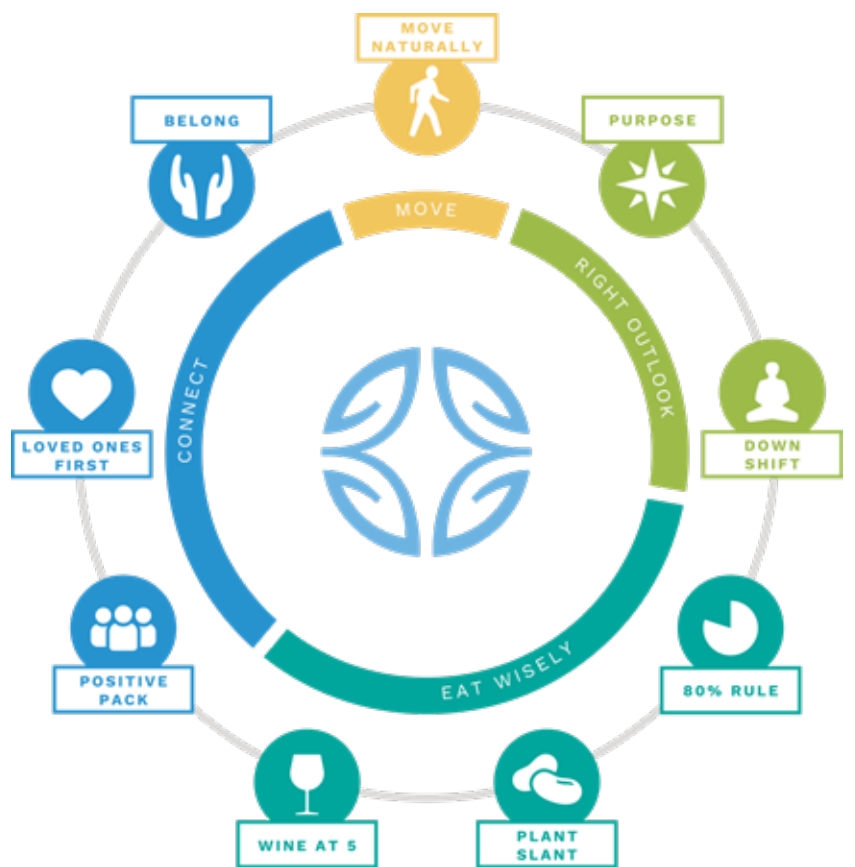
It was during this process that they discovered Blue Zones. "Blue Zones is about improving community health, addressing the specific needs of each community and advancing health equity, which is the foundation of what public health does," explained Dr. Tsang. "We were intrigued by their data and results from other communities that demonstrated their return on investment and sustainability after the work was completed."

RUHS-PH identified target regions within the county to participate; in addition to Palm Springs and Coachella, they are Riverside, Banning and the unincorporated community of Mead Valley. The County of Riverside and RUHS-PH are helping fund the project, along with sponsors Inland Empire Health Plan (IEHP), IEHP Foundation, Kaiser Permanente and Molina Healthcare, which are underwriting the majority of the cost.

Over the next five years, RUHS-PH, the sponsors and participating communities will drive the project in partnership with BZP. The public-private partnership between the county and its sponsors is important, they add, because it ensures that the project's objectives and metrics are identified appropriately for each community.

"It also provides added assurance that our efforts move forward through a coordinated approach, and to hold the Blue Zones Project team accountable," notes Tsang.

The Blue Zones Power 9®



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The remaining funding comes from participating communities and was used to close the gap to move the project forward.

"It's very important that the cities have a seat at the table," says Tsang. "They are the experts on their community's needs, strategic vision, and how we can best engage with their residents. Moving forward, the cities will be especially important as they begin to implement programs and policies to improve overall community well-being by addressing the root causes of ill health, resident needs and health equity."

*Desert Health* will feature a new Blue Zones Project column in each edition to keep readers up to date on progress and offerings as they develop. Organizations and individuals who would like to get involved in the local efforts can contact Project Coordinator Jade Tuleu directly at [jade@bluezones.com](mailto:jade@bluezones.com).

