

PA

ISSUE 3, FALL 2019

HEALTH

YOUR GUIDE TO FITNESS & WELL-BEING

“MIRACLE KID” Saige LaCoe:

*“I’M DETERMINED TO
LIVE MY BEST LIFE!”*



HEALTHY AFTER-
SCHOOL SNACKS

KID-FRIENDLY
PLACES

BACK-TO-SCHOOL
WELLNESS TIPS





If you have a story suggestion or an amazing health story to tell, we'd love to hear it, and maybe we'll even feature it in an upcoming issue of *PA Health* magazine. Email us at PaHealth@geisinger.edu.

On the Cover: Children's Miracle Network Miracle Kid Saige LaCoe just wants to be a normal kid — and her tireless, cheerful effort to reach that goal is kind of what makes her extraordinary. (Photo by Mark Dastrup)

At Geisinger, we see amazing kids every day who face down health issues that would be a struggle for even the strongest adults. In this issue of *PA Health*, you'll meet two of them: Saige LaCoe of Clarks Summit and Alex Hosler of Bloomsburg. What these two young people have gone through, and what they've overcome, is truly inspiring. I hope you enjoy reading their stories as much as I did.

Saige and Alex are doing fine today thanks to the outstanding care they received at Geisinger Janet Weis Children's Hospital and Geisinger's Autism and Developmental Medicine Institute in Lewisburg. My hat is off to everyone who contributed to — and continues to contribute to — their journeys to better health and bright futures.

But these stories are just the beginning.

The entire fall edition of the

magazine is dedicated to children. Autumn is here — the air is cooler, leaves are changing, and pumpkins are almost ready for carving. As your kids head back to school, we have tips for keeping them healthy, so they can do their best in the classroom and out on the sports field.

We're also featuring three great opportunities for children to learn and play. From museums that offer hands-on exhibits to the state's first all-inclusive playground — which opened in July right here in Selinsgrove — we are fortunate to have access to some fantastic resources to keep kids active and engaged outside of school.

We hope you enjoy the third issue of *PA Health*. As always, we welcome your comments and suggestions.

Here's to a healthy and happy fall!

- Don Stanziano
Executive Editor

Publisher

ERICA L. SHAMES
Susquehanna Life Custom
Publishing Division

Creative Director

SIMONE TIEBER
estudio-5.com

Production Manager

JASON LOWSY
estudio-5.com

Contributing Writers

LISA Z. LEIGHTON
CARRIE PAULING

Photography

MARK DASTRUP
KRISTIN DORAN

Geisinger

Chief Marketing Officer/

Executive Editor

DON STANZIANO

Vice President of

System Marketing

JEFF BEAN

Contributing Writers

PAULA FRANKEN
BETH KASZUBA
GABRIEL J. MILLER

Creative Director

PATRICK PACACHA

Managing Editor

JESSICA MARTIN

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HEALTH EVENTS NEAR YOU

Yearning to do yoga? Searching for a support group to manage diabetes? Want to quit smoking? A wealth of wellness events awaits you — including classes, lectures, support groups, screenings and more! Just visit events.geisinger.org and browse by category, date or location.



“Miracle Kid”

IS DETERMINED TO LIVE HER BEST LIFE

Saige LaCoe just wants to be a normal kid — and her tireless, cheerful effort to reach that goal is kind of what makes her extraordinary.

BY BETH KASZUBA

Saige, of Clarks Summit, has faced two serious health issues that would challenge most adults to remain upbeat and brave. But, according to Saige’s mother and members of her Geisinger healthcare team, the 11-year-old “Miracle Kid” exhibits consistent courage and positivity.

“She’s a very strong little girl, and very determined,” says Leah LaCoe, Saige’s mom. “Ten days after brain surgery, she was able to dance in a recital.”

Saige’s saga began about three years

ago, when she was suffering episodes of severe stomach pain, accompanied by bleeding when she used the bathroom. She also battled debilitating headaches that were escalating in severity.

Geisinger pediatric gastroenterologist Rick Focht, MD, first diagnosed Saige with Crohn's disease, a treatable, but incurable, inflammatory bowel disease that can cause symptoms including abdominal pain, diarrhea, weight loss, anemia and fatigue. Then an MRI revealed that Saige had a second unrelated and equally scary problem — a Chiari malformation, meaning part of her brain extended into her spinal canal. The condition triggers headaches, but can cause more serious issues, such as hydrocephalus and cysts in the spinal cord's central canal.

Looking back, Ms. LaCoe says there were early signs that Saige was facing some big health issues. But she was also an active little girl who enjoyed swimming, dancing and even BMX bike racing — activities that Saige says she insisted on doing, even though at times “it was like a rubber band was squeezing my head.”

That resolve to live a normal life compelled Saige to make the choice to have brain surgery to fix the malformation, even though the repair doesn't always end headaches, according to Anne Marie Morse, DO, a pediatric neurologist on Saige's Geisinger care team.

