



*Published for members of the Baystate Health Every Woman program*



## IN THIS ISSUE

**2** Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month

**6** 9 New Year Health Tips

**8** Are Bladder Control Problems Affecting Your Quality of Life?

**10** How Does Stress Affect Your Body

# Virtual Events

## You Are Enough: Exploring Imposter Phenomenon

Wednesday, March 9, 6-7 pm  
(presenter logs on at 5:30 pm)



Kathryn Jobbins, MD

Have you ever felt like an Imposter? That you were “faking it until you make it” or that you just happened to be lucky to be hired for your job? Have you ever seen a colleague or mentee struggle with feelings of being inadequate? If you answered Yes to any of these questions then come join Dr. Kathryn Jobbins, Associate Program Director Internal Medicine Residency, Assistant Professor, UMass Chan School of Medicine- Baystate, Department of Internal Medicine, for a session to learn more about Imposter Phenomenon/Syndrome. What is it, how to tackle it in yourself and how do you help coach others when they are experiencing it.

### Objectives

1. Define what imposter syndrome/phenomenon is and how it presents in ourselves and others.
2. Recognize and reflect on times when you have experienced imposter syndrome.
3. Design and formulate a plan for coaching yourself or someone else when you next experience imposter syndrome/phenomenon

## Menopause & Hormone Therapy

Monday, March 14, 6-7 pm



Rebekah Perks, NP

Menopause is a natural phase for women but the decline in reproductive hormones can have major effects on a woman's life. Join Rebekah Perks, WHNP, ANP, Baystate ObGyn Group, certified Menopause Practitioner, North American Menopause Society, for a discussion about menopause and the many symptoms of menopause.

There will be a focus on symptomatic relief including hormone replacement therapy (HRT) and other treatments for menopause management. There will be time for questions and answers.

## Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month It Can Happen To Anybody: Colorectal Cancer

Tuesday, March 22, 6-7 pm

During COVID-19 a lot of us put off the colonoscopies but early detection is key to being cancer free. Join colorectal surgeons, Dr. Holly Sheldon, and Dr. Ziad Kutayli, Baystate General Surgery, for a discussion about colon and rectum cancers, how to nip the cancers early with the latest tests, screenings and research. There will be time for questions and answers.



Holly Sheldon, MD



Ziad Kutayli, MD

## Being Diagnosed with Colon Cancer, Now What?

Thursday, March 24, 6-7 pm



Daniel Fish, MD

The test came back positive for colon cancer. But what does that mean for treatments and how is the cancer diagnosed? Join Dr. Daniel Fish, colorectal surgeon, Baystate General Surgery, for a discussion about colon and rectal cancer, the different interventions needed and the latest treatment options. There will be time for questions and answers.



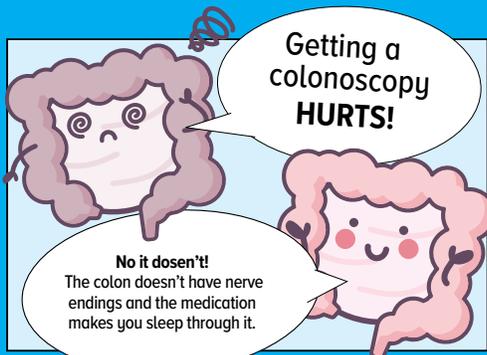
**To register** for any of the virtual events visit [BaystateHealth.org/EveryWoman](https://BaystateHealth.org/EveryWoman) and scroll to the bottom of the page or visit [BaystateHealth.org/Events](https://BaystateHealth.org/Events). Questions? Email [Sue.Fontaine@BaystateHealth.org](mailto:Sue.Fontaine@BaystateHealth.org) or call 413-794-5200.