*Lauren Del Sarto is founder/publisher of Desert Health and can be reached at [Lauren@DesertHealthNews.com](mailto:Lauren@DesertHealthNews.com).*

Reference: 1) <https://news.gallup.com/poll/648008/good-health-saves-california-beach-cities-millions-yearly.aspx>





## Chickpea Stew with Honey-Roasted Cauliflower and Root Vegetables

Blue Zones approved recipe by Diane Kochilas

Diane Kochilas is a daughter of Ikaria, Greece, a Blue Zones region where people often live past 100. Her cookbook, *The Ikaria Way*, is filled with easy plant-based contemporary recipes rooted in her Ikarian heritage, steeped in ancient culinary traditions and employing the most prized ingredients of her region: herbs, olive oil, nuts, honey, legumes and more.

"The smoky, spicy-sweet flavors of the vegetables are a delicious addition to the earthy flavor of the chickpeas. Orange is one of the ingredients in my secret arsenal of flavor enhancers, up there with lemon zest and a few other ingredients." - Chef Kochilas

### Ingredients for the sheet-pan vegetables:

- Fresh strained juice of 1 orange
- ½ cup extra-virgin Greek olive oil
- 2 teaspoons Dijon mustard
- 1 tablespoon Greek pine honey, or more to taste
- 2 heaping teaspoons ground cumin
- 1 pinch freshly grated nutmeg
- 1 heaping teaspoon turmeric powder
- 2 teaspoons ground ginger
- 1 teaspoon smoked paprika
- ½ teaspoon cayenne or hot paprika, or more to taste
- Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
- 1 medium head cauliflower, trimmed and cut into small florets
- 2 carrots, pared, halved lengthwise, and cut into 2-inch pieces
- 2 large red onions, peeled and quartered



### For the chickpeas:

- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin Greek olive oil, plus more for drizzling
- 1 large red or yellow onion, chopped
- 4 garlic cloves, chopped
- 4 cups cooked chickpeas (good-quality canned are fine), rinsed and drained
- 1 heaping tablespoon tomato paste
- 1 small seedless orange, preferably organic, cut into 4 wedges
- 2 fresh rosemary sprigs
- 2 to 4 cups hot vegetable broth or water, or more as needed
- 1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar
- Preheat the oven to 400°F. Line a sheet pan with parchment paper.

### Directions:

In a large mixing bowl, whisk together the orange juice, olive oil, mustard, honey, and all the spices including the salt and pepper. Toss the vegetables in this mixture to coat evenly. Spread the vegetables in one layer onto the sheet pan. Roast until tender and lightly charred, about 20 minutes, removing vegetables as they cook to avoid burning them. Set aside to cool and then cut into smaller pieces, a little larger than the chickpeas.

In the meantime, prepare the chickpeas: Heat the olive oil in a large wide pot and sauté the onion until translucent. Stir in the garlic. Add the chickpeas and stir. Stir in the tomato paste. Squeeze the orange wedges into the chickpeas to get out their juice and add the wedges, peel and all, to the pot. Add the rosemary and 2 cups of the hot broth or water. Season to taste with salt and pepper, partially cover the pot and cook the chickpeas on low for the flavors to meld, about 15 or 20 minutes. If you want the mixture to be thick and creamy, you can mash a handful of chickpeas against the side of the pot.

Add the root vegetables to chickpeas, heat all together for about 5 minutes, stir in the balsamic vinegar and serve. Serves 6.

*The Ikaria Way is available on Amazon. Copyright ©2024 by the author and reprinted with permission.*

## Power Pumpkin Smoothie

By Barbara Hankey-Rogers

Pumpkin-everything season is here! Skip the sugary syrups and satisfy that cool fall craving with this healthier option from Rogers's *It's A No Grainer*.

Featuring hemp seeds, a powerful super food packed with proteins, essential fats, vitamins and enzymes, combined with seasonal spices and a touch of honey, this dairy-free smoothie will start your day off right.

### Ingredients:

- ½ frozen banana peeled (Be sure to freeze without the peel. If not frozen, add three ice cubes)
- ½ cup unsweetened almond or coconut milk
- 2-3 tablespoons of canned pumpkin
- ½ teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 teaspoon honey
- 1 teaspoon hemp seeds
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon ground cloves
- ¼ teaspoon ground nutmeg



### Directions:

Add all the ingredients to a blender. Start to blend on low speed, gradually increasing as you watch for desired thickness. Add ice to thicken if you'd like.

*It's A No Grainer Cookbook: Over 180 Delightfully Gluten-free, Grain-free, Low-carb and Keto-friendly Recipes is available on Amazon.*

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# HEALTHY DESERT HEALTHY YOU

Coachella Valley Environmental Health Summit

The Desert Healthcare District and Foundation's FREE two day environmental health summit will feature a variety of keynote speakers, panels, and related workshops focusing on the environmental health issues impacting the Coachella Valley.

