

HealthLINK

SUMMER 2022

YOUR CONNECTION TO HEALTH & WELLNESS

INSIDE:

Pregnancy and the pandemic:
One couple's journey. / How
antiviral medications are
transforming COVID care. /
New vision for aging eyes.



EAT SMART FOR LIFELONG HEALTH

VALLEY HEALTH'S NUTRITION THERAPY TEAM HELPS
PATIENTS WITH A RANGE OF HEALTH CHALLENGES

WELCOME

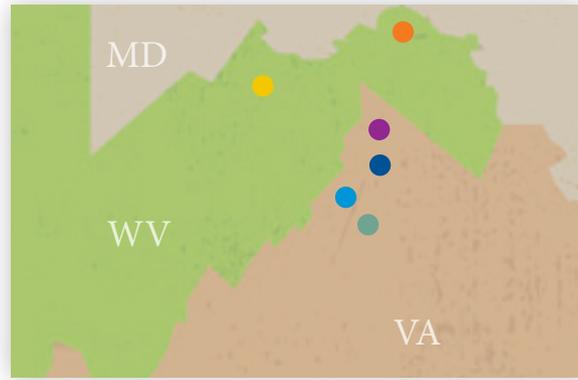
LIVING WITH COVID IN OUR COMMUNITY

Yes, we are all “over” COVID-19. We are weary of having to schedule get-togethers and celebrations around outbreaks, testing, quarantining, wearing masks ... and most of all, mourning those we’ve lost to the disease.

Fortunately, the incidence of COVID has decreased since the surge last winter, and our lives are beginning to look more like they did pre-COVID. This issue of *HealthLINK* includes info on antivirals, testing, boosters, and how to stay safe as COVID remains ever present. The waning of COVID can’t come soon enough, but meanwhile, get educated on precautions to protect yourself and your loved ones. And remember, COVID vaccination and boosters are currently the best protection against serious illness.

Remember, too, that the possibility of getting COVID remains a reality for anyone who has contact with other people: in other words, all of us.

Want to ensure home delivery of every issue of *HealthLINK*? Call **540-536-5325** or sign up at valleyhealthlink.com/news.



Valley Health is a not-for-profit system of hospitals, services and providers. For more information about the many ways we serve the health and wellness needs of the community, visit valleyhealthlink.com.

Valley Health System includes:

- Winchester Medical Center (Winchester, VA)
- Hampshire Memorial Hospital (Romney, WV)
- Page Memorial Hospital (Luray, VA)
- Shenandoah Memorial Hospital (Woodstock, VA)
- War Memorial Hospital (Berkeley Springs, WV)
- Warren Memorial Hospital (Front Royal, VA)

Additional locations and services:

- Employer Health
- Outreach Lab Services
- Rehabilitation Services (Inpatient and Outpatient)
- Urgent Care and Urgent Care Express
- Valley Health Home Health | West Virginia
- Valley Health Medical Group
- Valley Health | Spring Mills
- Valley Health Surgery Center
- Valley Medical Transport
- Valley Pharmacy
- Wellness & Fitness Centers

For more information, visit valleyhealthlink.com/locations.



Valley Health System

Serving Our Community by Improving Health

HealthLINK

The magazine of Valley Health System
Serving the northern Shenandoah Valley and surrounding areas in Virginia, West Virginia and Maryland

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The information contained in *HealthLINK* is not a substitute for professional medical care or counsel. If you have medical concerns, consult a medical professional. A list of physicians, specialists and other care providers is found at valleyhealthlink.com/physicians.

HealthLINK magazine is published three times a year. Its purpose is to provide health and wellness information to the community and to connect area residents with healthcare experts within Valley Health System.

Contact marketingmail@valleyhealthlink.com or 540-536-5325 to be added to our mailing list; view *HealthLINK* online at valleyhealthlink.com/news.

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VHS DISTRIBUTES COVID TEST KITS

Valley Health has distributed over 150,000 free COVID-19 self-testing kits to individuals and organizations throughout the region. Law enforcement, free medical clinics, churches, shelters, and other congregate living facilities—and even Valley Health staff—are among those who received test kits sent by the U.S. government for local distribution by VHS.

Our caregivers continue to diagnose and treat those with COVID. Valley Health staff take a multipronged approach to battling the disease by encouraging prevention through vaccination, boosters and masking indoors/in public, and promoting the use of testing and quarantine to mitigate the spread.

Valley Health also offers treatment options to decrease the severity of COVID-19 symptoms. Be proactive if you test positive. Contact your primary care provider promptly to determine if you are a candidate for monoclonal antibody infusion or antiviral treatment.

Visit valleyhealthlink.com/c19 for info on pandemic resources, and learn more about antiviral treatments on page 13.



To increase detection of COVID, test kits were distributed to thousands, including Valley Health employees.



