HEALTHCARE HAPPENINGS

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MONROE COUNTY HOSPITAL & CLINICS

An Affiliate of MERCYONE

Our Newest ORTHOPEDIC SURGEON | BLOOD *Pressure* | PELVIC HEALTH *Therapy*

Good Moves for Gut Health

Simple steps can help you maintain a healthy gut microbiome, with benefits that go beyond digestion.

THE GUT MICROBIOME is the unique collection of bacteria, viruses and other microorganisms that live in your intestines. This community not only helps you process food and absorb nutrients, but it also boosts your brain health, aids immune system function and reduces inflammation.

Your gut microbiome contains both helpful and potentially harmful bacteria. To perform its best, the microbiome needs to maintain a balance between the two. Here are four ways you can help.

1. FILL UP ON FIBER.

Fiber is a prebiotic, a substance that nourishes beneficial gut bacteria. Fiber may also help boost the diversity of these microbes in your intestines. Good sources of this key nutrient include fruits, vegetables, beans, oats and wheat.

2. ADD PROBIOTICS TO YOUR DIET.

You can introduce live beneficial microbes, known as probiotics, to your gut microbiome by eating certain foods that contain them. These include yogurt, sauerkraut and kimchi.

3. DRINK PLENTY OF WATER.

Staying hydrated helps prevent constipation. That, in turn, benefits your gut microbiome. Why? Constipation reduces the number of microbes in your gut.

4. USE ANTIBIOTICS ONLY WHEN TRULY NEEDED.

Antibiotics can kill both good and bad bacteria. Sacrificing some of the helpful ones may be necessary to eliminate an infection. Otherwise, you should use antibiotics only sparingly and as directed by your medical provider.

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Sweet Potato and Black Bean Hash

This quick and easy one-pan skillet recipe packs plenty of fiber.

INGREDIENTS

- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil, divided
- 1 sweet potato, peeled and diced
- 1 medium zucchini, diced
- 1 medium red bell pepper, diced
- ½ cup corn, frozen
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- ½ teaspoon chili powder
- ½ teaspoon ground cumin
- ¼ teaspoon smoked paprika (optional)
- 1 cup canned black beans, drained and rinsed
- 3 large eggs
- salt and pepper to taste

DIRECTIONS

1. Heat one tablespoon of oil in a large skillet.
2. Add sweet potatoes and cook for five minutes.
3. Add zucchini, bell pepper and corn. Stir occasionally and cook for 15–20 minutes, until vegetables are tender.
4. Combine one tablespoon oil, garlic and spices in a small bowl. Add this mixture and black beans to the skillet. Stir well.
5. Create three small openings in the vegetables and crack an egg into each. Sprinkle salt and pepper on the eggs if desired.
6. Cover the skillet and cook for four to six minutes, until egg whites and yolks are firm.
7. Serve and enjoy.

NUTRITION INFORMATION (SERVES 3)

Calories: 360
Total fat: 18g
Sodium: 285mg
Carbohydrates: 39g
Dietary fiber: 10g
Protein: 11g

Source: UNL Food, University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension

"Aim to get a minimum of 25 grams of daily fiber. This will provide consistent digestion and relieve constipation while feeding prebiotics and probiotics. In turn, this builds beneficial gut bacteria and a healthy microbiome for disease-fighting immunity."

—Liz Zmolek, RDN, LD





Meet the Albia Area's New Orthopedic Expert

Orthopedic Surgeon Christopher Vincent, MD, helps patients find relief from bone and joint pain without having to leave our community.

A COLORADO NATIVE, Dr. Vincent received his medical degree from the University of Colorado School of Medicine. He completed an orthopedic surgery residency at Indiana University School of Medicine and a sports medicine fellowship in Indianapolis. Over the last few years, he has put down roots in Iowa as a member of Iowa Ortho.

"I've practiced in the Des Moines metro area and in outreach clinics in southern Iowa," Dr. Vincent said. "I enjoy connecting with patients. The people of rural Iowa are good and kind, and I'm glad to bring orthopedic services to them so they don't have to travel for this much-needed specialty care."

LOCAL EXPERTISE

Dr. Vincent spends the fourth Friday of every month at Monroe County Hospital & Clinics' Susan Allison Outpatient Clinic. There, he sees patients for consultations and offers minor in-office procedures, such as injections. He also performs surgeries at the hospital.