**Be Inspired. Be Healthier.** Not a member of Baystate Health Every Woman? Join the free program focused on the total well-being of a woman – body, mind, and spirit. Visit [BaystateHealth.org/Every Woman](https://BaystateHealth.org/EveryWoman)

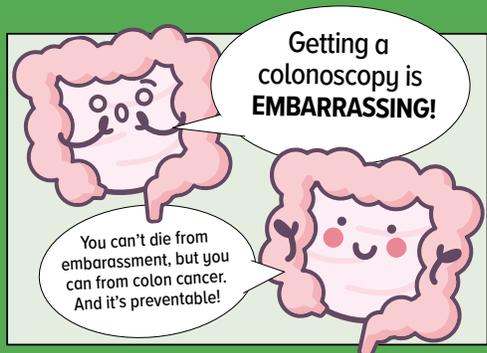
# 4 BAD EXCUSES Not to Get Your Colonoscopy

Talk to your **primary care provider** to make an appointment

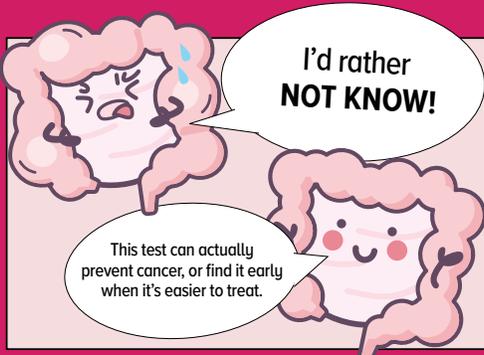
1



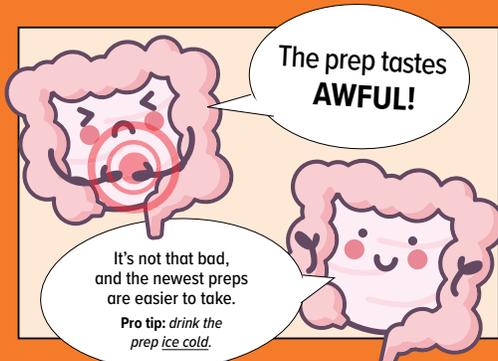
2



3



4



## This is Neurosurgery

Wednesday, March 30, 6-7 pm



Kamal Kalia, MD

Have you heard the expression “It’s not brain surgery”? But what is it like when it is. Exploring the field of neurosurgery is compelling and complex. Join Dr. Kamal Kalia, neurosurgeon, Baystate Neurosurgery, for a discussion about what neurosurgeons do, the common issues treated and a fascinating show and tell experience in the field of neurosurgery.

## The Rise of the Tick

Tuesday, April 26, 6-7 pm



Brian Sutton, MD

It’s springtime, and after a long winter we are all ready to get outside and enjoy the great weather. Unfortunately, so are ticks. Join Dr. Brian Sutton, Medical Director, Baystate Health Urgent Care, for a discussion about the many varieties of ticks, some of the myths regarding ticks, tick bites, and information about removing ticks. Included in the discussion will be the symptoms, diagnosis, and treatment of Lyme disease, the most common tick-associated illness. There will be time for questions and answers.

## Missed a Virtual Event?



Watch recorded events anytime at [BaystateHealth.org/Every Woman](https://www.baystatehealth.org/EveryWoman).

## Are you receiving the Baystate Health Every Woman monthly email

with links to articles and virtual events, as well as recorded virtual events?

Visit [BaystateHealth.org/EveryWoman](https://www.baystatehealth.org/EveryWoman) to sign up for email news.



**Baystate Health**

ADVANCING CARE.  
ENHANCING LIVES.

Baystate Health is a leading not-for-profit health system with the charitable mission of improving the health of the people in our communities every day, with quality and compassion.

# HEART & VASCULAR

## 2022 Virtual Lecture Series

Join us for all or part of the free virtual series to learn about the latest advances in heart and vascular care. There will be time for questions and answers.



Adam Stern, MD



Rabbi Ken Hahn

**SUNDAY | FEBRUARY 6 | 12 - 1 PM**

**Adam Stern, MD** – Cardiologist

**Rabbi Ken Hahn** – Baystate Spiritual Services

**[Heart and Soul of Heart Disease](#)**

What can be done to reduce the risk of heart disease? Join Dr. Adam Stern, cardiologist, Baystate Cardiology, for a discussion about the latest research for prevention including diet, exercise, stress reduction, blood pressure and more. The conversation continues with Rabbi Ken Hahn, Baystate Spiritual Services, about the power of spirituality in healing, and mindfulness to de-stress the heart.