Staff at Warren Memorial Hospital celebrate their recent honor from The Joint Commission.

DEVELOPMENTS IN ORTHOPEDIC CARE

Warren Memorial Hospital (WMH) in Front Royal, Virginia, has earned the Gold Seal of Approval® for Total Knee Replacement and Total Hip Replacement Certification from The Joint Commission (TJC). This honor, awarded in collaboration with the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons, reflects the Orthopedics team's compliance with standards for safe, high-quality care for joint replacement patients. From pre-surgical consultation and patient education to surgery, pain management, rehabilitation, and follow-up, the certification attests to the quality of the total joint program at WMH.

“We have a wonderful group of care providers who really understand that our patients are our partners,” says orthopedic surgeon Mesfin Shibeshi, DO. “We want our patients to know exactly what to expect in every stage of the process. This certification ensures that our processes are evidence-based, consistent, streamlined, and patient-focused.”

At the northern end of the Shenandoah Valley, an established orthopedic practice in Martinsburg, West Virginia, has joined our system of care. Valley Health | Center for Orthopedic Excellence includes four experienced orthopedic surgeons, who serve patients at their office on Tavern Road. The physicians perform surgery, including same-day total joint replacement, at the adjoining Tri-State Surgical Center.

Valley Health welcomes John W. Buschman, DO; Joseph P. Cincinnati, DO; Troy D. Foster, DO; and Thomas E. Knutson Jr., to our team and is excited to expand the quality care and services offered to patients in the Eastern Panhandle of West Virginia.



Staff members at Shenandoah Memorial, which was recently designated a Top 100 Critical Access Hospital.

TOP 100 RECOGNITION FOR SMH

Shenandoah Memorial Hospital (SMH) was recently recognized as a Top 100 Critical Access Hospital in the country, based on data compiled by the Chartis Center for Rural Health. There are 1,353 Critical Access Hospitals in the U.S., and SMH is the only hospital in Virginia and one of



just a few on the East Coast to earn this recognition for 2022. The Chartis Center uses data to assess and benchmark rural hospital performance based on 36 rural-relevant indicators,

including quality, outcomes, patient satisfaction, and costs. The 100 facilities with the highest scores earn a spot on the list.

“COVID-19 has brought challenges we could not have imagined, from disruptions in supply chains to workforce shortages to a highly polarized national debate on the best ways forward,” says SMH President N. Travis Clark. “To have earned this distinction during such a transforming time is a testament to our entire team’s commitment, resiliency and extraordinary skill set.”

POP-UP CLINIC TO SERVE PAGE COUNTY AREA ON JULY 9-10

In July, the Page Free Clinic in Luray will collaborate with Remote Area Medical (RAM) Volunteer Corps to provide medical, dental and vision care to all comers, free of charge, at a two-day clinic at Luray High School. The clinic will take place July 9 (6 AM–6 PM) and July 10 (6 AM–2 PM) and will offer a variety of services from credentialed physicians and other clinicians who are volunteering their time to serve the community.

“Through our long-standing support of the Page Free Clinic, we have advanced access to care for area residents, so we are very excited about the weekend clinic in July,” notes Valley Health President and CEO Mark Nantz. “Volunteers from around the region, including numerous Valley Health team members, will serve 400 to 500 individuals over the course of the two days. It will be a great opportunity for patients with limited access to medical, dental and vision services to get care from a team of compassionate caregivers.”

Patients who arrive early to register should be prepared with their own food, water, medicines, and clothing. Services will be provided on a first-come, first-served basis, no ID is required, and all attendees must wear a face covering and must undergo a COVID-19 screening before entering the clinic.

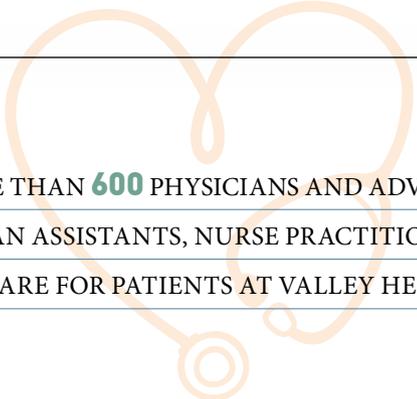
For more information about clinic services and/or volunteering, visit pagefreeclinic.org or ramusa.org.

FOR THE LATEST HEALTH AND WELLNESS NEWS, VISIT THE *HEALTHLINK* BLOG AT VALLEYHEALTHLINK.COM/NEWS.

POWERED BY PEOPLE

→ VALLEY HEALTH HAS EXCEPTIONAL HOSPITALS AND OTHER FACILITIES, TECHNOLOGY, AND RESOURCES, BUT ULTIMATELY, IT IS OUR TEAM MEMBERS WHO PROVIDE AMAZING CARE. WE ARE TRULY POWERED BY PEOPLE!