With nearly 15 years of experience caring for patients, Dr. Vincent treats a wide range of knee, shoulder and other orthopedic conditions, including:

- fractures
- dislocations
- joint pain
- ligament injuries
- meniscus injuries
- rotator cuff injuries
- tendonitis

"I like to educate patients about their diagnoses," Dr. Vincent said. "I help them understand their treatment options and the evidence-based medicine behind them so they can make the best decision for their needs."

ACTIVE IN ATHLETICS AND THE OUTDOORS

Beyond the clinic and operating room, Dr. Vincent serves as the head physician for college and high school athletics programs in Pella. His family also keeps him busy.

"My kids are active in sports and school activities, and I enjoy attending their events," Dr. Vincent said. "When I'm not caring for patients or spending time with family, I like to work out and hunt and fish on my property."

TO SCHEDULE AN ORTHOPEDIC APPOINTMENT AT THE SUSAN ALLISON OUTPATIENT CLINIC, CALL 641-932-1678.

Bend, Don't Break

Christopher Vincent, MD, sees patients of all ages, and he counsels them to make lifestyle choices that benefit their musculoskeletal health, including:

Choose shoes wisely.
Select supportive footwear with a low heel (or no heel at all) and room to wiggle your toes.

Don't smoke.
Smoking causes inflammation, a major contributor to arthritis.

Eat a healthy diet rich in bone-building nutrients.
These include calcium, which can be found in dairy products, broccoli and kale, and vitamin D, found in salmon, tuna, and fortified milk and cereals.

Eliminate excess pounds.
Maintaining a healthy weight reduces pressure on your joints.

Move more.
Regular physical activity strengthens your bones and the muscles around your joints and reduces joint pain.



LOWER THE PRESSURE on Your Heart Health

As you age, your blood pressure naturally tends to rise. So should your commitment to keeping it in a healthy range.



Julie Vander Linden, RN, Cardiac Rehab Coordinator

CHANGE IS PART of aging, and your blood vessels aren't exempt. As you age, your arteries get stiffer. The result: Blood pressure increases, potentially damaging the arteries. This process usually happens under the radar, without symptoms. However, it can contribute to attention-grabbing conditions, including heart disease and stroke.

What doesn't change, regardless of age, is the healthy blood pressure target: a top (systolic) number less than 120 millimeters of mercury (mm Hg) and a bottom (diastolic) number less than 80 mm Hg.

- You have **elevated blood pressure** if your top number is **120–129 mm Hg** and your bottom number is less than **80 mm Hg**.
- You have **high blood pressure** if your top number is **130 mm Hg** or higher and your bottom number is **80 mm Hg** or higher.

GOING UP

How does blood pressure tend to change with age? In your 20s and 30s, it's often lower than 120/80, according to Julie Vander Linden, RN, Cardiac Rehab Coordinator at Monroe County Hospital & Clinics. It usually rises as you move into middle age and beyond.

"From your 40s to your 70s, the top number increases, and the bottom number may decrease," Vander Linden said. "Overall, your blood pressure continues to increase in your 80s and 90s."

RELEASE VALVES

Whatever your age, you can take action to maintain a healthy blood pressure. Start by knowing your numbers, which will help guide your decisions with your medical provider. You can measure your blood pressure using a home blood pressure monitor.

"Follow your provider's directions for how often to measure your blood pressure at home," Vander Linden said. "Generally speaking, if you have a normal blood pressure, check it approximately monthly. If your pressure is above normal, you may need to check it weekly or more frequently."

To support a healthy blood pressure, you can:

- **Avoid smoking,** which harms your blood vessels.
- **Choose a healthy eating plan,** such as the Dietary Strategies to Stop Hypertension, or DASH, diet, which emphasizes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, fish, and low- or no-fat dairy products, among other nutritious foods.
- **Exercise regularly,** which can help lower blood pressure and strengthen the heart so it functions better.
- **Get at least seven hours of sleep** each night so your blood pressure can naturally decline while you rest.
- **Maintain a healthy weight** so your heart doesn't have to work harder to pump blood.
- **Manage stress,** which can spike your blood pressure.

SCAN THE CODE TO SCHEDULE AN APPOINTMENT WITH A PRIMARY CARE OR CARDIOLOGY SERVICES PROVIDER AT MCHC.