Daniel Engelman, MD



Cheryl Crisafi,  
MSN, RN

**SUNDAY | FEBRUARY 13 | 12 - 1 PM**

**Daniel Engelman, MD** – Cardiac Surgeon

**Cheryl Crisafi, MSN, RN** – Nurse Coordinator

**[Today's Open Heart Surgery](#)**

Join Dr. Daniel Engelman, cardiac surgeon, Baystate Cardiac Surgery, Professor of Surgery, UMass Chan Medical School-Baystate, and Cheryl Crisafi, Nurse Coordinator, Baystate Cardiology, for a discussion about the use of technology to improve the patient experience surrounding open heart surgery.



Sabeen Chaudry, MD

**SUNDAY | FEBRUARY 20 | 12 - 1 PM**

**Sabeen Chaudry, MD** – Cardiologist

**[Women and Heart Disease](#)**

There is an assumption that heart disease primarily impacts men but in fact is the number one killer of women. Heart disease doesn't affect all women alike. Women face unique risks, warning signs and symptoms. Join Dr. Sabeen Chaudry, cardiologist, Baystate Heart & Vascular Program, for a discussion about the misconceptions about heart disease and heart attack symptoms in women, the impact of stress, and the many ways to stay heart healthy.

To register, visit

[BaystateHealth.org/Heart](https://www.baystatehealth.org/Heart)



Baystate  Health

ADVANCING CARE.  
ENHANCING LIVES.

BaystateHealth.org

CS13497



# EMERGENCY, URGENT CARE, OR PRIMARY CARE – WHERE TO GO FOR HELP



## It’s a common question: “Should I go to the emergency room or urgent care? Or should I see my primary care doctor?”

While emergency rooms are open 24-7 to care for the sick and injured, urgent care centers are a popular alternative for a fast and economical alternative to non-life threatening care of illnesses and injuries.

Urgent care can come at a lower co-pays for patients – often a difference as great as \$50 compared to \$200 depending on your insurance provider – and savings for the medical system as a whole. And urgent care can be faster in the sense that an emergency room sees the sickest patients first, while at an urgent care center it is usually first-come, first served. Below, we break down how to decide where to go: primary care, urgent care, or emergency?

### WHERE TO GO FOR CARE

As the region’s largest healthcare system, Baystate Health has locations and services that are designed to get you the right care at the right time. With five hospitals throughout western Massachusetts and the only Level 1 trauma center in the region, Baystate Health is here to help.

#### ➤ When should you go to primary care?

As part of our ongoing efforts to reduce the spread of COVID-19, Baystate Health is increasing its use of telehealth video visits. These visits allow you to stay in the safety and comfort of your home, while providing a real-time connection (similar to FaceTime or Skype) with your healthcare provider on a mobile device, phone or computer.

Your primary care doctor knows you, your health history and may be the perfect person to may be the perfect resource tom make sure you get consistent, quality care. If you are not feeling well, call your doctor's office for guidance.

- Cough, cold, flu
- Ear infections and sore throat
- Skin problems
- Minor injuries like sprains, bumps and bruises
- Urinary tract infections

Your primary care doctor can also help you coordinate care for chronic conditions like:

- Allergies and asthma
- Arthritis
- COPD
- Heart disease
- High blood pressure
- Diabetes and obesity
- Substance abuse

#### ➤ When should you go to the emergency room?

If the situation requires immediate medical treatment, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room for:

- Severe bleeding
- Chest pains
- No pulse
- Inability to breathe
- Severe eye injuries
- Head, spinal cord or back injuries
- Broken bones
- Severe stomach pain
- Sudden change in mental state, sudden severe headache, other stroke symptoms.

#### ➤ When should you go to urgent care?

Urgent care centers are for conditions or injury that require professional care, but will not get worse if not immediately treated.