(6,017 EMPLOYEES* MORE THAN 600 PHYSICIANS AND ADVANCED PRACTICE PROVIDERS (PHYSICIAN ASSISTANTS, NURSE PRACTITIONERS, ETC.) OFFER EXPERT MEDICAL CARE FOR PATIENTS AT VALLEY HEALTH.)



*As of March 1, 2022.

SINCE 2019, **550+ VOLUNTEERS** HAVE GIVEN MORE THAN 27,000 HOURS IN VALLEY HEALTH'S SIX HOSPITALS, AND **1,500+ VOLUNTEERS** WORKED 127,000+ HOURS ENSURING WIDESPREAD ACCESS TO COVID VACCINES IN OUR REGION!

OUR PEOPLE STICK WITH US!

MORE THAN **2,800** HAVE WORKED AT VALLEY HEALTH FOR **5+ YEARS** AND **723** HAVE WORKED FOR US FOR OVER **20 YEARS**. WE EVEN HAVE 2 EMPLOYEES WHO HAVE WORKED AT VALLEY HEALTH FOR OVER **50 YEARS!**

8.1 YEARS
AVERAGE TENURE OF VHS STAFF

1,870+ NURSES

FILL MANY ROLES AT VALLEY HEALTH. THEY WORK AT THE BEDSIDE, IN MEDICAL PRACTICES AND IN PATIENT HOMES; AS TRAINERS, TEACHERS AND EDUCATORS; IN TECHNOLOGY, INFORMATION SYSTEMS AND CLINICAL RESEARCH; AS RECRUITERS; IN PATIENT EXPERIENCE AND AS PATIENT NAVIGATORS; IN HOME HEALTH; AND MORE.

→ Interested in a career at Valley Health? Visit valleyhealthlink.com/careers.



EATING OUR WAY

Low carb, keto, gluten-free, or Whole30 diets? Vegetarian, pescatarian or vegan? With so many eating options and fads in the news, it's hard to know which approach is right for you and your family. And the choices are even more challenging when you or a loved one has a medical condition with special dietary recommendations or restrictions.

Valley Health's Nutrition Therapy team is here to help.

Nutrition therapy—healthy eating and nutritional support expertly tailored to your medical needs—is a key component of whole-person care at Valley Health. “As the ancient Greek physician Hippocrates said, ‘Let food be thy medicine,’” says Susan Lessar, MS, RD, director of VHS Nutrition Therapy. “Food is essential to life—and to managing or preventing a wide range of health conditions including diabetes, for recovery during cancer treatment, and for enhancing wellness.”

The health system's award-winning Nutrition Therapy team of 26 registered dietitians (also called registered dietitian nutritionists) works

TO HEAL

with hospital inpatients, those receiving outpatient care and others seeking personalized food strategies for good health. They collaborate with doctors, nurses, therapists, and hospital pharmacists to ensure patients are adequately nourished. One result of the team's exceptional work and track record of conducting nutrition research: two prestigious ASPEN Clinical Nutrition Team of Distinction Awards (in 2015 and 2021) from the American Society for Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition. Only 19 other medical centers across the U.S. have received the award in that time.



Valley Health registered dietitians (from left) Stacy Schultz, Jordan Dolewski, Katherine Sellors, Sara Brewer, and Elena Mullen display some of their favorite foods.

WHAT ARE REGISTERED DIETITIANS?

Registered dietitians (RDs) are highly trained health practitioners, accredited by the national Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.

“They have an accredited undergraduate or master’s degree in nutrition, complete a dietetic internship, pass an exam, and maintain a state license and or registration,” notes Susan Lessar, MS, RD, director of Nutrition Therapy at VHS.

RDs offer nutritional counseling and develop dietary plans tailored to individual patients. Hospital-based RDs place feeding tubes and perform indirect calorimetry/metabolic testing for intubated patients to determine their caloric needs to prevent underfeeding and overfeeding.

Many RDs have a specialized area of practice. For example, some at VHS focus on diabetes management, others on medical weight loss. “They cover the whole realm of nutrition needs—from a baby with food allergies to an adult with celiac disease,” Lessar adds.

➔ VALLEY HEALTH’S NUTRITION THERAPY TEAM SUPPORTS PATIENTS WITH A RANGE OF HEALTH CHALLENGES

TH AND WELLNESS

HOW CAN VALLEY HEALTH’S REGISTERED DIETITIANS (RDs) HELP YOU IMPROVE YOUR HEALTH? HERE ARE EXAMPLES:

- **IF YOU HAVE DIABETES OR PREDIABETES:** An estimated 13 percent of all U.S. adults have diabetes, and 34.5 percent meet criteria for prediabetes. Valley Health’s Nutrition Therapy staff have dual strategies when it comes to diabetes: prevention for those at risk and management for those who have already been diagnosed.