Nearly **50%** of American adults have high blood pressure. Fewer than **25%** of them have it under control, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

GET TO KNOW Pelvic Floor Therapy

A unique type of physical therapy can strengthen some of the most important tissues in your body and give your health a boost.

PELVIC FLOOR THERAPY is physical therapy focused on the muscles and other tissues that sit below your bladder, bowel and reproductive organs. Collectively known as the pelvic floor, these tissues hold the organs in place. Aging, childbirth, excess weight and other factors can weaken the pelvic floor. As a result, you may develop life-disrupting symptoms such as bladder leaks. Pelvic floor therapy can address these symptoms.

HOW THERAPY WORKS

Partnering with a physical therapist in the Rehabilitation Services Department at Monroe County Hospital & Clinics, you will learn various exercises to strengthen or release tension in your pelvic floor. At your first visit, you and the physical therapist will discuss your medical history, symptoms and goals, and the therapist will evaluate your movement. Once you learn the exercises during therapy, you'll be able to do them at home to keep managing symptoms long after in-person treatment ends.

WHO CAN BENEFIT

You may benefit from therapy if you have a pelvic floor disorder–a condition or symptoms stemming from weak or injured tissues. Around 25% of women will develop one of these disorders during their lives, according to the Office on Women's Health. They can affect men, too, although it's much less common.

Pelvic floor therapy can help provide relief from:

- chronic constipation and straining
- overactive bladder, including the sudden urge to urinate
- nocturia, when you wake more than one time overnight to use the bathroom
- pelvic organ prolapse, when the pelvic organs drop out of normal position
- pelvic pain during intercourse, or pain that's related to pregnancy or surgery
- urinary incontinence, including uncontrolled leaking of urine when coughing, sneezing or jumping

STRENGTH MATTERS

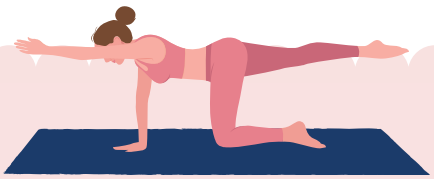
In addition to pelvic floor specific exercises, your therapist may ask you to do exercises like this at home to support your pelvic floor.

Bridge



1. Lie on your back with knees bent, feet flat and arms at your sides, palms down.
2. Raise your hips by engaging your abdominal and pelvic floor muscles.
3. Hold for five seconds and lower your hips to the floor.
4. Repeat 10 times.

Bird Dog



1. Get on your hands and knees, with your wrists under your shoulders and your back straight.
2. Raise your right arm in front of you and your left leg behind you.
3. Hold for three seconds, lower your arm and leg to the floor, and switch sides.
4. Repeat 10 times.

TIRED OF DEALING WITH PELVIC PAIN, URINARY INCONTINENCE OR OTHER PELVIC FLOOR ISSUES? ASK YOUR MEDICAL PROVIDER FOR A REFERRAL TO THE MCHC REHABILITATION SERVICES DEPARTMENT FOR A PELVIC FLOOR THERAPY EVALUATION.



Jill Fitzgerald, PT, Physical Therapist

"I have completed specialized training that allows me to offer pelvic floor therapy. It's extremely gratifying to help patients reclaim their quality of life from symptoms that can affect them physically and emotionally."

—Jill Fitzgerald, PT, Physical Therapist at Monroe County Hospital & Clinics



Understanding Your BREAST CANCER RISK

Taking an active role in breast health starts with knowing your own breasts.

By Christian Schultheis, MD, FACS, Hematologist/Oncologist with Monroe County Hospital & Clinics



Christian Schultheis, MD, FACS

BECOME FAMILIAR WITH your breasts' usual appearance and feel, and pay attention to changes over time.

While routine breast self-exams are not recommended as a formal screening test (it does not replace mammography), breast self-awareness can help women recognize changes that are unusual for them.

UNDERSTAND NATURAL CHANGES

One patient taught me an important lesson about this years ago. She told me that her breasts became more lumpy at certain times during her menstrual cycle, but that the changes resolved afterward. Her experience highlighted the importance of understanding how breasts can naturally change throughout the month.

For women who menstruate, becoming familiar with how the breasts feel at different points in the menstrual cycle can make it easier to distinguish normal hormonal changes from a new or persistent abnormality.