Urgent care centers should be used only when your primary care physician is not available – such as after hours, on weekends, and during holidays. At Baystate Health, you can be seen at urgent care either in person or through telehealth visits.

Illness or injuries appropriate for urgent care include:

- Colds, coughs, flu, fever, sore throat
- Asthma and upper respiratory problems
- Minor cuts or burns
- Rash, skin and eye infections
- Earaches
- Migraine headaches
- Urinary tract infections (pain or burning when urinating)
- Strains and sprains
- Stomach pain, nausea, diarrhea, vomiting
- Animal bites (if not severe)



Find the nearest urgent care location visit [BaystateHealth.org/locations](https://www.baystatehealth.org/locations)

Use cellphone camera, and click the pop-up

# NEW YEAR HEALTH TIPS

Now that 2021 has come to an end, there are many ways to make 2022 healthier for you and your family.

Doctors at Baystate Health suggest setting realistic goals and prioritizing what is most important to you, taking small steps, and remembering not to beat yourself up if you encounter a setback in your health goals for 2022.

Some healthy goals to consider as you continue on your journey are:

## DON'T ALLOW SLEEP PROBLEMS TO AFFECT YOUR HEALTH



The COVID-19 pandemic has led to more sleep problems at a time when sleep is especially important for health and well-being. Good quality sleep

is important for preventing infections and keeping your immune system working well. Studies have shown that sleep deprived people don't mount the same immune response after vaccinations as good sleepers do, so it is important to make sure you get a good night's sleep prior to getting a flu or COVID vaccine.

A recent study published in the Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine by Baystate Health's Dr. Eva Mok showed increased rates of flu in patients with untreated sleep apnea. So, getting good quality sleep is just as important as getting enough sleep. If you are having difficulty sleeping or signs of poor-quality sleep with loud snoring, difficulty staying asleep, urinating frequently at night or daytime sleepiness or tiredness, you may benefit from a sleep medicine evaluation.

- **Dr. Karin Johnson**, medical director, Baystate Health Regional Sleep Program and Baystate Medical Center Sleep Laboratory

## MAKE A PLAN FOR GOOD OVERALL HEALTH



While weight loss, health screenings, and stress reduction are among some of the best ways to achieve and maintain better health, creating

a plan that is manageable is the key to success. Look at the new year as a time to set small, attainable goals that you can maintain throughout the year, that will also lead to long term success and better health.

Now is a great time to make an appointment for an annual exam and include your physician in your health goals for the year. For those who don't have a primary care provider, the best time to choose a doctor is before you need one. Over time, your healthcare needs may change or you may face a new health challenge. The relationship you have with your healthcare provider, who knows you and your medical history, can lead to a better overall outcome that will protect your health. Also, telemedicine provides a fast and convenient way for you to connect with your doctor for urgent needs such as fever, cough, and skin rash, as well as management of chronic conditions such as diabetes and high blood pressure.

Whether you want to lose weight, quit smoking, or reduce stress, your healthcare provider can suggest additional resources such as support groups, reading material, or if appropriate, medications or aids that can help. Getting advice from your primary care provider and support from friends and family is a great way to keep your New Year's health resolutions going all year long.

- **Dr. Linda Schoonover**, Baystate Primary Care at Baystate Wing Hospital

## GET VACCINATED



Flu vaccine was updated this year to match the anticipated circulating strains. Both the flu and COVID-19 vaccinations are important means in

preventing serious respiratory infections. Beyond the flu and COVID vaccines, it is important to keep up to date on adult immunizations. The protection you have from some childhood vaccines can wear off over time requiring you to get booster shots.

- **Dr. Armando Paez**, chief, Infectious Disease Division, Baystate Health

## REDUCE YOUR RISKS FOR CANCER



Reducing identified dietary and lifestyle risk factors can help prevent many diseases, including cancer. Don't use tobacco, avoid drinking

too much alcohol, increase moderate aerobic exercise to at least 30 minutes daily most days of the week (moderately vigorous walking will do), and if overweight, shed some pounds.