“For patients like Saige, who had intractable headaches, sometimes surgery can help,” Dr. Morse says. “But the results aren't always that good.”

For Saige's mom, the prospect of surgery was just plain frightening. “You don't know what to expect,” Ms. LaCoe notes, adding, “There are plenty of children with more serious problems than Saige. But you never think you're the one whose child will go through this.”

Happily, Saige came through the surgery with flying colors and soon resumed her favorite activities, including dancing. “I do everything except pointe,” Saige says. “Tap, jazz, contemporary and ballet.”

However, while she's active and healthier,

she does still see Dr. Morse for headaches.

“She's an incredible child,” Dr. Morse says. “She's always positive and enthusiastic about her opportunity to be the best she can be.”

Saige also travels to Geisinger in Danville every six weeks for treatment for her Crohn's disease. The therapy, which involves medication delivered intravenously, sidelines Saige for about half a day, Dr. Focht says. “But it's really worked well to control her disease.”

He adds, “Saige always has a very upbeat attitude. She's a great fighter and just an awesome, awesome kid. I'm glad she's my patient.”

The LaCoe family is equally happy with Saige's Geisinger team. “I couldn't ask for better doctors to take care of Saige,” Ms. LaCoe says. “They've all been so helpful. We've built a little relationship, like a family.”

This year, Children's Miracle Network at Geisinger chose Saige to be a Miracle Kid, one of several children who received life-saving or life-improving care at Geisinger Janet Weis Children's Hospital. “It's a chance to tell my story,” Saige says.

“She's a great role model for children — and adults,” Dr. Morse adds. “We don't always cope that well. But Saige never exhibits self-pity, and nothing is going to slow her down.”

Saige's mother agrees. “She's such a strong little girl,” Ms. LaCoe says. “The strongest person I know.”

“I couldn't ask for better doctors to take care of Saige. They've all been so helpful. We've built a little relationship, like a family.”

— Leah LaCoe

Saige with Rick Focht, MD



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WAYS TO KICK OFF A HEALTHY SCHOOL YEAR

BY GABRIEL J. MILLER



1. GET THEIR EYES CHECKED.

Imagine sitting in class and not being able to see the board. Your young student needs to be able to make out the math problems and spelling words to succeed. Kids are growing and changing, and so are their eyes. If you think your child might be having trouble seeing, have their eyes examined as soon as possible.

2. GET THEM ON A CONSISTENT SLEEP SCHEDULE.

Kids can usually sleep in a little later during the summer. The transition from the summer to school sleeping hours can be rough, causing headaches and physical exhaustion. A consistent sleep schedule, established at the start of the school year if not before, is a good idea for students of all ages. That way, they can wake up less drowsy and be more focused throughout the day.

3. SICK DAYS ARE INEVITABLE, SO PREPARE FOR THEM.

When your child returns to school, they are entering an environment with more kids — and germs. Even with the best hygiene habits, the chances of them getting sick are high. To help head off sick days, pack small bottles of hand sanitizer, wet wipes, and pocket tissues — arming your child with tools they can use to keep germs away. If they do get sick, you can be ready by having the right medicine and the school nurse's contact information. But prevention is still the best medicine. You can stop the flu or common cold in its tracks by teaching your child proper handwashing techniques.

4. GIVE THEM A REAL BREAKFAST.

Breakfast fuels your child's day, so you want to give them a healthy one that will power them through six to eight activity-packed hours. Protein, in the form of breakfast sausage, bacon and eggs, yogurt or nuts, is a great choice. Another alternative is oatmeal, which is whole grain. Just make sure it's nutritionally balanced by checking labels for too much sugar and sodium. If you choose to give your child cereal, heartier options like oat- and grain-based cereals are better than sugar and empty calories.

5. MAKE SURE THEY ARE UP TO DATE ON THEIR SHOTS.

You don't want your child contracting some illness they could have avoided — especially one that causes serious harm, like measles. Keeping up with all the shots your child needs to attend school not only protects them, but also other students. Your child will be safer at school, and you'll also be helping students who can't receive vaccinations due to medical conditions, such as cancer or allergic reactions. This is known as "herd immunity." In this case, what's good for your student is good for the classroom.





7 OPTIONS FOR QUICK, EASY AFTER-SCHOOL SNACKS

BY CARRIE PAULING

Kids come home from school hungry and reach for the closest snack — which is usually high-calorie, high-sodium and low-nutrition, says Kim Segiel, registered dietitian nutritionist at Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center. With a little preparation, you can have healthy options ready for your hungry kids.

PRETZELS AND POPCORN, PRE-PACKAGED. Low in fat, pretzels and popcorn — even prepackaged — are relatively healthy compared to chips or other crunchy, crispy options. Portion ahead of time, using package serving size recommendations.