“With a referral from your doctor, you can see one of our RDs, who are Certified Diabetes Care and Education Specialists (CDCES), and participate in Valley Health’s Diabetes Management Program. Edu-

cation about diabetes self-management, meal planning, carbohydrate counting, medical nutrition therapy for weight loss, exercise, and problem-solving are some of the resources provided,” says Jordan Dolewski, MS, RD. These experts help patients understand use of therapies like insulin and devices like continuous glucose monitors (CGMs). “We also provide education for women who develop gestational diabetes during pregnancy.”

Stacy Schultz, RD, clinical dietitian at War Memorial Hospital, takes patients to a local grocery store for hands-

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

on experience in making healthy choices. “We look at labels to determine which foods are low carb and low in sugar. The goal is to prevent diabetes from getting worse,” she says. She is also an advocate for the role that exercise plays. “Those who use CGMs take readings before and after exercise, and they really see how it lowers blood sugar levels.”

A healthy diet and exercise both impact prediabetes and are emphasized in Diabetes Prevention Program sessions. “Those two things go hand in hand in preventing Type 2 diabetes,” says clinical dietitian Jane O’Doherty, RD. “In fact, losing 5 to 7 percent of your body weight, exercising 150 minutes a week at moderate intensity, and eating healthy lower a person’s risk of diabetes by 58 percent.”

- **IF YOU HAVE HEART AND VASCULAR DISEASE OR HYPERTENSION:** A poor diet can lead to a number of serious conditions, including heart disease, high blood pressure (hypertension) and other chronic vascular conditions. Although there is not a one-size-fits-all approach, limiting foods and beverages with added sugars, saturated fat, sodium, and alcohol is important for heart health.

Clinical dietitian Katherine Sellors, RD, stresses that eating healthy is about more than taking things out of your diet, such as saturated and trans fats often found in red meats, cheeses, butter, and mayonnaise. She advocates for adding more fiber, along with eating unsaturated fatty acids from beans, fish, nuts, and poultry, to improve heart health.

Patients should also be mindful of their sodium consumption because many processed convenience foods, like ramen noodles, contain a lot of salt. “Seventy percent of what people consume in sodium is already in their diet in preprocessed foods,” adds Sellors. “It’s not just about using a salt shaker.”



“Natural, simple foods are best. There’s a misconception that it’s too expensive to eat healthy. You can buy beans, frozen vegetables and more on a modest budget.”

—MAGDA BULLOCK, RD

- **IF YOU CHOOSE TO HAVE BARIATRIC SURGERY OR WANT TO LOSE WEIGHT WITH MEDICAL NUTRITION THERAPY:** Nutrition therapy is an invaluable resource for those planning bariatric surgery, and patients’ pre-surgical work with an RD can be critical to their success. RDs help with nutritional counseling and meal planning, evaluate the support system that patients have at home, and offer tips to deal with cravings and constipation, says bariatric dietitian Sara Brewer, RD.
- **IF YOU HAVE CANCER:** “We are in it for the long haul, working with patients to make lifestyle changes that help them beat cancer,” says registered dietitian Athena Hall, RD, who specializes in oncology. Her work with Valley



Registered dietitians at Valley Health advise patients to eat fruits and vegetables that are high in fiber and nutrients.

PLANT-BASED DIETS: NUTRITION THAT ‘GROWS’ ON YOU

Elena Mullen, RD, clinical dietitian in Nutrition Therapy at WMC, recommends a diet high in fiber and low in saturated fat and sodium, and notes that studies show that eating a plant-based, whole-food diet helps reduce the risk of cancers, heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, and cognitive decline.

It’s no surprise then that this plant-centric approach to eating—built around vegetables, fruits, whole grains, beans, lentils, nuts, and seeds—continues to grow in popularity.

“I recommend limiting or completely eliminating red and processed meats,” Mullen says. “Processed meats [smoked meats, sausages, hot dogs, salami, and bacon, for example] are considered a Group 1 carcinogen by the World Health Organization, meaning that they are a known carcinogen. This is the same group as asbestos and tobacco.”

Red meat doesn’t fare much better, as it is classified in Group 2A by the World Health Organization, which is the group for foods that “probably” cause cancer.

“By maximizing plant-based foods, you are getting foods that are high in heart-healthy fiber, vitamins and minerals and low in harmful components associated with cancer,” Mullen adds. Eating more veggies—that’s an idea that can “grow” on you!

Health’s multidisciplinary oncology team helps patients both throughout their treatment journey and beyond into survivorship by providing nutrition support during chemotherapy and radiation treatments as well as before and after surgical interventions.

- **IF YOU WANT TO RAISE A HEALTHY FAMILY:** Clinical dietitian Magda Bullock, RD, who works at both Shenandoah Memorial and Page Memorial hospitals and medical practices, tries to help parents make good choices in the environment in which they live. That includes fighting myths about which foods are healthy and affordable.