- **Dr. Wilson Mertens** - vice president and medical director, Cancer Service, chief, Division of Hematology Oncology, Baystate Regional Cancer Program, Baystate Health

## REDUCE YOUR RISK FOR DIABETES



Over 34 million Americans have diabetes and 88 million American adults – approximately 1 in 3 – have prediabetes.

Prediabetes puts you at high risk of developing type 2 diabetes and also increases your risk of developing cardiovascular disease. By modifying your risk factors and adopting a healthy lifestyle – from eating more nutritious foods and limiting your portions to exercising to maintain an appropriate weight – you can help delay or prevent some of the serious complications of diabetes such as heart disease, stroke, blindness, kidney damage and limb amputations.

Aside from reducing your risks for diabetes, if you want to maintain good health in 2021 and beyond, consider:

- If you are overweight, eating 20% less can lead to slow sustained weight loss over time
- Fit in exercise, even 10 minutes at a time, which can lead to significant physical and mental health benefits
- Address your mental health which can be the primary barrier to a healthier you.
- Also, quit smoking, this is the best decision you can make for your health.

- **Dr. Chelsea Gordner**, director, Baystate Inpatient Diabetes Service, Departments of Adult and Pediatric Diabetes at Baystate Medical Center and Baystate Children's Hospital

## FOCUS ON MENTAL HEALTH



There are many ways to improve your mental health. Consider getting outdoors for walks in nature, ideally with others (socially distanced and masked). Find opportunities to be kind. Even though many of us are hurting in various ways nowadays, it's not unlikely that there are others who are hurting even more.

It's important to remember that we all have things to give: attention, compassion, listening, forgiveness, it doesn't have to be material. Giving feels good year-round, much better than receiving.

Also, be kind to yourself: treat your body well by eating healthy foods and not overwhelming it with unhealthy substances such as too much alcohol, sugar, and more; don't be mean and punitive towards yourself, if you notice mistakes you've made or things you don't like about yourself—acknowledge them and make a commitment to change, make a plan to change, and get started.

- **Dr. Barry Sarvet**, chair, Department of Psychiatry, Baystate Health

## DON'T SKIP ANNUAL PREVENTIVE EXAMS

Annual preventive exams are vital in detecting conditions like breast cancer or cervical dysplasia at an early, manageable, and treatable stage. The well visit is a perfect time to address bothersome symptoms, set health goals and learn updates on disease prevention. Checking in annually with an established provider supports a trusted relationship which facilitates seamless care if a medical problem arises.

## MAINTAIN A HEALTHY HEART



Maintaining a healthy heart begins when we are young by following a healthy diet and maintaining a proper weight, keeping active

with regular exercise, quitting smoking, and keeping your cholesterol and blood pressure in check.

If you are having symptoms such as chest pain, shortness of breath, dizziness, palpitations or swollen legs please contact your physicians to be checked out as these may be signs of serious heart conditions.

During these unprecedented times, try to find moments of "Zen," be it listening to your favorite music, going for walks, playing with your pets, reading a nice book or drawing. Everybody has to find his or her way of reducing their anxiety and life stressors. Also, don't forget to take your medications regularly.

- **Dr. Mehdi Pajouh**, Baystate Cardiology in Westfield

## KNOW WHERE TO GO WHEN EMERGENCIES HAPPEN



My health tip for the new year is one that will come in handy for a lifetime. I often get the question: "When should I go to the Emergency Department

compared to Urgent Care?"

It's not really a simple answer, but a good rule of thumb when any new, acute, severe, uncontrolled symptoms need to be addressed in the Emergency Department (ED). For example, if you are having the worst headache of your life or experiencing any new acute severe shortness of breath, chest pain or abdominal pain, you should go the Emergency Department. If you are having any bleeding from an injury that is not under control with simple first aid measures, that also belongs in the ED. If you are experiencing any new neurologic symptoms or new seizures/convulsions, that also needs to be attended to in the ED. Anytime there is a loss of consciousness from any cause, that should also be evaluated in the ED.

