

# seniorclass

Baystate Health

ADVANCING CARE. ENHANCING LIVES.



Scenic Autumn Road in Quabbin Reservoir Park

## IN THIS ISSUE

Exploring Your  
Medicare Options  
page 5

Senior Class Trips  
page 7

Can Learning  
Make You Healthy?  
page 10

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**Baystate Medical Center**

413-794-5200

**Baystate Mary Lane  
Outpatient Center**

413-967-2200

**Baystate Franklin  
Medical Center**

413-773-2433

**Baystate Wing Hospital**

413-967-2200

**Baystate Noble Hospital**

413-794-5200

**ADVANCING CARE.  
ENHANCING LIVES.**

## Senior Class Calendar of Events [ Fall 2019 ]

### October

October 16, 4:30-6:30 pm  
**Open House & Ribbon Cutting Ceremony**

October 23, 6-7:30 pm  
**Scope It Out! Colon Health**

October 28, 6-7:30 pm  
**Out of Breath?**

October 29, 6-7:30 pm  
**Bones, Muscles, and Joints, Oh My!**

### November

November 5, 12-1:30 pm  
**That "Gut" Feeling**

Monday, November 18, 5:30-7 pm  
**Protecting Your Assets**

November 20, 5-7 pm  
**Senior Class Thanksgiving Dinner**  
Country Club of Greenfield

November 21, 5-7 pm  
**Senior Class Thanksgiving**  
Salem Cross Inn

*Back by popular demand*  
November 25, 11:30-1 pm  
**AFib with the Cardiologist**

### December

Monday, December 2, 5:30-7 pm  
**Protecting Your Assets**

December 3, 11:30-1 pm  
**The Nose Knows**

# Seminars & Events

Visit [baystatehealth.org/seniorclass](http://baystatehealth.org/seniorclass) for links to all events.

## Open House & Ribbon Cutting Ceremony

Wednesday, October 16, 4:30-6:30 pm  
Baystate Mary Lane Outpatient Center  
85 South St, Ware



In honor of Breast Cancer Awareness month in October, please join us for the Open House & Ribbon Cutting Ceremony of Baystate Mary Lane Imaging Center featuring 3D Mammography. We welcome you to experience a premier celebration of our beautiful Imaging Center with exclusive viewing and tour of the new space. You will be some of the very first to see it. The evening will be fun-filled with live entertainment, delicious samplings from local Chef Jason Green, complimentary spa treatments and the opportunity to experience M technique hand massage. Everyone who attends will receive a free insulated beverage tumbler. For your convenience, complimentary valet parking will be available. To register: [baystatemarylanedigitalimaging.eventbrite.com](https://baystatemarylanedigitalimaging.eventbrite.com) or call 413-794-5200. FREE!



## Scope It Out! Colon Health

Wednesday, October 23, 6-7:30 pm  
Baystate Health Education Center  
361 Whitney Ave, Holyoke



Colon cancer, also known as colorectal cancer, is the second leading cause of cancer death in both men and women, and risk increases with age. What most people don't realize, however, is that it's almost completely preventable thanks to procedures like the colonoscopy, sigmoidoscopy, barium enemas and blood test. Join colorectal surgeon, Dr. Ziad Kutayli, director of robotic surgery, for a discussion about prevention, screening, latest research, risk factors, symptoms, diagnosis and treatment for colon cancer. Refreshments served. To register: <https://scopeitout.eventbrite.com> or call 413-794-5200. FREE!



## Out of Breath?

Monday, October 28, 6-7:30 pm  
Baystate Health Education Center  
361 Whitney Ave, Holyoke



Michele Hart, RN

There are many causes for shortness of breath including COPD (chronic bronchitis, emphysema), asthma, pulmonary fibrosis, anxiety and being out of shape. Join Michele Hart, RN, Pulmonary Nurse Clinician, Baystate Pulmonary Rehabilitation, for a discussion about what can be done to

help manage breathing, increase stamina and decrease breathlessness. Handouts, demonstrations and time for questions and answers are included. Refreshments served. To register: <https://outofbreath.eventbrite.com> or call 413-794-5200. FREE!