“Natural, simple foods are best,” Bullock says. “There’s a misconception that it’s too expensive to eat healthy. You can buy beans, frozen vegetables and more on a modest budget.” She adds that oatmeal, rice, pasta, and baked sweet potatoes, for example, are loaded with

nutrients, are not expensive and are better choices than convenience or fast foods.

“Childhood obesity is a serious problem, and young patients can develop heart disease and hypertension,” Bullock continues. Passionate about helping families adopt strategies to build good habits for lifelong health, she encourages parents and children to exercise together every day, even if it’s for only 10 to 15 minutes at a time. “Sometimes we have to start at just five minutes, especially for those who are not so active,” she says.

For more information, visit valleyhealthlink.com/nutrition-services.

SPOTLIGHT

PREGNANT DURING THE PANDEMIC

One couple's journey to start a family in uncertain times

Eloise Whitacre, 1½, is a blonde, blue-eyed toddler who adores dancing and playing peek-a-boo. “She loves books,” says mom Mary Beth Whitacre. “She’ll pull 10 off the shelf to look at.”

Whitacre, 35, who works on Valley Health’s marketing team, was pregnant with Eloise during the first nine months of the COVID pandemic. The baby was conceived via in vitro fertilization just as early news of the virus trickled out of China in late December 2019. Shortly after Mary Beth and her husband, Dan, celebrated his birthday by going out to dinner in early March 2020, the pandemic began reshaping their lives.

“COVID shutdowns began on March 13,” says Dan, 39, a realtor in Winchester. “It was such a difficult road just getting to the point where Mary Beth was pregnant with our first child, so we were superexcited. Then COVID hit and there were so many unknowns. We were in a global pandemic where nobody knew what to do.”

Their first priority: avoiding exposure to the virus. “No one knew at the time what it could mean for a baby if the mom contracted COVID,” Mary Beth says. “There were no vaccines. So we were very careful.” She began working from home, joined by Dan for the first month. The couple had groceries delivered, only socialized with friends and family outdoors, and spent their time cocooned at home playing Scrabble and Rummikub for fun. When Dan showed houses to prospective buyers, he practiced social distancing. “There was a lot of hand washing and hand sanitizing,” he says.

Leslie Kidd, MD, one of the eight physicians at Winchester Obstetrics

“No one knew at the time what it could mean for a baby if the mom contracted COVID. There were no vaccines. So we were very careful.” —MARY BETH WHITACRE



Mary Beth and Dan Whitacre with their baby, Eloise, who was born during the pandemic.



and Gynecology, Mary Beth's obstetrical group, says she and her colleagues urge expectant parents to take all steps possible to avoid contracting COVID because of the risks to moms and babies. This includes getting vaccinated.

There was no vaccine available in 2020, so for the Whitacres, the pandemic rewrote some pregnancy plans. Dan couldn't accompany Mary Beth to medical appointments. Their parents, who live nearby, couldn't stop by for coffee or dinner. Mary Beth's baby showers took place outdoors. And she had to take a COVID test a week before her September due date. It was negative. "It wasn't clear what would happen if I had COVID when the baby was born," she says. "It was possible I would have to isolate away from the baby at first. Fortunately, that did not happen."

Dan was with Mary Beth before, during and after Eloise's birth at Winchester Medical Center. "I could have one person with me," Mary Beth says. The new family's first moments together at the hospital felt happy and normal. "Those nurses were absolutely incredible," Dan says. "Honestly, in the hospital we kind of forgot about COVID because the care was that good." The couple's parents quarantined for two weeks, at Mary Beth's request, so that they could safely meet and hold their new granddaughter.

This was a wise decision. "More than 90 percent of neonatal COVID infections come from family members," notes Dr. Kidd.

After her maternity leave ended, Mary Beth continued working from home and found herself assisting with community vaccination efforts. "I was on the phone and computer for 12 hours some days, helping people register for appointments," she says. "Dan and I received the vaccine, too. And Eloise had some protection for as long as she was nursing."

Mary Beth is expecting the couple's second child this summer. To stay safe, they track COVID case numbers at Valley Health and carefully weigh the risks and benefits of outings. "This time around it's different," Dan says. "The Omicron variant is highly contagious, but people are out everywhere. We might decline an invitation to an indoor dinner with a lot of people."

Dr. Kidd agrees that expectant parents should continue to be cautious—and get vaccinated. "Please trust my scientific expertise: There is an increased risk of complications if the mother gets COVID. We are still learning, and there's lots we don't understand yet. But vaccination is our best defense against the virus, and it's one of the safest vaccines we've seen in decades."

Despite the new challenges associated with pregnancy in the times of COVID, Mary Beth and Dan are looking forward to the birth of Eloise's baby sister at WMC. "The care was so good the first time, in difficult circumstances, that we're excited to go back," says Dan.