Urgent Care is an ideal locale for the care of minor injuries and ailments like coughs, colds, earaches, urinary tract infections, insect bites and stings. Urgent Care is also appropriate for acute flare-ups of chronic conditions such as migraine headaches, asthma, gout, and eczema. Most urgent care centers have on-site X-rays and can take care of acute fractures and other minor traumas. It is also important to know during the current pandemic that you should not be afraid to go to the ED with any new acute severe symptoms as all hospitals have protocols in place to protect patients and their families from potential exposure to COVID-19.

Trying to "tough it out at home" can be a fatal mistake if it's an acute heart attack or stroke.

- **Dr. Brian P. Sutton, FACEP**, medical director, Baystate Health Urgent Care

# Are Bladder Control Problems Affecting Your Quality of Life? You're Not Alone

While experiencing an involuntary release of urine may feel far from normal when it's happening, the truth is it's a lot more common than you may think.



Katelyn Kopcsay, MD

According to Dr. Katelyn Kopcsay, urogynecologist, Baystate Urogynecology, "A recent survey of women found that 25-50% of the respondents reported they had a bladder control issue in the past year. That's at least one in four women experiencing a leak, a dribble or full-on accident.

And, yes, while it's happening, that uncontrolled loss of urine – on any scale – can feel very isolating, the numbers prove it's happening to a lot of women all the time.

In other words, if you're having bladder control issues, you're far from alone. But, more importantly, there's a very good chance you're closer to regaining control than you think."



## UNDERSTANDING AND TREATING COMMON TYPES OF BLADDER INCONTINENCE

Frequently experienced by women who have given birth or gone through menopause, urinary incontinence is often very treatable. As Kopcsay notes, the first step in treating the issue is getting an accurate diagnosis. "There actually are several different types of incontinence; the most common being stress incontinence and urge incontinence, often called overactive bladder.

Each type has different causes, characteristics, and triggers for leaking urine. Diagnosing the type of incontinence is an important first step in choosing a treatment option." Here's a closer look at each:

### STRESS INCONTINENCE

The loss of small amounts of urine when a person coughs, laughs, exercises, or is startled is called stress urinary incontinence (SUI). It results from the weakening of the muscles in the pelvic floor that occurs over time. The biggest risk factor for SUI is childbirth, particularly vaginal delivery. Obesity, which can increase pressure on the pelvic floor, is also known to contribute to SUI.

### How to Stop Stress Incontinence

"SUI is often successfully treated with simple lifestyle changes," says Kopcsay. "For individuals with obesity, losing 8% of body weight can lead to a 50% reduction of SUI symptoms."

Regardless of weight, Kopcsay adds that pelvic floor exercises can reduce symptoms. "Actively engaging the specific muscles of the pelvic floor with Kegel exercises – squeezing your muscles as if you're trying to stop urine flow or not pass gas – can give you back some of the control lost to aging."

Kopcsay advises patients to perform exercises 30-50 times a day. "It may sound like a lot but given you can do them seated or standing and you can see a 60% reduction in leakage, it's really not that much."

She also recommends patients look to keep fluid intake under 64 ounces per day and practice 'timed voiding' – going to the bathroom every two hours.

## Surgical Treatment

If these approaches don't offer the desired degree of relief, there are surgical options that can be considered, the most common being the midurethral sling.

Kopcsay explains, "The procedure is very low-risk and basically involves implanting a synthetic mesh under the urethra to recreate the lost support. It's a same-day surgery that offers immediate results and is over 90% successful."

## URGE INCONTINENCE

While it's most often referred to as overactive bladder (OAB), urge incontinence is probably best described as "I gotta' go RIGHT NOW" syndrome.

### Why Do I Have a Constant Urge to Pee?

Characterized by a sudden and compelling urge to pee, OAB often leads to urine leakage. The unexpected urgency often leads women to limit socializing or outings for fear of having an accident.

### Causes and Treatments for Urge Incontinence

If you have an overactive bladder, you're probably wondering "Why can't I hold my pee?" – and "What can I do about it?"