## Bones, Muscles, and Joints, Oh My!

Tuesday, October 29, 6-7:30 pm  
Baystate Wing Hospital, Snow Conference Room  
40 Wright St, Palmer



Dr. Robert Campbell

The adult human body has 206 bones, 650 muscles and 360 joints. Add ligaments, tendons, and nerves, and there is a lot going on that allows us to work, move, and be active. When one of these isn't working correctly or

properly things can lead to pain, stiffness, spasms, cramps, inflammation, and more. Join Dr. Robert Campbell, orthopedic surgeon, Baystate Orthopedic Surgery, for a discussion about bones, muscles and joints, aka the musculoskeletal system, the causes of symptoms, tests used to diagnosis as well as the many treatments. There will be plenty of time for questions and answers. Refreshments served. To register: <https://bonesmusclesjoints.eventbrite.com> or call 413-794-5200. FREE!

## That “Gut” Feeling

Tuesday, November 5, 12-1:30 pm  
Baystate Mary Lane Outpatient Center  
85 South St, Ware, MA



Join Dr. Harbir Sawhney, gastroenterologist, Baystate Gastroenterology, for a discussion about latest news about digestive issues that may impact your health, such as gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) or heartburn and other digestive problems as well as treatment options. To register:

<https://thatgutfeeling.eventbrite.com> or call 413-794-5200.  
Light Lunch will be served. FREE!

## Protecting Your Assets

Monday, November 18, 5:30-7 pm  
Baystate Noble Hospital  
115 West Silver St, Westfield  
To register: <https://protectingyourassetsbnh.eventbrite.com> or call 413-794-5200.

Monday, December 2, 5:30-7 pm  
Baystate Health Education Center  
361 Whitney Ave, Holyoke  
To register: <https://protectingyourassetsdec.eventbrite.com> or call 413-794-5200.

Join Christopher T. Cloutier, MSFS, Retiree Financial Services, and Hyman Darling, Esq., Bacon Wilson P.C., for a discussion about elder planning and how to protect your assets from long-term illness. There will also be an overview of probate avoidance, estate taxes, and gifting. Refreshments served and handouts provided. FREE!

Back by popular demand

## AFib with the Cardiologist

Monday, November 25, 11:30 am-1 pm  
Baystate Wing Hospital, Snow Conference Room  
40 Wright Street, Palmer



Dr. Zachry Zichittella

A fluttering or pounding of the heart could be Atrial Fibrillation or AFib. Join Dr. Zachry Zichittella, cardiologist, Baystate Cardiology, Baystate Wing Hospital, to learn about AFib, its associated risk factors, signs and symptoms, and treatment options, with plenty of time for questions and answers. To register: <https://afibwithcardiologist.eventbrite.com> or call 413-794-5200. Handouts and light lunch will be provided. FREE!

## The Nose Knows

Tuesday, December 3, 11:30 am-1 pm  
Baystate Wing Hospital, 40 Wright St, Palmer



Dr. David Wexler

Your nose could be telling you a few things about allergies, infections, colds and maybe more. Join Dr. David Wexler, otolaryngologist, Baystate Ear Nose & Throat, for a discussion about common nasal and sinus symptoms, how it is evaluated and treated as well as what's interesting in Ear, Nose & Throat diagnosis. There will be plenty of time for questions and answers. Light lunch will be provided. To register: <https://thenoseknowsbwh.eventbrite.com> or call 413-794-5200. FREE!

Visit [baystatehealth.org/seniorclass](http://baystatehealth.org/seniorclass) for links to all events.

# SCREENINGS

## Free Hearing Screenings

**Baystate Rehabilitation Care**  
360 Birnie Avenue, Springfield  
Appointments: 413-794-2222.

**Baystate Rehabilitation Care**  
48 Sanderson Street, Greenfield  
Appointments: 413-773-2227.

## Free Blood Pressure Screenings

**Baystate Mary Lane Outpatient Center**  
Emergency Department  
85 South Street, Ware  
Daily, 7-8 am. No registration required.

**Baystate Wing Hospital**  
Emergency Department  
40 Wright Street, Palmer  
Daily, 7-8 am. No registration required.





## Senior Class Thanksgiving Dinner

Wednesday, November 20, 5-7 pm

Country Club of Greenfield

244 Country Club Road, Greenfield



Ronald Bryant

Visit with **Ronald Bryant**, President of Baystate Franklin Medical Center & Baystate Noble Hospital, and **Deborah Provost**, Chief Administrative Officer & Chief Nursing Officer, Baystate Franklin Medical Center, at this popular annual event. Enjoy Thanksgiving specialties at one of the area's premier establishments with the perfect atmosphere to celebrate Thanksgiving holiday together. New this year, **The One and Only Freddie Marion**, one of the top entertainers in the Pioneer Valley will be performing. He is greatly influenced by artists including Wayne Newton, Kenny Rogers, and Sammy Davis Jr. You will be thankful you joined us!