WHAT PARENTS-TO-BE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT COVID

Pregnant women—as well as couples trying to conceive—face new risks to their own health and that of their baby if they get COVID. Expectant parents are full of questions, so we reached out to Leslie Kidd, MD, a board-certified obstetrician with Winchester Obstetrics and Gynecology, to learn more on how to best prevent complications and ensure healthy and safe pregnancies.

- **HealthLINK: What risks do pregnant women face if they get COVID?**

Dr. Leslie Kidd: The overall risk of complications is low, but pregnancy itself is an immunocompromised state, so pregnant women with COVID have 15 to 20 times the risk of complications compared to nonpregnant women. And pregnant women with certain health conditions—such as diabetes, hypertension, obesity, asthma, and other diseases—have additional risk of complications.

- **HL: What are the risks to babies if a pregnant mom has COVID?**

LK: We are still learning about the impacts of COVID on pregnant women and babies, but some initial findings



OB/GYN Leslie Kidd, MD, with patient Mary Beth Whitacre.

are concerning. If the mom gets COVID, we have seen an increase in fetal growth restriction [low birth weight] and preterm birth, and the risk of stillbirth is four times greater. COVID may affect how the placenta oxygenates babies since the virus can impact blood-clotting factors.

- **HL: What treatments should be given to a pregnant woman with COVID?**

LK: Pregnant women can use monoclonal antibodies. These are safe and help clear the active virus from the system more rapidly, so there's less risk for long-term complications.

- **HL: Should a new mom breastfeed if she has COVID?**

LK: We encourage breastfeeding and wearing a mask while doing so if the mom has an active infection. Women who have been vaccinated pass antibodies from the vaccine to the baby through the breast milk, providing babies with additional protection.

- **HL: Should a woman who is trying to conceive or who is already pregnant get the vaccine?**

LK: If a woman conceives and hasn't been vaccinated or had a booster yet, I recommend she do it while pregnant. The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are recommended; the J&J is not recommended because a small number of women of reproductive age have had an uncommon side effect, a clot in the cerebellum.

- **HL: What are common misconceptions about COVID vaccines and pregnancy?**

LK: The vaccine is the best defense against the virus, and its safety profiles are incredibly good. Some studies have shown that the COVID virus itself can decrease sperm counts in men, but the vaccines do not cause infertility, and specialists recommend that both partners get vaccinated prior to conception. As with all patient groups, those who get seriously ill are the unvaccinated, and I don't want to see anything happen to my pregnant patients or their babies when complications can be prevented with a couple of shots.



PROMISING TREATMENTS FOR COVID-19

ANTIVIRAL PILLS HELP REDUCE RISK OF SERIOUS COMPLICATIONS

Hospitals have been pushed to the brink during the pandemic, with intensive care units often filling up. But now, antiviral pills have arrived, helping people who contract the coronavirus avoid serious illness.

For high-risk patients, these pills are up to 88 percent effective at preventing hospitalizations and death. “At least for the next year or so, if these drugs are widely available and effective, hospitalization rates should stay low, even if we get another surge in cases,” says Luray, Virginia-based family physician David Switzer, MD, Valley Health medical director, Population Health.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has greenlighted two pills—Pfizer’s Paxlovid and Merck’s molnupiravir—for use in high-risk patients. “Both medications appear to be effective with the Omicron variant, which is responsible for the majority of COVID-19 infections now,” says pharmacist Sarah Wheeler, PharmD, a member of the Page Memorial Hospital Primary Care team who collaborates to serve patients at various clinics in the area.

Antivirals target the processes the virus uses to replicate, or make copies of itself. “By reducing the number of viral particles in the body, these medications lessen the burden of the infection and help ease symptoms,” Wheeler explains. It’s currently unknown whether the antivirals make you less contagious, however, so it’s still important to quarantine

if you are COVID positive. (Another treatment option for people with the virus is monoclonal antibodies, given via intravenous infusion, administered up to 10 days after symptoms begin.)

Both pills are prescribed based on test results for COVID. Antivirals aren’t handed out to everyone who tests positive, however. They’re intended for those most likely to become severely ill without treatment. “These antivirals were approved with an emergency-use authorization through the FDA, similar to the process that originally brought us the vaccines,” Dr. Switzer adds. “Under emergency-use authorization, it’s really at the provider’s discretion. The patients we worry most about when they get COVID are unvaccinated patients who are older with chronic conditions.”

Antivirals need to be taken within five days of symptoms, so it’s important to act quickly. “As soon as you suspect that you have COVID symptoms, call your doctor or take a home test,” Wheeler says, “because the clock starts ticking.”

→ Visit valleyhealthlink.com/c19 to learn about resources available to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in the region.

SECOND BOOSTERS AUTHORIZED BY FDA

In March, the FDA authorized a second booster dose of either the Pfizer-BioNTech or the Moderna COVID-19 vaccines for those 50 years of age and older and certain immunocompromised individuals. This second booster may be administered at least four months after receipt of the first booster of any approved COVID vaccine.

