

# Focused On You

SUMMER 2020

**Inside:** Resilience during COVID-19 | MedStar Health Video Visits | Senior joint health | Tips to avoid workout injuries  
Keeping active as a family | Navigating a healthy pregnancy | Healthy meal planning



**Silver Spring man  
beats COVID-19  
after 51 days**

# During these unprecedented times, we are here for you.



The challenges of the past few months have been met with hope, talent, and resilience.

To manage our community's needs at the outset of COVID-19, MedStar Montgomery Medical Center halted elective surgeries and some services. Now, we are resuming many of our services, including elective surgeries and procedures, with the overarching goal of providing our patients with the safest possible care.

I could not be prouder of the work being done here at MedStar Montgomery. Our caregivers have developed a better understanding of COVID-19 and its treatments. We consistently participate in research and clinical trials, including the Mayo Clinic convalescent plasma trial that is making great strides in developing successful treatments for this virus. Our team is an important participant in our nation's effort to find innovative ways to protect everyone's health and safety.

Everywhere we look, we are finding new forms of encouragement and inspiration in our community as we continue to move forward and face a new normal. One of our first confirmed COVID-19 patients, Redley Blake, was under our care for 51 days (see page 4). He was confirmed by the doctors who cared for him as one of the sickest patients we have seen during the pandemic. We were thrilled that, because of his caretakers' perseverance and Redley's unwavering spirit, his health improved. Recently, we were able to give him a huge send-off home following his recovery.

MedStar Montgomery remains well-prepared, safe, and ready to serve our patients, as we follow guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. We've put extra precautions and protocols in place—including frequent disinfecting of public areas, use of personal protective equipment (PPE), social distancing, and reduced traffic volume—and we urge you not to delay your care with us.

Inside this newsletter, you will find tips and resources to help you continue to thrive and stay resilient. From offering mental health tips to making recommendations for staying active and healthy during the pandemic, MedStar Montgomery is here for you, to support your health, wellness, and well-being every step of the way. With access to the best healthcare providers, resources, and practices, we are prepared to meet the challenges of COVID-19. We are in this together, and we stand with you.

I am so thankful to our local community for the outpouring of support for our front-line healthcare workers. In times like these, we are most proud to call you neighbors. Know that the health and wellness of our community remain our top priorities.

Thank you again for your continued partnership and support.

Yours in good health,

**THOMAS J. SENKER, FACHE**  
President, MedStar Montgomery Medical Center,  
Senior Vice President, MedStar Health

## Focused On You

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MedStar Montgomery  
Medical Center

## Welcoming our new provider.



To schedule an appointment, please call **301-570-7404**.

**Richard Weinstein, MD**

Cardiologist, MedStar Health  
Cardiology Associates

# The summer of our discontent.

## How to stay sane and resilient during COVID-19.

BY LESLIE A. WHITLINGER

If physical distancing, social isolation, unemployment, death rates, and all the other coronavirus fallout have left you feeling sad, you are not alone.

"Everyone's ability to function as we used to has been compromised," says Marilou Tablang-Jimenez, MD, chair of the Department of Psychiatry at MedStar Montgomery Medical Center. "Sadness is a normal response to such a big loss."

Yet, how individuals deal with changes, great and small, can have a big impact on their lives and the lives of others.

"Some of us are just not as resilient as others, and are more predisposed to anxiety and depression that can escalate quickly when stressed," she says. "We are seeing more cases of seriously depressed patients who need hospitalization to heal than before COVID-19 struck."



**Families that play and make healthy choices together develop more resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

Fortunately, such reactions are not the norm, even during a crisis. But how can you tell if someone is merely sad or may need help from a professional?

"Warning signs typically start with a change in the person's ability to cope with day-to-day basics," says Dr. Tablang-Jimenez.

"For instance, a person may lose his or her appetite, not be able to relax,

and worry constantly. They're not sleeping well and have little or no interest in things they used to enjoy. Even the slightest stress will cause them to lash out. I'm not talking about the occasional moodiness that we all feel during these trying times, but changes that occur most days of the week."