Seating is limited. To register:

<https://bfmcthanksgivingdinner.eventbrite.com> or call 413-794-5200. Fee: \$20/member. \$40/non-member.

Thursday, November 21, 5-7 pm

The Salem Cross Inn, Route 9

260 West Main Street, West Brookfield



Join us for Thanksgiving specialties at The Salem Cross Inn featuring the perfect atmosphere to celebrate Thanksgiving season together. New this year, **The One and Only Freddie Marion**, top entertainer in the Pioneer Valley will be performing. He says his style was influenced by artists including Wayne Newton, Kenny Rogers, and Sammy Davis Jr. You will be thankful you joined us!

Seating is limited. To register:

<https://thanksgivingdinnersalemcross.eventbrite.com> or call 413-794-5200. Fee: \$20/member. \$40/non-member.



## Exploring Your Medicare Options

For 2020 coverage, open enrollment will run from October 15, 2019 to December 7, 2019. During the annual enrollment period (AEP) you can make changes to various aspects of your coverage.

Original Medicare only provides basic coverage, there will be gaps in coverage and you will be responsible for a portion of your health care costs. This is why many people enroll in additional coverage that help pay for costs and benefits not covered by Original Medicare.

### Coverage options to consider:

**Medicare Advantage** – provided by private health plans approved by Medicare. These plans combine Part A and Part B, and usually Part D (prescription drug coverage). Medicare Advantage plans may provide coverage and benefits beyond those covered by Original Medicare, such as an annual physical, dental and fitness allowances, and health and safety items. This type of plan is also known as Part C.

**Medicare Supplement (Medigap)** – provided by private health insurance companies. These plans help to cover Part A and Part B cost-sharing amounts, such as deductibles and coinsurance, for Original Medicare covered services. Separate prescription drug coverage must be purchased.

Visit [HealthNewEngland.org/medicare](http://HealthNewEngland.org/medicare) for upcoming information sessions or call 413-787-0010, Toll Free: (877) 443-3314, TTY: 711

## Baystate Health Named an "Age Friendly" Health System

The Institute for Healthcare Improvement has designated Baystate Health an age-friendly health system and honored caregivers for their commitment to policies and services for senior citizens. The City of Springfield was also recognized for being a dementia-friendly community at an awards ceremony in June presented jointly by the Massachusetts Chapter of the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), The Dementia Friendly Massachusetts Initiative, the Massachusetts Council on Aging as well as the Institute for Healthcare Improvement.



Dr. Maura Brennan

Dr. Maura Brennan, chief of Baystate Medical Center's Division of Geriatric and Palliative Care says she is thrilled with the designation. "We've been working toward this for years. There is still a great deal to be done, but to be in the vanguard of this movement is just unbelievable."

# MY FIRST COLONOSCOPY IS BEHIND ME

– Keith O'Connor

Fear kept me from getting a colonoscopy all these years, that is, until my first colonoscopy this past January.

I should have had the screening 15 years ago when I turned 50. And, if you take into account the new American Cancer Society guidelines to begin colonoscopy screening at age 45, I was 20 years late.

Why didn't I? It was fear of the unknown, the fact that they might find something...a cancer in my colon. What led to the colonoscopy finally? I was having a hemorrhoid problem and one day, I found myself hoping I would run into Kelly Tyler, MD, chief of Colorectal Surgery, whom I knew well. And, as I rounded a corner, there she was.

Tyler is a great surgeon and a compassionate human being. I had no problem sharing my concerns that some may consider embarrassing. She told me if the hemorrhoids didn't get better, to make an appointment and when they started to bother me again, I did. I remember sitting in her waiting room, worrying. Tyler convinced me to do a colonoscopy.

## THE RATIONALE

Most colon cancers develop from polyps – precancerous growths in the colon and rectum. Risk factors include: age – older than 50 (I'm 65), family history of colorectal can-

cer or polyps, a personal history of intestinal polyps or inflammatory bowel disease, a diet high in red and processed meats (that's me), obesity (that's me, too, although I just lost 12 pounds), heavy alcohol use, smoking, type 2 diabetes (me again), and physical inactivity (that's me).

The day of my procedure I had a 1:45 p.m. appointment. I must have looked very scared and nervous waiting because Liz, my wife, said to me, "You look like a ghost." The screening takes about a half hour. Before I knew it, I found myself waking up with the colonoscopy finished. My first words were, "Am I OK?" "Yes," I heard someone say.