Screening mammography is an important tool for detecting breast cancer before symptoms develop. For women at average risk, routine screening typically begins at age 40, although the appropriate screening schedule may vary based on individual risk factors and current guidelines.

WORK TOGETHER WITH YOUR DOCTOR

Any new or persistent breast abnormality should be evaluated by a healthcare professional. This may include a new lump, a persistent change in the breast, changes in the skin or nipple or unusual nipple discharge. Most breast changes are not cancer, but persistent or concerning findings should not be ignored.

It is also important to understand your individual breast cancer risk. Women with a strong family history of breast or ovarian cancer, or those with a known hereditary cancer syndrome, may benefit from earlier and more intensive screening. Depending on their level of risk, additional imaging such as breast MRI and genetic counseling or testing may be appropriate.

Finally, healthy lifestyle choices can contribute to overall breast health and may reduce the risk of developing breast cancer. Maintaining a healthy weight, engaging in regular physical activity and limiting alcohol use are practical steps women can take as part of a comprehensive approach to prevention.

Early detection does not mean being fearful of every change. It means knowing what is normal for you, participating in recommended screening, understanding your personal risk and speaking with your healthcare provider when something changes.

SCAN THIS QR CODE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT MAMMOGRAPHY SERVICES AT MONROE COUNTY HOSPITAL & CLINICS.

SIMPLY THE *Best*

Monroe County Hospital & Clinics is proud to celebrate Kayla Bishop, RN, a member of our EMS Services team, for earning third place in the Nurse category of the Ottumwa Courier's 2026 Best of Southern Iowa.

AS THE FIRST MCHC EMPLOYEE to receive recognition in this program, Bishop marks a special milestone for our organization and gives our entire team a reason to celebrate.

This recognition reflects Bishop's dedication, compassion and commitment to providing exceptional care to our community. In Emergency Services, kindness and reassurance can mean just as much as clinical skill. Bishop brings heart to her work, helping patients and families feel cared for during some of their most difficult moments. We are incredibly proud to have her on the MCHC team and grateful for the difference she makes alongside her colleagues.

APPRECIATION FROM THE COMMUNITY

The Ottumwa Courier's Best of Southern Iowa is a community voting program that gives readers an opportunity to recognize local businesses, services and professionals across a variety of categories. Honorees are selected through public voting, making this recognition a meaningful expression of appreciation from the community they serve.

We also extend our appreciation to the entire MCHC EMS Services team, whose teamwork and dedication support exceptional care every day.





OUR *Hero*

Kim Higginbotham's devotion to helping patients and families earned her a hero's recognition (again).

ON OCT. 7, the Iowa Hospital Association named Higginbotham, a Social Worker and Case Manager at Monroe County Hospital & Clinics, a Hospital Hero. This recognition honors hospital employees who have displayed selfless service or courage in a crisis. Higginbotham received the award for working with the health and legal systems to help a patient obtain a guardian and find appropriate care.

"I'm very honored," Higginbotham said. "Many people worked with me for many months to help this patient. Every one of them is a hero."

Higginbotham is no stranger to the Hospital Hero award. She was also honored in 2016 for organizing and facilitating the Healing Hearts Grief Day Camp, a free event for children and teenagers mourning the loss of a loved one.

TEAM PLAYER

Higginbotham is quick to praise her team members for supporting her in doing what she loves: helping the people who trust her during some of life's most vulnerable moments.

"Rarely is work in health care done solo," she said. "It takes a team. I can only do what I do because I work alongside some great people who care deeply about those we serve. We have heroes walking in our hallways every day. They all deserve recognition."

SCAN THE CODE FOR INFORMATION ABOUT MCHC'S SOCIAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT.

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11 YEARS OF EXCELLENCE.
ONE INCREDIBLE TEAM.

For the 11th consecutive year, Monroe County Hospital & Clinics has been named a Top Workplace by the *Des Moines Register*.

Based entirely on employee feedback, this award proves what we've always known: Our people are the heart of MCHC. Together, we've created a workplace where healthcare professionals don't just work–they thrive, grow and belong.

TOP WORK PLACES 2016-2026

BY THE NUMBERS

11 consecutive years recognized
No. 4 ranked mid-sized organization in Iowa
1 of 133 honored out of 5,500+ eligible companies
100% employee-driven results

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