Crisis or not, there are ways to manage stressors.

### **Rx for a healthy mind and body**

"There is no separation between the brain and the body," Dr. Tablang-Jimenez states. "And to be healthy mentally and physically, you must practice a healthy lifestyle."

She offers a four-point plan to balance your life and feelings (see sidebar).

If all else fails, Dr. Tablang-Jimenez urges people to reach out for help, even as the virus persists. ◀◀

## Dr. Tablang-Jimenez's four-point plan

### 1. Get a good night's sleep

"The hormone histamine regulates wakefulness and is influenced by light," Dr. Tablang-Jimenez explains. "Another hormone, melatonin, is released with darkness, promoting sleep. Together they help modulate moods, energy levels, appetite, and even infection response. Poor or inadequate patterns of sleep can affect us in many negative ways."

What is the definition of a "good night's sleep"? Most experts agree on seven to nine hours for healthy adults.



**Marilou G. Tablang-Jimenez, MD, DFAPA**

### 2. Eat well and exercise

Americans have turned into a nation of grazers, eating anytime we feel like it, 24/7. This is an unhealthy habit for both brain and body, says Dr. Tablang-Jimenez, who recommends three meals a day on a regular schedule.

Aerobic exercise increases brain power. When you are running, jogging, swimming, cycling, or even walking briskly, your body releases a protein called brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF).

"BDNF acts as a 'fertilizer for the brain,' improving mood, cognition, long-term memory, learning, and energy," she says.

For best results, exercise 30 minutes every day, preferably about an hour after a hearty breakfast.

### 3. Play

"Having fun is good for the brain," Dr. Tablang-Jimenez continues. "It's important to have something pleasurable to look forward to. Think about that first thing in the morning and those thoughts will help set the tone for the rest of your day."

### 4. Be productive

Equally important to well-being is a sense of purpose, fulfillment, and accomplishment, whether through work, volunteering, or other activities. If you are out of work right now, try using this time to update your resume, make calls, do home-improvement projects, or find other useful ways to feel good about yourself.

If you or your loved one is in need of mental health support, please visit [MedStarMontgomery.org/BehavioralHealth](https://www.MedStarMontgomery.org/BehavioralHealth) or call **301-774-8888**.



**Redley Blake, 74, of Silver Spring, Maryland, receives a warm send-off from associates, doctors, and nurses at MedStar Montgomery Medical Center after spending 51 days there recovering from COVID-19.**

# Silver Spring man beats COVID-19 after 51 days.

BY JENNIFER DAVIS

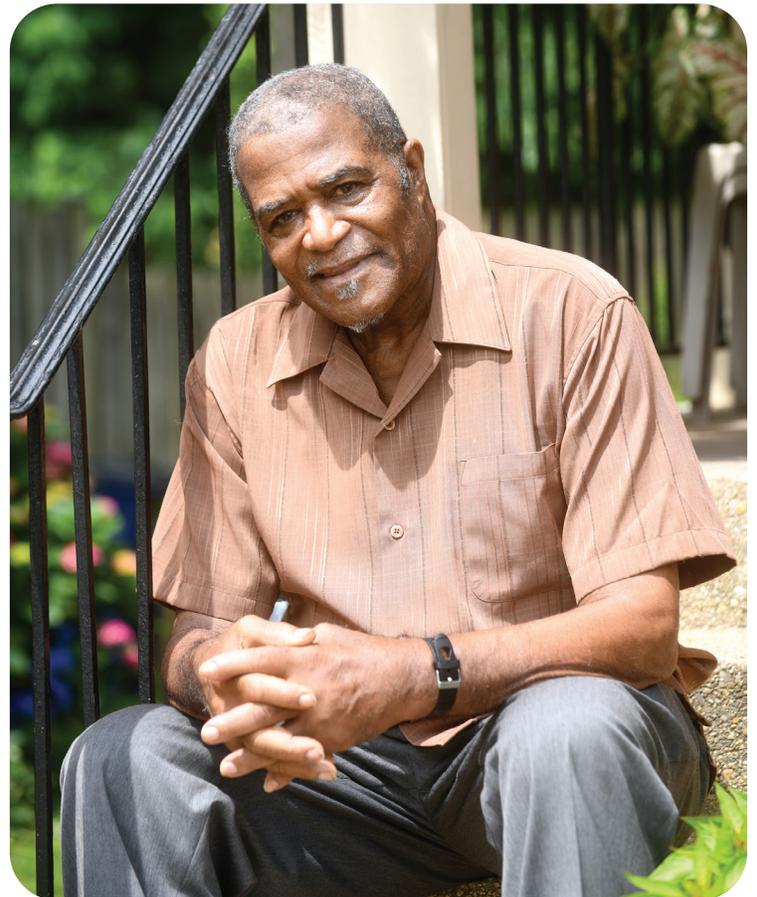
**Redley Blake, of Silver Spring, Maryland, was one of MedStar Montgomery Medical Center's first COVID-19 patients, and he spent 51 days at the hospital—27 in the intensive care unit (ICU) and 16 of those on a ventilator. "I'm feeling grateful to know that I made it," says the 74-year-old. "I'm so happy to be alive."**