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Desert Health® is proud to support these community events. We look forward to seeing you out and about!

**SEPT. 5**

**Women Leaders Forum's Season Kick-off**

WLF's season opener is designed to elevate your networking skills so you can boldly present yourself or your business with confidence. Sponsored by Buzzbox, all are welcome to attend. Classic Club, Palm Desert 5:30-7:30p. Tickets \$48-\$65. www.WLFDesert.org

**SEPT. 17-20**

**The Experience Adult Skate Camp**

Learn from some of the sport's best in this once in a lifetime opportunity for figure skating fans. Enjoy instruction and social activities with Randy Gardner, Elizabeth Manley, Jeremy Abbott, Elin Schran and Special Guest Gracie Gold at Acrisure Arena's Berger Foundation Iceplex. www.theexperienceadultskatecamp.com



Olympian Gracie Gold

**SEPT. 20-21**

**Healthy Desert, Healthy You Summit**

All are welcome to attend this free two-day environmental health summit featuring panels, keynote speakers, and workshops focusing on the environmental health issues impacting our valley. Westin Mission Hills, Rancho Mirage. Register at www.healthideserthealthyyou.com.

**OCT. 3**

**Women Leaders Forum's Let's Interact: Health Empowerment**

Meet local health professionals and gain essential information to live a healthy and happy life. Sponsored by Desert Oasis Healthcare, the event is open to all and takes place at UC Riverside, Palm Desert. 5:30-7:30p. Tickets \$48-\$65. www.WLFDesert.org

**OCT. 9-23 • NOV. 6 & 20**

**Creative Wellness Workshops: Inspiration from Nature**

Explore your creativity and self-discovery in this four-class workshop (choose one or all) focusing on nature using paints, poetry, music and meditation. Held in the gardens (weather permitting) for outdoor inspiration. No art experience necessary, just a curious mind. 10:30a-12:30p, Artists Council at the Galen, Palm Desert. See p.11 and visit www.creativelifeworkshops.com. (760) 902.5467.



**NOV. 6**

**Alzheimers Coachella Valley Open House**

Enjoy live music, drinks and hors d'oeuvres provided by local businesses while touring our beautiful facility and learning more about how ACV supports local families living with dementia. 5:30-7:30p. 75105 Merle Dr., Suite 800, Palm Desert. Free and open to the public. RSVP (760) 776.3100 or Naomy@cvalzheimers.org.



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**STEPHANIE LINK**

Keynote Speaker

Stephanie is featured on: CNBC Contributor and frequently appears on The Halftime Report, Squawk Box, The Closing Bell, and Power Lunch.

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## Expanding Your Network

By Eleanor Oliver-Edmonds

Whether you're an introvert or an extrovert, the mere thought of attending a networking event can seem daunting. For introverts, engaging in small talk can feel awkward, while extroverts may feel exhausted after being animated for an extended period of time.

However, there is so much value to be gained from networking beyond the initial getting-to-know you stage. It's an opportunity to cultivate relationships, build rapport and make lasting connections. Selecting a group of like-minded individuals with shared interests is a good way to ease the anxiety of those initial steps.

For over 20 years, Women Leaders Forum of Coachella Valley (WLF) has provided a space to engage, empower and uplift women throughout the community. Through their signature Let's Interact Series, WLF has created a forum where like-minded women can come together to learn and grow, while also supporting the next generation of future leaders. The monthly events take place the first Thursday of the month from September through April and culminate with the Women Who Rule Awards Luncheon in May, our largest fundraiser for our Young Women Leaders youth scholarship program.

Each month professional women gather to network, socialize and enjoy dinner as they hear from local leaders and business owners who share their journeys, expertise and knowledge. The 2024-25 season kicks-off September 5 featuring Kimberly Krause, owner of Konnections Certification, Inc. who will demonstrate how to elevate your networking game with ease and confidence. She is joined by WLF Vice President of Membership Stacie Hedges, owner of SH Business Stylist, and moderator Sofia Mastroberti, owner of Kiki's La Quinta. The event is sponsored by locally owned Buzzbox Premium Cocktails.

In October, the program series will highlight the importance of maintaining your health and well-being. This highly requested topic is presented by sponsor Desert Oasis Healthcare and offers a top-tier panel of leading health care professionals from around the valley. This event will be held at UCR who generously provided the space.