Tyler found diverticulosis, often found during a colonoscopy and common as people age. Doctors believe the main cause is a low-fiber diet. Diverticula are small pouches that bulge outward through the colon, or large intestine. Most people with diverticulosis don't have symptoms though it can cause mild cramps, bloating or constipation.

After years of worrying I might have colon cancer, I have a new lease on life. So, get a colonoscopy when the time comes. Don't wait. Colorectal cancer has become the second leading cause of cancer deaths. The earlier a cancer is detected, the better chance it will be cured.

**Join Dr. Kutayli for a discussion about colorectal cancer on Oct. 23. See page 3.**

## Rays of Hope Imagine it – a generation without breast cancer.

It is the stuff dreams are made of, however, we believe it will be reality one day in the future. Since 1994, over \$14.8 million has been raised to support research at the Rays of Hope Center for Breast Cancer Research in Springfield as well as breast cancer programs and complementary therapies on a local level. All money raised says here!

### JOIN US!

Walk, Run, Form a Team, Sponsor, Donate – whatever you do we hope you will join us for the 2019 Rays of Hope - Walk & Run Toward the Cure of Breast Cancer.

**Sunday, October 27, 2019**

**Springfield, MA – Forest Park Area**

**Run Starts at 8:30 AM • Walk Starts at 10:30 AM**

**Learn More:** BaystateHealth.org/Raysofhope | 413-794-8001



## ONE SENTENCE MAKES A LASTING IMPACT

For more than 140 years, friends like you have ensured the vitality of Baystate Health for your loved ones, neighbors, friends, and our community. By including a gift in your will to Baystate Health Foundation, you support lifesaving and life-enhancing care for future generations.

When you include Baystate Health Foundation in your estate plan, you provide hope, you help fight disease, and you transform lives for the better.

Simply ask your attorney to add this suggested wording to your will to make a lasting impact:

I give DOLLAR AMOUNT [or \_\_\_\_% of my estate] to the Baystate Health Foundation, Inc., a charitable organization established by law in Massachusetts (Federal Tax ID# 04-3549011), to be used for \_\_\_\_\_ ("Baystate Health's greatest needs" or name of hospital or program).



### Questions?

Contact Kylie Johnson  
at 413-794-7789 or  
[kylie.johnson@baystatehealth.org](mailto:kylie.johnson@baystatehealth.org).  
We're here to help at no obligation.  
We respect all wishes for anonymity.



## Senior Class Trips

Senior Class is partnering with Collette Vacations to offer you some great vacation plans. Collette Vacations escorted tours have received rave reviews from our members over the years. Prospectuses are available online at [baystatehealth.org/seniorclass](http://baystatehealth.org/seniorclass) or call the Senior Class office at 413-794-5200.

### From the Outback to the Glaciers

**April 20-May 10, 2020, 21 days, 28 meals**

Highlights: Cairns, Great Barrier Reef, Melbourne, Alice Springs, Ayers Rock, Sydney, Sydney Opera House, Christchurch, Franz Josef Glacier Region, Queenstown, Milford Sound, Mt. Cook National Park. Included in Price: Roundtrip Airfare, Air Taxes, Hotel Transfers. Not Included in price: Insurance, \$385.

### National Parks of America

**July 11-22, 2020, 12 days, 17 meals**

Highlights: Scottsdale, Lake Powell, Grand Canyon, Zion, Bryce Canyon, Salt Lake City, Jackson Hole, Grand Teton & Yellowstone National Parks, Old Faithful, Sheridan, Bighorn Mountains, Crazy Horse Memorial, Mount Rushmore. Included in Price: Roundtrip Airfare and Fees/Surcharges, Hotel Transfers. Not included in Price: Cancellation Waiver and Insurance of \$275 per person.

### Shades of Ireland

**August 31-September 9, 2020, 10 days, 13 meals**

Highlights: Dublin, Irish Evening, Choices of Tour, Kilkenny, Waterford, Blarney Castle, Killarney, Ring of Kerry, Farm Visit, Jaunting Car Ride, Limerick, Cliffs of Moher, Galway, Castle Stay. Included in Price: Round Trip Airfare, Air Taxes and Fees/Surcharges, Hotel Transfers. Not Included in Price: Cancellation Waiver and Insurance of \$315 per person.