It was not an easy battle. Redley suffered complete lung failure and kidney failure requiring dialysis, and he was going into sepsis. Doctors say he was one of the sickest patients they have seen during the pandemic.

"Patients in Redley's age group generally have a very poor outcome with COVID-19, especially if requiring prolonged hospitalization and an ICU stay," explains Manu Kaushal, MD, director of the Critical Care Program at MedStar Montgomery and one of many providers who took care of Redley. "Someone of his age—who is as sick as he was—is, sadly, less likely to survive."

Redley was also among the first wave of patients in early March when drug treatments were hard to come by. "It was an emotional time. Many patients were not surviving because treatments were not yet widely available," Dr. Kaushal says. "We were all praying for his survival."

As Redley was weakening on the ventilator, the MedStar Montgomery team was looking for the best opportunity to wean him off it. They found a small window but



**Redley Blake feels grateful and happy to be alive after his battle with COVID-19 kept him in the MedStar Montgomery ICU for 27 days, with 16 days on a ventilator.**

**“They took such good care of me. They cheered me on each day and even lined the halls and applauded when I was discharged.”**

– REDLEY BLAKE

warned his family there were no guarantees. Everyone was thrilled when he responded well to the treatment and slowly started to improve.

“Our healthcare team has been emotionally invested in every single patient, and Redley’s recovery was a real ray of hope for all of us,” Dr. Kaushal says.

“We needed to see that patients like him could beat this virus. His case is a perfect example of the miracles we see when we have hope, perseverance, amazing clinical teamwork, and family support.”

Redley was eventually sent home on dialysis, which he now no longer needs. He is still recovering from weakness and fatigue and is receiving physical therapy. Dr. Kaushal says his prognosis is good. Redley has already returned to the hospital to thank the nursing team who cared for him, including Lauren Sundergill, RN, and many others.

“This was the first time I ever got sick and went to the hospital, so it was very scary at first,” Redley says. “But they took such good care of me. They cheered me on each day and even lined the halls and applauded when I was discharged.”

MedStar Montgomery was quick to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, leading the fight by providing affected patients the with the most evidence-based treatments, including convalescent plasma, which is part of a Mayo Clinic trial. With expanded ICU capacity, the nursing team also formed a specialized mobility unit to provide more acute rehabilitation services desperately needed by COVID-19 patients.

“MedStar Montgomery has demonstrated exceptional leadership during this challenging time,” says Dr. Kaushal. “The hard work and dedication of our healthcare heroes and our system preparedness are reflected by excellent outcomes, such as in cases like Redley’s. Just like him, you can trust you are in good hands.” ◀◀



**Manu Kaushal, MD**

## MedStar Health Video Visits offer easy and safe access to care.

As part of MedStar Health’s commitment to providing agile care solutions during the unprecedented demands of COVID-19, we’ve made it easier for you to get the care you need using MedStar Health Video Visits—all from the comfort of your home.