Come join a group of amazing women who share a desire to make the community around them a better place. Whether you are new to the Coachella Valley and are seeking the camaraderie of like-minded women, are interested in volunteering with a philanthropic organization, or simply want to surround yourself with women interested in personal development and empowerment, there are many ways to get involved with WLF.

Visit our website to reserve your spot for our upcoming Let's Interact events. You may walk in as a stranger, but you will leave as a friend. We look forward to meeting you soon!

Eleanor (Elle) Oliver-Edmonds is founder of Eleanor Oliver Coaching and President of Women Leaders Forum and can be reached at [president@wlfdesert.org](mailto:president@wlfdesert.org). For more information and our schedule of events, visit [www.wlfdesert.org](http://www.wlfdesert.org).



WLF offers an inviting space to engage, empower and uplift women throughout our community.

## Healthy Desert, Healthy You Summit

Environmental advocacy event open to all

By Will Dean

If there is one thing Coachella Valley residents have in common, it's the environment we share and how it can affect our health. Valley leaders and residents are invited to explore the impact of the environment on our health at the inaugural Healthy Desert, Healthy You Summit taking place September 20-21 at The Westin Mission Hills in Rancho Mirage.

Panels featuring environmental experts, health leaders, elected officials and others will cover topics that affect diverse community members. Presentations will span empowerment of seniors and farmworkers to protect themselves, engaging youth and nonprofits to lead efforts addressing air and water quality, and land-use issues. The panels will be bookended by two key note speakers who are knowledgeable, compassionate and effective environmental advocates: California Secretary for Environmental Protection Yana Garcia (Sept. 20) and activist and 2022 Goldman Environmental Prize winner Nalleli Cobo (Sept. 21). Both speakers are known for uplifting the voices of disadvantaged residents who are grappling with environmental challenges.

Garcia, appointed to state secretary by Governor Gavin Newsom in August 2022, advises the governor on environmental policy. She oversees the state's efforts to fight climate change, protect air and water quality, regulate pesticides and toxic substances, achieve the state's recycling and waste reduction goals and advance environmental justice. Since 2021, Garcia has served as Special Assistant Attorney General advising California Attorney General Rob Bonta on the California Department of Justice's legal and policy matters pertaining to the environment, land law and natural resources including climate and energy, along with transportation and housing.



California Secretary of Environmental Protection Yana Garcia

Cobo, who is the co-founder of People Not Pozos, made international news at age 19 when she identified a correlation between the illnesses affecting her and her neighbors and the presence of an oil-drilling site in their Los Angeles neighborhood. Her activism led to closing the site down. In addition to sharing her experience and insights, Cobo will meet separately with valley youth organizations.

Cobo and Garcia's remarks are expected to be two of many summit highlights.

"We are excited to present this summit as an opportunity to raise awareness of how our local environment can affect our health and to issue a call-to-action for everyone in the valley to get involved," said Chris Christensen, Desert Healthcare District and Foundation CEO. "Our goal with this event is to provide information that leads to real-world action to improve environmental health conditions and our quality of life."

The District and Foundation has launched a \$1 million request for proposal process in support of the call to action. Nonprofit organizations are invited to apply for funding for programs and services that address environmental health challenges.

Healthy Desert, Healthy You Environmental Health Summit takes place September 20-21 at The Westin Mission Hills in Rancho Mirage and is open to all. For free registration and additional information, visit [www.healthydeserthealthyyou.com](http://www.healthydeserthealthyyou.com).



## LET'S INTERACT

A SPEAKER SERIES

Women Leaders Forum launches another exciting season of our signature Let's Interact speaker series. Each month, we feature speakers and topics curated to transform the lives of busy, professional women.

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- CONNECT** with like-minded women leaders
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- EMPOWER** the next generation of leaders
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- LEARN** from top speakers and industry experts



Let's Interact events take place on the first Thursday of each month at The Classic Club • 5:30-7:30 p.m. \$48 members | \$65 non-members

## Upcoming Events

September 5 • Season Kick-Off  
Building Strong Networks and Communities

October 3 • Health Empowerment  
What You Don't Know May Hurt You

(please note different location)  
UC Riverside-Palm Desert • 75080 Frank Sinatra Drive

November 7 • She Means Business  
From Idea to Impact

December 5 • I Love the Coachella Valley  
Discover What's Hot, What's New and What's Next

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WLF is a non-profit organization bringing together women leaders of the Coachella Valley to network, volunteer, and fundraise for the advancement of the next generation.

Find more details about WLF and register for upcoming events at [wlfdesert.org](http://wlfdesert.org).







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