### Shades of Ireland

**October 2-October 12, 2020, 11 days, 13 meals**

Highlights: Dublin, Irish Evening, Choices of Tour, Kilkenny, Waterford, Blarney Castle, Killarney, Ring of Kerry, Farm Visit, Jaunting Car Ride, Limerick, Cliffs of Moher, Galway, Castle Stay. Included in Price: Round Trip Airfare, Air Taxes and Fees/Surcharges, Hotel Transfers. Not Included in Price: Cancellation Waiver and Insurance of \$315 per person.

# **WATCHMAN: a One-Time Procedure That May Reduce Stroke Risk for a Lifetime in People with AFib**



Dr. Marshal Fox    Dr. Amir Lotfi



A person with AFib is 5 times more likely to suffer a stroke than someone with a regular heartbeat.

Baystate Medical Center is the only hospital in western Massachusetts to now offer patients with atrial fibrillation (AFib) not caused by a heart valve problem, a life-changing alternative to the lifelong use of the blood thinning medication known as warfarin (Coumadin).

The alternative treatment is an implantable device made by Boston Scientific called WATCHMAN, which is proven to reduce the risk of stroke in these patients.

"This is a much welcome advancement for patients who have suffered a bleed – one of the major risk factors to anticoagulant medications – and who had no other option but to discontinue their use of warfarin," said Dr. Marshal Fox, an electrophysiologist in the Heart & Vascular Program at Baystate Medical Center.

Today some 5 million Americans are living with AFib, a number that is expected to double by 2050. Atrial fibrillation, also referred to as AF, is the most common type of heart arrhythmia – when the heart beats too slowly, too fast, or in an irregular way. When someone has AFib, the normal beating in the upper chambers of the heart (the two atria) is irregular, and blood doesn't flow as well as it should from the atria to the lower chambers of the heart (the two ventricles). As a result of these irregular heartbeats, blood can collect in the heart and result in the formation of a clot, which can then travel to a person's brain and cause a stroke.

"Until recently there were no other therapies available to help prevent stroke for patients who could not tolerate taking long term anticoagulation medicine. Clinical trials

had proven the efficacy of WATCHMAN equivalent to blood thinners in preventing stroke. So, we knew we had to offer this procedure for our patients as part of our comprehensive Heart & Vascular Program," said Dr. Fox.

WATCHMAN is appropriate to those AFib patients who:

- Have a history of serious bleeding while taking blood thinners.
- Have a lifestyle, occupation, or condition that puts them at risk for serious bleeding.
- Are taking warfarin and having trouble with their treatment plan, and a different type of blood thinner isn't an option.

WATCHMAN works differently from blood thinners like warfarin and is a permanent implantable device – the only one of its kind approved by the FDA – that closes off a part of the heart where blood clots commonly form and keeps them from escaping.

Clinically studied before its approval by the FDA, WATCHMAN has a proven track record of safety. In a clinical trial, 9 out of 10 people were able to stop taking warfarin just 45 days after getting the implant. At one year, 99 out of 100 people were able to stop taking warfarin.

The WATCHMAN procedure is performed by an electrophysiologist, such as Dr. Fox, along with an

interventional cardiologist, Dr. Amir Lotfi, in Baystate's Electrophysiology (EP) Lab. About the size of a quarter, the WATCHMAN doesn't require open-heart surgery. Instead, doctors make a small cut in the patient's upper leg, then insert a narrow tube through which the WATCHMAN is guided into the left atrial appendage (LAA). The entire procedure – performed under general anesthesia – takes about an hour and requires only an overnight stay in the hospital.

After the procedure, patients take warfarin until their LAA is permanently closed off, usually in about 45 days. During that time, heart tissue grows over the WATCHMAN implant to form a barrier against blood clots.

In addition to reducing the risk of stroke, WATCHMAN has other benefits for AFib patients, including the elimination of regular blood tests and food and drink restrictions that come with warfarin.

"Our introduction of WATCHMAN is another example of how Baystate continues to provide leading-edge technology in order to enhance the lives of patients and their families here in Western Massachusetts," said Dr. Lotfi.

**For more information on Baystate Medical Center's lifesaving cardiac treatment, visit [baystatehealth.org/watchman](http://baystatehealth.org/watchman) or call 413-794-4011.**

# CARDIAC SURGERY AND REHAB MADE ME WHOLE AGAIN



At age 33, Brian had open-heart surgery at Baystate Medical Center to treat a lifelong condition. As a self-described “sports guy” his main focus was to get back on the field, coaching high school baseball and playing on recreational teams with friends.

Brian said that this experience has changed him, but in the spirit of true sportsmanship, he gives most of the credit to his Baystate Health care team.