Stuart Gould, MD, cardiologist with MedStar Cardiology Associates at MedStar Heart & Vascular Institute, recognizes the challenges that come with adapting to the new technology of video visits.

“My patients haven’t reached out as much as I would have expected, so I have shared more with them about our telehealth platform and how vital it is that they stay connected with video visits,” says Dr. Gould.

MedStar Health Video Visits are similar to in-person office visits, except you see your provider by using a tablet, smartphone, or computer (with a camera) from your home.

By connecting over secure video, our MedStar Health medical providers offer consultation, diagnosis, treatment, and even prescriptions (when appropriate).

MedStar Health Video Visits are scheduled the same way as in-person appointments, by calling your provider’s office. At the time of your appointment, your provider sends a link through email and/or text message. Clicking on that link starts your video visit.

“During video visits, I enjoy checking in with my patients, making sure they’re doing well and taking their medications,” Dr. Gould explains. “A lot of what I do to monitor my patients is based on blood pressure, and most have their own machine at home so they can record themselves. They also are able to capture their heart rhythm with devices such as an Apple Watch or the KardiaMobile monitor app. With these devices, they can send me their heart rhythm recording and I can check for abnormalities like atrial fibrillation or other heart arrhythmias.”



**Stuart Gould, MD**

Video visits are also helpful in making patients, especially the elderly, feel more connected and less isolated. “By the end of the visit, they feel better and are really appreciative,” says Dr. Gould. “That personal connection through video visits has made a large impact, and our patients, who have always been a part of the decision-making process, continue to play a more active role with their health.”

Before you schedule your visit, be sure to check on your health insurance coverage for video visit services. With the COVID-19 pandemic, many insurance providers, including Medicare and Medicaid, offer some coverage.

Your health remains our top priority. Staying current with your care and follow-up visits is the best way to maintain your strength and vibrancy. Schedule a video visit with a MedStar Health provider today. ◀◀

You can visit our MedStar Health Video visits patient experience website at [MedStarHealth.org/MyVideoVisit](https://www.MedStarHealth.org/MyVideoVisit) to schedule your visit and to learn more about what to expect.

Visit [MedStarHealth.org/COVID-19](https://www.MedStarHealth.org/COVID-19) to learn more about our COVID-19 symptom checker and to access additional information and resources.



Senior joint health best practices include regular exercise, yoga and stretching, strength training, and maintaining a healthy weight.

# The importance of joint health as you age.

BY JENNIFER DAVIS

**There's no magic elixir to keep us young. Staying active to maintain healthy joints is about as close as we'll get.**

"It's so important, especially for seniors," explains Bruce Robert Knolmayer, MD, an orthopaedic surgeon at MedStar Montgomery Medical Center who specializes in joint replacement and sports medicine. "The better you take care of your joints, the more active a lifestyle you will have and the less pain you'll be in regardless of your age," he says. "That makes life more enjoyable day to day and helps you avoid major injuries and doctor visits in the future."

Dr. Knolmayer says it's never too late to start focusing on joint health. If you're just beginning to think about these healthy habits, he recommends starting small and building up to them over time.

If you are struggling with pain or limited mobility in your joints, visit [MedStarMontgomery.org/Orthopedics](https://www.medstar-montgomery.org/Orthopedics) or call **301-774-8958** to speak with an orthopaedic specialist.

## According to Dr. Knolmayer, joint health involves four key components:

### Range of motion

"Healthy and strong joints have as close to a normal range of motion as possible, but that is impacted as you get older, especially if you develop osteoarthritis," says Dr. Knolmayer. "Exercise is a really important way of maintaining the motion you have and ensuring you don't lose that comfortable range."