Kopcsay explains, "The core of the problem with OAB is that the brain has lost control over the bladder." She continues, "Normally, the muscles of the bladder stay relaxed as it fills with urine. Nerve signals from the bladder tell the brain that the bladder is filling, and the brain decides if it's appropriate to empty the bladder. With OAB, the messaging is out of whack and the bladder contracts without permission from the brain. The urge to urinate can be quite frequent and strong, often disrupting sleep, and leakage is quite common."

Treatment of OAB often begins with a bladder diary. "I advise patients to maintain a bladder diary," says Kopcsay, "noting how often they have an urge, how much they drink, and what they are doing when they have leakage. This gives us a better picture of exactly what's happening."

She also recommends patients engage in active fluid and diet management. "Certain foods, like caffeine, artificial sweeteners, and sodas, can increase bladder sensitivity and contribute to OAB. I also suggest they limit fluid intake 4-6 hours before bed if they are having bothersome urination overnight."

### Strengthening Your Pelvic Floor

Because a weakened pelvic floor is also a contributing factor in OAB, Kegel exercises are also recommended.

Once you've learned to do them correctly, Kegel exercises are simple — and you can do them anywhere, anytime.

## Medical Treatments for Overactive Bladder

If those measures don't bring relief, the next step is often medication. A number of prescription medications in both generic and brand name form have been shown to be effective. However, potential side effects include dry eyes, increased blood pressure, and even cognitive impairment in older adults.

### PTNS

Another treatment option is percutaneous tibial nerve stimulation (PTNS). "This is an effective with no side effects," says Kopcsay.

PTNS works by stimulating nerves and improving the communication between the brain and bladder. An acupuncture needle is inserted near the posterior tibial nerve in the ankle area and connected to a TENS unit. Treatments are performed weekly for 12 weeks in the doctor's office and approximately 30 minutes. After the initial 12 treatments, your provider will evaluate your response to treatment and determine if treatments should continue on an every 4-6 week basis.

### SURGICAL IMPLANT

Kopcsay adds, "In addition to PTNS, another treatment option that aims to improve brain-bladder communication is Interstim. Best described as a pacemaker for the bladder, the treatment involves implanting a small device in the buttock area near a nerve to the bladder. In addition to the fact that this approach is very effective, another nice aspect is that we can actually do a trial run with it outside your body for two weeks before doing the actual implant."

### BOTOX FOR BLADDER

A final option for OAB is Botox for the bladder. "One of the most potent muscle relaxants," says Kopcsay, "Botox is effective at preventing inappropriate bladder contractions, and thereby preventing OAB-related leakage. Treatments typically last for 6-9 months and can be performed in the doctor's office."

### TRUE RELIEF FROM BLADDER ISSUES IS POSSIBLE

Bladder control issues can be frustrating and embarrassing. But regaining control may be possible — and easier than you think. To discuss your issues with a Baystate health professional, visit [BaystateHealth.org/pelvic-health](http://BaystateHealth.org/pelvic-health) or call Baystate Urogynecology at 413-794-7045.



Use cellphone  
camera, and  
click the pop-up

# How Does **STRESS** Affect Your Body?

**Perhaps you're a healthcare provider working in the height of a pandemic, watching the news and witnessing a political riot on our U.S. Capitol, or stuck in bumper-to-bumper traffic and late for work. Your breath becomes quicker; your heart beats faster. Your body feels on edge. As stress develops and builds, you might think you're having a heart attack.**

This experience is called the “flight or fight” response. In a stressful situation, the body releases a surge of chemicals such as cortisol and epinephrine (adrenaline), which is a mechanism to help your body prepare for action. However, the reaction is counterproductive when you're not necessarily in need to act or “fight-back.”



*Grace Lavalley, DNP,  
AGACNP-BC*

## **WHAT IS THIS STRESS RESPONSE DOING TO THE BODY?**

Stress can be acute (sudden) or chronic (long-term) and affect the body directly or indirectly.

Grace Lavalley, a nurse practitioner, Baystate Cardiology-Palmer, in Baystate Health's Heart and Vascular Program, shares how stress impacts your heart health and offers tips for coping.