## THROUGH THE LEAGUES

Brian was born with an aortic valve defect; one of his heart valves was not closing properly. He underwent a valvoplasty at age four to correct the defect. Brian recalls one of the first questions that his mom had for the surgeon being “can he still play sports?” She was reassured that her son would not have restrictions and that he would still be able to play recreationally, but that he would not have a career as a professional athlete due to his heart condition. “For most people that would be good news,” laughed Brian’s wife, Stephanie, “but that was their hope for him. We joke that their early retirement plans went out the window that day.”

Brian happily settled into an active childhood, went on to graduate from Westfield State University, and landed a job as a teacher at the Franklin County Technical School, where he coached the baseball team. He spent his free time playing on recreational baseball and softball teams, and was already trying to determine if his one-year-old twin boys would be batting lefty or righty.

Another hobby of Brian’s was obstacle course racing. It was during one of these events that Stephanie, a nurse at Baystate Franklin Medical Center, noticed that something wasn’t right.

After his valvoplasty 29 years prior, he was told that he would need to have the valve replaced at some point in his thirties. Despite a normal, healthy life, Brian learned at his annual echocardiogram, an ultrasound of his heart, that his heart would need repair once again. The dilation of the ventricles in his heart – combined with the discomfort his wife noted during their recent race – meant that it was time to plan for surgery. “My cardiologist, Dr. Nitin Bhatnagar, referred me to Baystate Cardiac Surgery, which I quickly learned was the best choice for cardiac surgery.”

## BATTER UP

“I knew the day would come, but man, I thought I had more time,” said Brian. “It was a true balancing act; I didn’t want the surgery before I needed it, but if they waited, I would have gone into heart failure and it would have been too late.”

Brian enjoyed Christmas at home with his family, followed a few days later by open-heart surgery at Baystate Medical Center. Stephanie, an experienced emergency department nurse, recalls the feeling of being a loved one rather than a caregiver. “I was on the other side of the fence,” she said, “and the nurses were awesome. His mom and I were in the waiting room, and his assigned nurse kept coming to see us, giving us updates. She was evaluating him, and knew everything about him. When she wasn’t talking to us, she was in his room, by his side. I can’t describe how comforting that was, knowing that her main priority was Brian.”

“No one minimized the importance of the surgery and my condition,” said Brian. “All of the doctors, the nurses, they were all on the same page about the importance of the situation but never made me feel overwhelmed. Everyone was very reassuring and at the same time, self-assured.”

Brian’s valve replacement went as planned, despite scar tissue from his surgery as a child.

In less than a week, Brian was heading home to recover; but in many ways his journey had just begun.

## ON THE BENCH

“They fixed the physical ailment, but I was left with unrest in my mental well-being. The trauma and mental health piece has been the biggest challenge for me,” said Brian. “These feelings started day one, the day I was told it was time for surgery. How do I keep myself mentally strong, and how to I remain confident with who I am, knowing that my life will be changing? Everyone kept telling me that I was healthy and it would be okay...but if I am so healthy, why I am the one who has to test my blood, go to these appointments, and deal with this?”

*(Continued on page 11.)*

# Can Learning Make You Healthy, as Well?

## THINK IT'S TOO LATE TO LEARN SOMETHING NEW? THINK AGAIN!

There's no need to stop learning once you've gotten your diploma. Learning is a natural life-long process. And, it doesn't have to happen in a stuffy classroom or ivy-covered halls.

Chances are that much of the knowledge and skills you use every day—driving a car, changing a diaper, paying bills—were learned outside of formal schooling.

Have you always wanted to grow your own vegetables, learn Tai Chi, or invest in the stock market? Here's why you may not want to put it off any longer: learning can be good for your health.

## WHAT HAPPENS TO YOUR BRAIN WHEN YOU LEARN?

Adult brains have about 86 billion nerve cells, called neurons. Each neuron is connected to thousands of others—7,500 on average—forming a network of pathways. Neurons send signals along these pathways to communicate between different areas of the brain, making it possible for us to think, feel, and act.

Scientists used to think that, after childhood, our brains stopped growing. Not so!

Neuroplasticity, or brain plasticity, is the process by which the adult brain adapts in response to new experiences.

When we gain new knowledge or practice a new skill, our neurons form new patterns of pathways. We may even create new neurons. With practice, the new pathways get stronger,

## DOES IT MATTER WHAT YOU LEARN?

It doesn't so much matter what we learn, it's the act of learning that has such a powerful impact.