He recommends swimming and biking—outdoors or on a stationary bike—and says walking is wonderful too. "We do worry with some older patients that they may start to lose balance or be unsteady on a treadmill," Dr. Knolmayer warns. So, he says—head outside. Walk with a partner if possible. Consider a walking stick if balance is a challenge. Keep your phone on you in case you need to call for help. Wear supportive shoes, and stick to level surfaces. "If you start going up and down hills, it puts more pressure on the kneecaps, and if there is any loss of cartilage—i.e., arthritis or inflammation—that could exacerbate those symptoms," he explains.

As for knee or ankle braces, he says research is mixed on whether they actually help. "Studies haven't shown they make a measurable difference, but they do provide a sense of extra security for some people, and that is a good thing," Dr. Knolmayer notes.

### Flexibility

Healthy joints are flexible joints. Yoga and stretching are great ways to maintain joint health. Dr. Knolmayer says there are many good online classes for doing yoga at home. If you easily feel off-balance, chair yoga is a good option too. Your doctor's office can be a great first point of reference if you are looking for exercise recommendations that support joint health.

### Strength

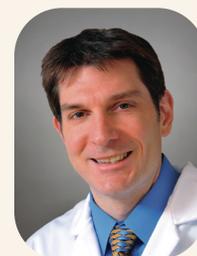
Weight training can help build strength, but if you're starting this for the first time, Dr. Knolmayer recommends starting small and teaming up with a trainer or physical therapist to guide you.

"It is better to go with mild to moderate weights," he says. "Heavier weights can put more stress on joints, especially joints with some mild wear or tear to them. If weights feel like too much, resistance bands are a great alternative."

### Maintaining a healthy weight

Published research from the American College of Rheumatology shows there is a four-pound reduction in knee stress for every one pound of body weight lost. So maintaining a healthy weight is an especially important component of joint health.

Dr. Knolmayer says patients often ask about supplements, such as glucosamine and chondroitin sulfate. "My advice: If you try them for a month or two and you feel a difference, then continue," he says. "But consult your doctor first because certain supplements can have some serious side effects and interact with blood thinners and other medications." ◀



**Bruce Robert Knolmayer, MD**

# Great tips to avoid injuries as you restart your workout.

BY SUSAN WALKER



**When returning to your normal workout routine, it's important to take things slow to rebuild strength, increase flexibility, and lower the risk of injury.**

For more information on treatments and services that can help enhance your workout and sports performance, visit [MedStarHealth.org/SportsMedicine](https://www.MedStarHealth.org/SportsMedicine) or call 301-774-8958.

If you've been less active than usual during the COVID-19 pandemic, you may be tempted to jump back into your exercise routine now that the weather is warm. Carter Mitchell, MD, chief of Sports Medicine at the MedStar Orthopaedic Institute, has some encouraging words and tips that will help you avoid injuries.



**Carter Mitchell, MD**

"The safest way to return to your normal activity routine after a period of being less active or not participating in a particular sport is to take a gradual, step-wise approach," Dr. Mitchell says. "Take some time to rebuild strength and increase flexibility first. That will help you protect and strengthen your joints, muscles, and tendons and lower the risk of getting injured."

If you haven't been active for an extended period of time, get a physical to ensure you don't have any underlying health problems that would affect your ability to exercise safely.

Dr. Mitchell suggests taking these three steps for a safer return to your active life:

- **Strengthen your core.** A strong core is key to lowering your risk of injury. To build strength in your core, include crunches, planks, and bridges in your workouts. Make sure you're maintaining correct form while doing these moves to lower your risk of strains. You can consult with a trainer via video chat to check your form. Start with just a few repetitions and increase the number gradually.
- **Work on your technique.** If you're returning to a sport such as tennis, soccer, or baseball, your technique may weaken after a period of inactivity. Rather than diving right into a tennis game or soccer match, spend several weeks working to perfect essential techniques. Get your muscles and joints used to those repeated motions again.
- **Include rest days.** While you may be eager to get active, it's wise to include rest days to lower your risk of overuse injuries.