Emerging evidence suggests that a second booster dose of an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine improves protection against severe COVID-19. Contact your local retail pharmacy to find out if you are eligible for a second booster.

NEW VISION FOR AGING EYES

ADVANCES IN OPHTHALMOLOGY HELP OLDER ADULTS SAFEGUARD THEIR SIGHT

As we enter our 40s, we might find ourselves struggling to read text messages and other small print. With age, our eyes' natural lenses lose the flexibility to focus on close-up objects. Eyeglasses can sharpen those murky texts, but aging eyes are also prone to other conditions that impact sight.

One in five adults 70 and older has vision impairment, so regular eye exams are key. "If a problem isn't taken care of, and a person is not as active in reading and doing things with confidence that they used to do, it can lead to isolation or a decline in cognitive ability," says ophthalmologist Norman Woodlief, MD.

If you have a problem like glaucoma, you may not realize it. This sneaky, painless condition increases eye pressure, damaging the optic nerve. Left untreated, it can lead to blindness. Dr. Woodlief and his colleagues, Thomas Keenan, MD, and Fiona Seager, MD, at Valley Health Eye Specialists, are highly trained, board-certified ophthalmologists who use high-tech imaging of the macula, retina and optic nerve to diagnose such conditions.

These physicians offer leading-edge treatments. Patients who have trouble taking glaucoma eyedrops, for example, may have a tiny pellet implanted in the eye in a painless procedure in the office that slowly releases medication over a three-month period.

If surgery is needed, Valley Health has advanced technology to perform selective laser trabeculoplasty, a surgery that reduces eye pressure. "It takes about five minutes in the office," continues Dr. Woodlief. Microinvasive glaucoma surgery is another option.

Half of adults over 80 develop cataracts, a clouding in the eye's natural lens that blurs vision. When vision reaches 20/40, surgery is often needed. During this 20-minute procedure, the eye's natural cloudy lens is replaced with a biocompatible clear one. For all eye surgeries, the outpatient surgical team at Valley Health Eye Specialists provides a warm, caring environment staffed with anesthesia professionals and nurses to maximize quality and safety.

Following cataract surgery, many patients become less dependent on their eyeglasses. "New technologies in cataract surgery allow patients to have better vision than they have had in many



Norman Woodlief, MD (right), offers advanced treatments to improve patients' vision.

years," adds Dr. Woodlief, who has performed more than 29,000 cataract procedures. "We can correct astigmatism and the need for bifocals or trifocals with these special lenses." Also, recent research shows that people who had their cataracts removed had a 30 percent lower risk of dementia.

A condition that threatens central vision is age-related macular degeneration, a deterioration of part of the retina. The Valley Health eye care team treats this condition with injected medication or surgery.

Dr. Woodlief empathizes with patients because when he was a medical student, he developed a serious eye condition—retinal detachment—that can cause permanent vision loss. "I had surgery to preserve my vision, which made me very sensitive about how precious sight is," he says.

As a physician, he's passionate about preserving eyesight. "We see people who have gone blind in both eyes, and we'll take their cataracts off," he says. "Their sight is often restored to 20/20 vision. It's exciting. We really enjoy serving this community."

→ Visit valleyhealthlink.com/vheye for more information.

MILLIONAIRES NEXT DOOR

Local couple's generous gift supports Valley Health nursing education and training

We've all heard the stories: The elderly woman or quiet couple of seemingly modest means who live down the block pass away and leave a fortune to a university, nonprofit or nearby hospital. "Who knew we had millionaires next door," exclaim surprised neighbors on the local news.

But these generous donors are not as unusual as you might think. In fact, the Winchester Medical Center Foundation recently received a \$1.6 million estate gift from Paul and Audrey Mitchell, who were passionate about giving to others during their lifetime. Grateful for the care they had received at the hospital over the years, the couple left assets and money in their will to support nursing education and training.

The Mitchells worked hard all their lives, lived modestly, saved regularly, and invested wisely. "Paul and Audrey were wonderful people," says longtime family friend Scarlett Copp. "They believed in hard work and living below your means."

She was nevertheless surprised by the size of their estate. "I was shocked," Copp explains. "But I know they wanted their estate to do good. And what better place than Winchester Medical Center?"

Vintage photos of Paul and Audrey Mitchell, who named the Winchester Medical Center Foundation in their estate.



Each of the six Valley Health hospitals has a foundation or development fund that supports healthcare programs. Whether raising \$10 million for a new cancer center or providing free bike helmets to children at health fairs, these funds make a philanthropic difference.

Jenny Grooms, executive director for the Winchester Medical Center Foundation, says charitable gifts like the Mitchells' can enhance, expand or create services that might not be possible otherwise. Grooms called the Mitchells' gift transformational.