Enhancing our mental abilities, researchers say, requires novelty, focused attention, and challenge. Learning either quilting or digital photography, for example, **produced significant improvements in cognitive ability in a study of older adults** compared to those who just reminisced, played games, or did easy puzzles.

So whatever you choose to learn should be a challenge—but a reachable one—that matches your interests, strengths, and needs.

## 3 WAYS LEARNING CAN HELP IMPROVE YOUR HEALTH

### 1. Keeps Your Brain Sharp

Regularly engaging in mentally stimulating activities can improve cognitive abilities, such as memory and reasoning skills.

In one study of U.S. adults cognitive training significantly improved mental skills regardless of age, gender, mental status, health status or education. Ten years later, all of the participants reported greater ease with their daily activities—and had retained most of their cognitive gains.

Intellectually challenging work or hobbies can even help reduce the risk for some diseases that affect the brain, and may slow their progression.

Scientists think that cognitive activities increase the brain's complexity and protect it by creating a "cognitive reserve." This helps the brain compensate for health conditions that affect it.

### 2. Manages Your Stress Levels

Mental stimulation can help manage physical and emotional symptoms of stress. Even reading for several minutes reduced heart rate, stress hormones, and feelings of anxiety, a study of executives showed.

Learning enhances self-esteem, a sense of purpose and hope, and feelings of competency, according to a multinational study of adults participating in a wide range of personal and professional educational activities. They reported improved well-being and ability to cope with stress—including chronic illness and disability.

On a practical level, learning new job skills—upskilling—can help us cope with the challenge of rapid changes in technology and work culture.

In addition, learning broadens our scope of knowledge and experience and gives us a different perspective on our problems, possibly leading to new solutions.

### 3. Helps You Take Better Care of Your Body

Have you always wanted to grow your own vegetables, learn Tai Chi, or invest in the stock market? Don't put it off. Learning can be good for your health. #LifelongLearning

People with higher levels of formal education tend to be healthier and live longer. Part of this advantage comes from lifelong learning—continuing to learn after completing schooling. Common benefits of lifelong learning reported by people of all ages, occupations, and levels of education, include self-understanding and independent thought. Critical thinking skills increase our ability to understand and evaluate health messages.

This health literacy can prompt us to adopt healthier behaviors, such as being physically active, maintaining a healthy weight, quitting smoking, and wearing seat belts.

It can also boost our confidence so that we are active participants in our health care decisions, including dealing more effectively with illnesses in ourselves and our loved ones.

# as Wise?

## WANT TO GET STARTED?

Try learning something new—for the health of it.

Most adults in the U.S. participate in some kind of learning activity for either personal or professional growth according to the Pew Research Center.

So don't just wave the kids off to school, join them.

### At Baystate Health

- Visit [BaystateHealth.org](http://BaystateHealth.org) and search for Mini-Medical School

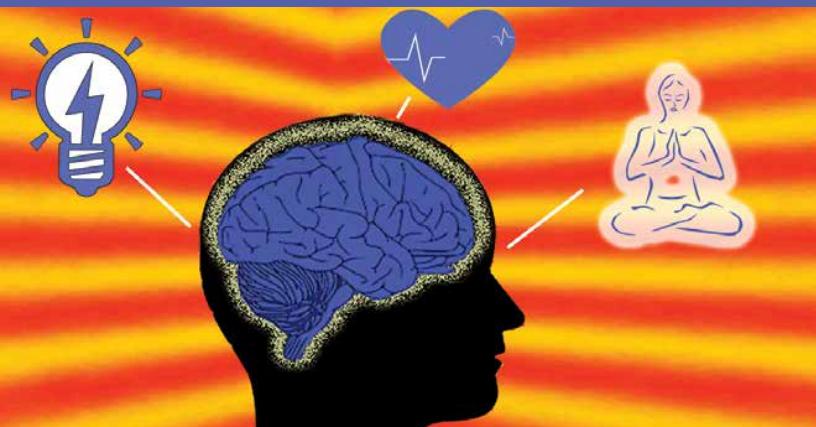
Mini Medical School is taught by physicians and other clinical experts who explain the science of medicine in layman's terms so participants can make more informed decisions about their healthcare.

- Health and Wellness Classes

Baystate offers a variety of classes and events year-round, including parenting education, support groups, and community wellness events.

### In Your Community

- Many organizations offer opportunities to learn: CPR, canning veggies, pickle ball, guest lectures, computer skills, and more.
- Local artisans often give lessons—maybe you'd like to try knitting, glassblowing, pottery, or ukulele?
- Check out museums, libraries, community centers, city parks, churches, and recreation departments.
- Most universities and community colleges offer classes especially for community members. Some may allow you to audit courses or take them for credit.