If you follow these tips, you'll be breaking a sweat safely in no time. ◀◀

# Active family is stronger and healthier together.

BY SUSAN WALKER

The gym is closed, there are no after-school sports, and you and your family are stuck inside most of the day because of COVID-19. So how can you stay active and healthy?

For Deborah Perry, BSN, RN, an infection preventionist at MedStar Montgomery Medical Center, and her family, the answer is to hit the trail. And that's just one way you can stay active. Whether you do video or streaming workouts, walk in your neighborhood, play tag or catch in your yard, or ride your bike, staying physically active can not only help you stay healthier, but it also presents opportunities for positive family interactions.

Deborah knows firsthand how important being physically active is. She, her husband, and their daughters have been hiking and kayaking for years, and they've continued to do so, while using face masks as needed and taking social distancing precautions during the pandemic.

"Keeping active and getting outdoors is a high priority for our family," Deborah explains. "It's something we

appreciate now more than ever.

We commit to making time for it.

We go for hikes most every weekend at parks near our home in Clarksville, Maryland. After a hike, everyone feels so good. I also try to walk every day at work during my lunch break, and we have PE time for our 11-year-old daughter every school day. She's a naturally active child, so getting outside and playing tetherball in the yard helps her burn off some energy and increases her ability to focus."

If you're new to hiking, Deborah suggests starting with a gentle walk on level surfaces. "A lot of trails in the DC region even have paved surfaces, so they're a great place to start. But if hiking isn't for you, just find an activity you enjoy and make it a regular part of your day," she says. "It can make a big difference in your mood and outlook on life, especially as we navigate the new normal of this pandemic." ◀◀



**Deborah Perry and her family enjoy outdoor activities together while practicing social distancing with face masks at the ready.**

# A new mom navigates a healthy pregnancy.

BY KATIE PARADIS

Now more than ever, people are looking for ways to stay healthy. But how about when you're trying to stay healthy for two (or more)?

Pregnancy often brings up concerns about how to take care of yourself and your baby. What should you do or not do? Eat or not eat? With so many healthy-pregnancy tips available (from your neighbor, aunt, or social media), it can be overwhelming to discern what information to believe and what to dismiss. The challenge can be even greater for first-time moms.

Leeah Harvey, 25, a store manager from Gaithersburg, Maryland, who gave birth to her first child in the spring, wanted to do all she could to take care of herself and her baby. Under the care of Ngozi Wexler, MD, chair of the Ob/Gyn department at MedStar Montgomery Medical Center, Leeah followed relatively simple, but effective strategies to maintain a healthy pregnancy.

## Get moving, and drink plenty of water

"To stay healthy, I drank water and took walks regularly," says Leeah. "At my job, I'm on my feet throughout my shift, so that was a big help as far as getting my steps in. I think that was a big part of what kept me healthy."

Dr. Wexler stresses the importance of exercise and a healthy diet, just as Leeah practiced. These simple actions reduce the risk of gestational diabetes and postpartum depression.

"That's certainly the groundwork for any healthy pregnancy," says Dr. Wexler. "Depending on your body mass index (BMI), we give you what your target weight-gain goals should be, and specific recommendations on how to meet those goals," she adds.



Leeah Harvey, 25, of Gaithersburg, Maryland, with her husband, Ian. Leeah credits her simple but effective self-care strategies and the care of her Ob/Gyn, Ngozi Wexler, MD, for a healthy pregnancy.

## Manage stress

"One of the most important things I tell my patients is to avoid unnecessary stress," explains Dr. Wexler. "It's a mind-body thing. If you're super stressed, your immune system probably won't be as strong as it normally would be." Prolonged stress can also increase your risk of preterm labor and low birth weight.

In addition to recommending regular exercise to reduce the impact of stress, Dr. Wexler encourages expectant mothers to practice self-care through activities such as meditation and positive hobbies like gardening and other positive, outdoor activities that are great stress-relievers.