## **CHRONIC STRESS**

Chronic stress affects the body directly as it triggers inflammation, a known factor that contributes to the development of cardiovascular disease. Inflammation can damage the endothelium (interior lining of blood vessels). Stress may increase blood pressure, heart rate, cause vasoconstriction of blood vessels, (narrowing) and platelet aggregation (clot formation). A rise in heart rate and blood pressure can create an increased demand on the heart.

Stress can also affect the body indirectly, as many often turn to the comfort of high fat, high cholesterol foods, smoking, and alcohol use. These are all modifiable risk factors that can contribute to cardiovascular disease.

## **ACUTE STRESS**

Acute stress, which is usually due to a traumatic incident such as a loss of a child, may lead to a heart attack, even in individuals who may have no history of heart disease. This can cause damage to the heart muscle and ultimately affect the way it pumps. This condition is known as “broken heart syndrome”, “stress-induced cardiomyopathy” or also “takotsubo cardiomyopathy.”



Multiple studies have established that adverse life events are associated with heart attacks. In addition, disasters have been associated with an increase in cardiovascular events. For example, within 60 days after 9/11, there was a 49 percent increase in patients admitted with a heart attack through 16 different emergency rooms within a 50-mile radius of the World Trade Center. Other studies have shown that even shortly after life disasters such as earthquakes and hurricanes there is an increase incidence of cardiovascular events.

### MANAGING STRESS

Think about how you manage your own stress. Do you eat to relax? Partake in smoking or alcohol use? Work too much? Procrastinate? Treatment of stress is both managing and relieving the stress but also the harmful habits it triggers. We all handle stress differently.

**Let's review how you may be able to accomplish stress management.**

**Try shifting your mindset to a positive attitude** with the emphasis on gratitude. Gratitude allows us to focus on what we are thankful for which will in turn unleash us from negative emotions.

**Try to become more physically active.** Whether it is taking a walk, jog, or going on a hike, exercise releases chemicals called endorphins, which enhances our mood. Exercise not only helps with stress management, but it also protects against cardiovascular disease by lowering blood pressure, strengthening your heart muscle, and helping you maintain a healthy weight.

It is also helpful to **unplug from electronics**, as work email, messages, and the news, which can be a contributing factor to our everyday stress. Even if it's for 10 minutes out of the day, treat it as if it was your own time to escape. This time may even be an opportunity to participate in mindfulness by focusing on your breathing and relaxing your body and mind.

**Above all, be patient with yourself.** This is essential to do each and every day, but it's now more important than ever during the COVID-19 pandemic. We are all trying to acclimate to a different way of living with new rules and guidelines that are evolving on a daily basis and trying to cope with the underlying fear of illness and mortality. You need to hear that it is necessary that you forgive yourself during this time. After all, it is healthy for your heart!



**Join us for Heart & Soul of Heart Disease with Dr. Adam Stern and Rabbi Ken Hahn for a discussion about prevention and mindfulness to destress. Visit [BaystateHealth.org/Heart](https://BaystateHealth.org/Heart)**



**Use cellphone camera, and click the pop-up**



A clinical trial that brings new hope. An advanced treatment that saves a life. A surgery resident starting a promising career. A warm blanket that makes a patient smile. Research that leads to a cure. Whatever your passion, you can help advance care and enhance lives at Baystate Health.

You can give the gift of health to patients by naming Baystate Health Foundation as a percentage beneficiary of your retirement assets, a bank account, life insurance or your overall estate.

By taking a few minutes to update your beneficiaries, you can create a gift that will help give patients a brighter tomorrow.

This is a simple and flexible way to create your legacy and help someone in need of health and healing.

Plus, you do not need a lawyer, you retain control of your assets, and your gift passes tax-free to Baystate Health Foundation to make a difference where it matters most.

Beneficiary designation gifts from friends like you help Baystate Health provide the lifesaving treatments, services and hope patients need to get back on their feet – today and in the future.



**To explore this option and more, please reach out to Kylie Johnson at 413-794-7789 or [Kylie.Johnson@BaystateHealth.org](mailto:Kylie.Johnson@BaystateHealth.org). All inquiries are confidential and gifts of all sizes matter.**