### Did You Know?

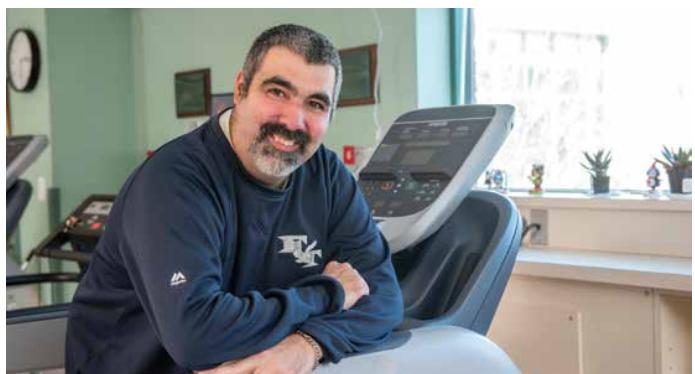
**Brains Can Grow at Any Age** Evidence shows that regardless of age, brains can shrink when they lack mental stimulation—and can grow in an environment of discovery, learning, and challenge.

(Continued from page 9.)

Brian began cardiac rehab at Baystate Franklin Medical Center, not far from his home in Northfield. He walked in the door on the first day for his intake appointment and remembers being fearful, and physically guarding his chest.

"I went from being an athlete, not a top-level athlete but an active guy, to being completely humbled. My confidence was shot, my engine was defective. Although I was the youngest person in the room, everyone was going through the same stuff. At cardiac rehab, I was not alone."

Brian worked closely with his nurses, Cheryl May and Patti Bliznak, and slowly started the process of healing, mentally and physically. In addition to exercise, they practiced meditation and visualization in an effort to deal with his stress and trauma. He started to adopt lifestyle changes and adjust to taking blood thinners daily – a lifelong necessity.



"I was so impressed that the care did not stop once I was physically healed," said Brian. "I had a team from the start, and I credit cardiac rehab with helping me to feel human again. If I could give one piece of advice to anyone who has a similar situation, it's this – go to cardiac rehab and get yourself a support system. It's a game changer."

### HEY, COACH

Brian began to acclimate to normal life, resumed his coaching job in the spring, and was back on the field playing recreationally by summertime. Today he remains dedicated to improving his mental health, most recently participating in the SMART Program for stress management at Baystate Franklin Medical Center.

Stephanie said that Brian has always been a laid-back guy, but he has taken this experience to heart – literally.

"It changes you," Brian explained. "I am a different person now. I am more introspective and I think it's a good thing. I am not as reactionary. When my students are having problems, I remind them that in the grand scheme of life, it's not a big deal. Your heart is beating, and you are here; let's appreciate what we have."

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If you're a patient of Baystate Primary Care,  
we're excited to offer you a new service for your  
urgent care needs - **Baystate Health Connect**.



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 App Store

Call your primary care office  
before downloading the  
app to request a video visit  
for your urgent care needs.

Next time you need urgent care, stay in the comfort of your own home and let Baystate Health Connect bring one of our Baystate Primary Care providers to you with a real-time, telehealth video visit. Baystate Health Connect visits with a primary care provider are convenient, private and secure.

#### **Use Baystate Health Connect for These Conditions and More**

- Cough            • Fever            • Headache
- Flu              • Sinusitis        • Pink eye
- Sore throat     • Bronchitis      • Painful urination

#### **When to Use Baystate Health Connect**

- You feel sick and cannot leave home.
- Your busy schedule prevents you from taking time to travel for an in-office visit.
- Your primary care provider is not available for an in-office appointment but you would like to seek urgent care from an alternate Baystate Primary Care provider who has availability.
- You're on vacation or far from the office (service area limited to Massachusetts).

#### **How to Use Baystate Health Connect—4 Easy Steps**

1. Call your *primary care office first* before downloading the app to request a video visit for your urgent care needs.
2. **Baystate Health Connect** will schedule your appointment and email you confirmation of the date and time, as well as, a link for your video visit.
3. Once your video visit is scheduled, download the free **Baystate Health Connect** app on your mobile device or go to [BaystateHealthConnect.org](http://BaystateHealthConnect.org) to register and sign in.
4. When your visit begins, you'll see both your image and the provider's on your screen and she or he will see the same thing. It's similar to FaceTime, Google Duo and Skype.