**"My pregnancy was pretty much smooth sailing thanks to Dr. Wexler and the Ob/Gyn team at MedStar Montgomery. My baby remained healthy. I am very lucky and blessed."**

– LEEAH HARVEY

## Have a reliable network

"Postpartum depression is very real," says Dr. Wexler, "but so is depression in pregnancy." That's why she encourages her patients to express their feelings with loved ones. "When you verbalize your fears, it's not so scary."

For Leeah, her husband, Ian, was her biggest supporter, especially during delivery.

"The birth was difficult, but he got me through it," she says.

A strong support network also can alert you to signs of anxiety or depression you may not recognize for yourself. Dr. Wexler recommends listening to what you hear from those who care about you.

## Talk with your doctor

In addition to having great support at home, Leeah met regularly with Dr. Wexler. Communicating with your obstetrician helps ensure that you and your baby are healthy and thriving.

With the coronavirus pandemic making in-person office appointments a challenge, Dr. Wexler and the team at MedStar Montgomery have used video visits to maintain seamless care and patient support.

"We're doing the same things we do when patients visit us in the office," says Dr. Wexler. This includes checking weights and blood pressure and ordering tests.

The team also uses Babyscripts™, an app that provides maternal health resources, including remote monitoring.



Ian and Leeah's daughter, Naomi, was born on April 14, happy and healthy.



Leeah's husband, Ian, was a huge support during her delivery at MedStar Montgomery. They welcomed their daughter, Naomi, in April.

Babyscripts can remind patients to check their blood pressure and then transmits that data to providers in real time. The service can be tailored by clinicians to provide patient-specific information about prenatal and postpartum care—especially useful for women with high-risk pregnancies. It also can be used to search for all sorts of information, including "things you may think are silly that you don't want to ask your doctor about," says Dr. Wexler.

"I used Babyscripts to keep track of how far along I was and how much weight I was gaining and for the helpful tips it provided," Leeah explains. "The app would update me weekly with new information regarding my current week of pregnancy. It was very helpful and got me more excited about everything happening in my tummy."

Leeah and Ian welcomed their daughter, Naomi, in April.

Dr. Wexler mostly credits Leeah's good habits for her healthy pregnancy, for which Leeah is tremendously thankful. ◀◀



**Ngozi Wexler, MD**

For more information about Ob/Gyn services at MedStar Montgomery Medical Center or to request an appointment, visit [MedStarMontgomery.org/MaternityServices](https://www.MedStarMontgomery.org/MaternityServices) or call 301-570-7424.

# Community class schedule.



**Online live classes are now available for our seniors and parents in the community.**



## Senior classes

- Senior Strength and Balance Fitness Class (free), 10 a.m. Mondays and Wednesdays

## Parenting classes

- Childbirth Express: \$75
- Lamaze Technique: \$60
- Infant Care: \$30  
*See also: Breastfeeding Support Group*
- Breastfeeding Basics: \$35
- Breastfeeding Support Group (free), 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. Thursdays

For full descriptions, or to learn more about dates and times, visit [MedStarMontgomery.org/Classes](https://www.MedStarMontgomery.org/Classes) or call **301-774-8881** (Option 4).

# Thank you for your expressions of gratitude.

On behalf of our caregivers and associates at MedStar Montgomery Medical Center, we sincerely thank our community for the outreach and generous support during this time.



Please know that your expressions of gratitude impacted our teams daily during this time. Thank you for caring for our caregivers.

The following list, at time of print\*, represents all those who supported us with in-kind gifts, which included meals, snacks, caregiver health kits, and personal protective equipment. We have been truly honored and humbled by your generosity. ♡

*\*Every effort has been made to ensure our list is comprehensive and includes all those who provided generous support to MedStar Montgomery Medical Center during our response to COVID-19. If your name or organization is not listed please contact Tiffany Brett at [tiffany.l.brett@medstar.net](mailto:tiffany.l.brett@medstar.net) or 301-774-8636.*

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El Andariego Restaurant  
Feed the Front Lines  
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Good Earth Garden Market

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Karis Suh  
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Weis Markets, Damascus  
The Women's Board  
Krista Wong & Jai Tran  
York Castle Ice Cream Company\*

*\*Took part in the GoFundMe  
Community Fundraiser for MedStar  
Montgomery Medical Center*

# Eat smart: Tips for healthy meal planning.

BY REINA SEKIGUCHI

The summer season, with its abundance of fresh produce, is the perfect time to re-evaluate your dietary goals and kick-start healthy decision-making in the kitchen.