"Estate gifts can have a huge impact," Grooms says. "And you don't need to have a million dollars in the bank." She explains that there are many options to help donors create their own legacy with gifts of any type and size, adding, "It's a privilege to be a part of carrying on someone's story of health and healing for generations to come."

Lifelong area residents, the Mitchells enjoyed gardening together. They loved sharing the vegetables they'd grown with friends and neighbors, including the doctors and nurses who provided their care over the years. Though they both have now passed, they will continue to give to Valley Health caregivers through the Paul and Audrey Mitchell Fund. What they grew financially will continue to bear fruit for the community for years to come!

→ For more information on the Mitchells' story, the Legacy Society at Valley Health Foundations or how you can support health in your community, visit valleyhealthlink.com/giving or contact Jenny Grooms at 540-536-2387 or jgrooms@valleyhealthlink.com.

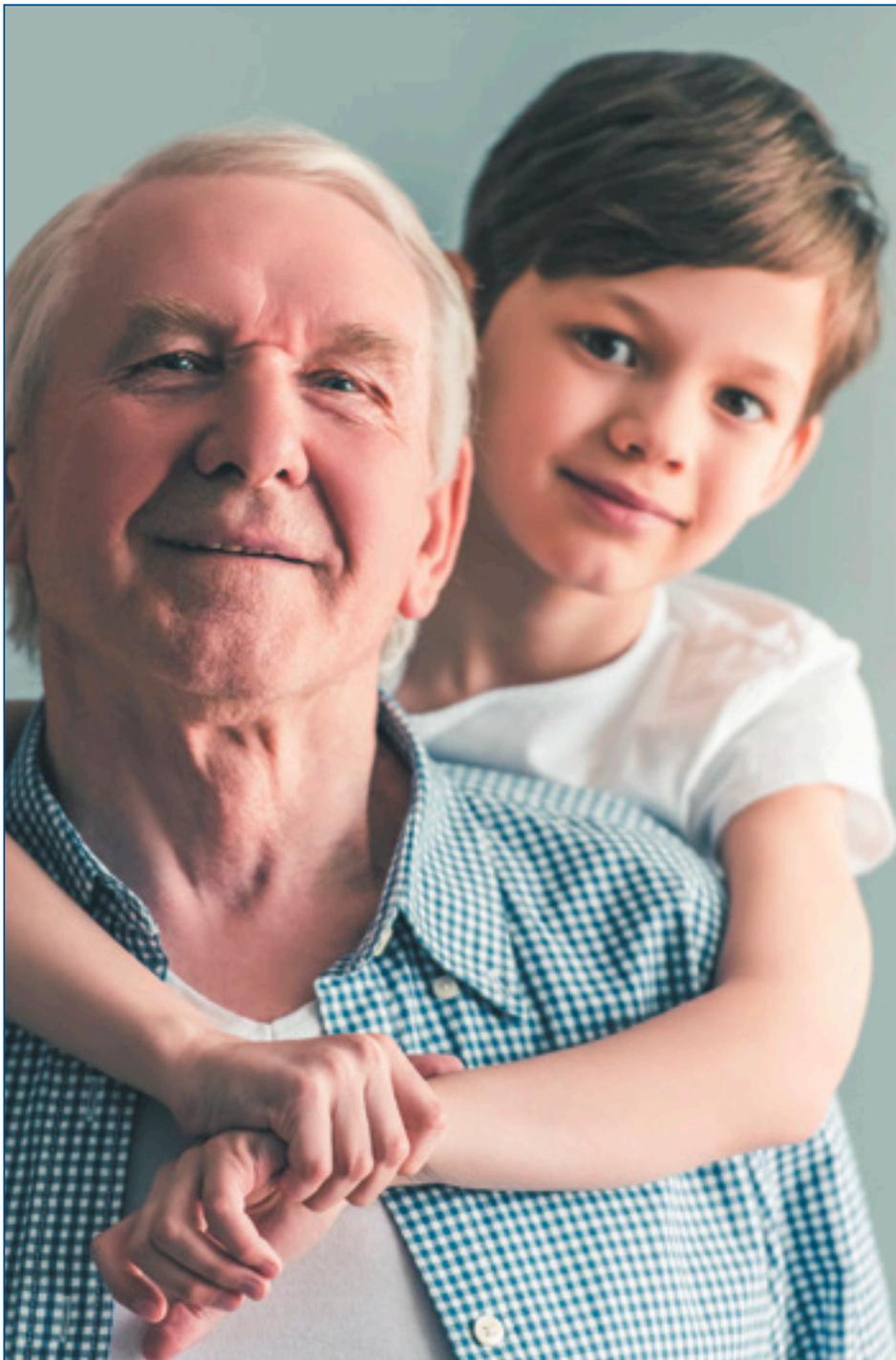


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