Julia Crussiah, MPH, RD, LDN, a bariatric dietitian at MedStar Montgomery Medical Center, shares her advice for making smart food choices year-round.

"A healthy meal always needs to contain a variety of foods, including vegetables, whole grains, and lean protein, such as chicken or fish," says Julia. "Dietitians often refer to this variety as the 'colors of the rainbow'—think, for example, a balanced dinner of *brown rice*, *pink salmon*, and *green kale*."

When assembling your rainbow of ingredients, remember that not all "healthy" items are created equal. "Always select the more nutrient-dense option that is higher in vitamins and minerals," advises Julia. "For example, when making a salad, opt for romaine lettuce, which is rich in calcium and folic acid, over iceberg lettuce, which is essentially just water."

For those struggling to make healthy eating part of their weekly routine, Julia recommends starting small. "First, take an inventory of your pantry and base your meals for the day on what you already have in stock," she advises. "Designate a time each week, even just a few minutes, to write down what you will eat the next day. It can be simple, such as a hardboiled egg and oatmeal for breakfast. Using this method, gradually work up to three or even five days' worth of meals."

If you're worried that weekly meal planning means five days of the same old salad, don't be afraid to get creative. "Try preparing the same foods in different ways," Julia suggests. "Freezing portions of chicken in different marinades such as lime and cilantro, Jamaican jerk seasoning, or low-sodium teriyaki sauce is a quick and easy way to add variety. These pre-prepared proteins can be added to a salad or lettuce wrap for lunch or grilled up for dinner with a side of green beans and your choice of whole grain."

Another mix-and-match meal idea that can be assembled up to three days in advance is overnight oats. Simply combine old-fashioned oats with your choice of milk, Greek yogurt, sugar substitute (such as honey or stevia), and chia seeds—a high-fiber superfood rich in antioxidants and omega-3 fatty acids. Let it sit overnight and top with your favorite berries and nuts for a versatile, high-fiber breakfast. Smoothies with fruits, protein powder, and green leafy vegetables, such as spinach or kale, also can be assembled in advance and blended at breakfast time.

And when it's time to visit the grocery store, be sure to stick to your shopping list. "Once an item is in your house, it's very hard to avoid it," Julia says. "Making a list can help you avoid those unhealthy impulse buys."

Julia advocates "perimeter grocery shopping," a practice of shopping primarily from the outer rim of the store, where fresh fruits, vegetables, and lean proteins typically are stocked, and avoiding the center aisles where more-processed items, high in saturated and trans fats, sodium, and added sugars, lie in wait.

These healthy choices at the grocery store will go a long way toward helping you make healthy choices at home. With a bit of preparation and a well-stocked pantry, you will be ready with a filling, nutrient-dense meal when cravings strike. ◀◀



**Salad-making pro tip:** Choose the more nutrient-dense option, such as romaine lettuce over iceberg.



**Julia Crussiah,  
MPH, RD, LDN**

## Your shopping list:

### Proteins

- Eggs
- Chicken (skinless)
- Fish
- Turkey
- Tofu

### Vegetables

- Spinach
- Arugula
- Cabbage
- Asparagus
- Mushrooms

### Fruits

- Blueberries
- Apples
- Clementines
- Peaches
- Grapefruit

### Whole Grains

- Brown rice
- Quinoa
- Barley
- Oats

### Fats

- Olive oil
- Canola oil
- Flaxseed
- Avocado

To learn more about our nutrition and weight management program or schedule an appointment with a counselor, please visit [MedStarMontgomery.org/Nutrition](https://www.MedStarMontgomery.org/Nutrition) or call 301-774-8828.

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