FRUITS AND VEGGIES. Leave a bowl of wash-and-go fruits on the counter or pre-slice apples, pre-cut melon, and wash and dry grapes. Then keep them handy in the refrigerator for ready-to-eat, healthy snacks.

LOW-FAT YOGURT.

It's healthy and portable, and a 4- to 6-ounce serving should satisfy a hungry kid after school. For a little crunch, "throw in some whole grain cereal, like Cheerios, which come in a wide variety of flavors, from blueberry or strawberry to peanut butter," says Ms. Segiel.

PEANUT BUTTER.

Protein helps satiate hunger, and peanut butter pairs well with apples and bananas. However, Ms. Segiel cautions, "It's a high-fat food and can quickly surpass the calorie guidelines for a snack."

DIY TRAIL MIX.

"If kids choose the ingredients and make a snack themselves, they're more likely to enjoy it," says Ms. Segiel. Stock their favorite nuts, dried fruits and whole grain cereals and let your kids combine them to make their favorite mix.

DIPS AND CONDIMENTS.

Hummus and salsa are healthier than ranch dressing and queso cheese as dips for veggies or baked tortilla chips.

OLD-FASHIONED

FRUIT DIP. Plain fruit salad might seem boring, but if you add yogurt to a mix of fruit, it's suddenly more dessert-like. "Traditional sweets are not satisfying," says Ms. Segiel, "and it's hard for kids to practice portion control with sweets." But a yogurt-based fruit salad is sweet, filling and healthier.

"One of the mistakes parents often make is having bags or boxes of snacks in the pantry for their kids. But if snacks aren't pre-portioned, kids don't realize they've eaten two or three times the serving size in one sitting."

— Kim Segiel, RDN



SNACKING TIPS:

- **A snack should be** around 100 to 150 calories. Once you surpass 200, it becomes a meal.
- **Encourage kids to drink** a glass of water before snacking to help them feel full and stay hydrated.
- **Protein bars** are a meal replacement, not a snack.



OLD-FASHIONED FRUIT DIP

Ingredients:

- Pineapple • Kiwi • Grapes
- Mandarin oranges • Bananas
- Low-fat vanilla yogurt

Directions:

Cut fruit into bite-size pieces and stir into yogurt. Serve in snack-size portions of 4 to 6 ounces.

WHAT MAKES YOU FRAGILE CAN ALSO MAKE YOU **STRONG**

No one told Alex what he wouldn't be able to do — so he just went ahead and did it.

BY PAULA
FRANKEN

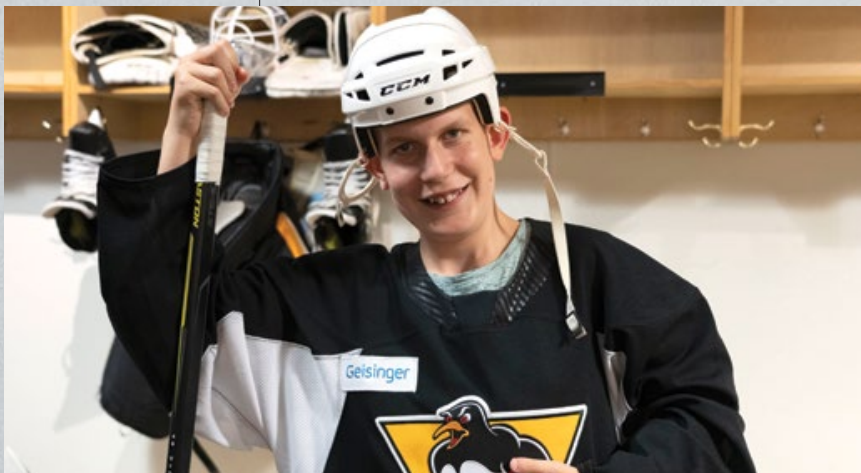
Alex Hosler started eighth grade this fall at Bloomsburg Area Middle School. He's a drummer in the band, his favorite class is gym, and he's a big fan of the Pittsburgh Penguins — and the Bloomsburg Panthers, of course. In many ways, Alex is a typical 14-year-old.

But the fact that he lives a typical middle school life is remarkable because Alex was born with a genetic syndrome called Fragile X. Fragile X syndrome (FXS) is caused by a permutation on the X chromosome, one of the two chromosomes that determine sex. FXS causes intellectual disability, behavioral and learning challenges and various physical characteristics.

Alex was diagnosed with FXS at age 4, but began working with Thomas Challman, MD, a pediatric neuro-developmental specialist at Geisinger Medical Center, when he was 2. "By the time Alex was diagnosed with Fragile X, we already had every possible intervention in place thanks to Dr. Challman and Pennsylvania Early Intervention Services," says Alex's mother, Melanie Hosler. "We had occupational, speech and physical therapies, and teachers were working with him at home and at preschool. What the diagnosis gave us was an explanation."

Dr. Challman and his colleagues formed the Autism and Developmental Medicine Institute (ADMI), a partnership between Geisinger and Bucknell University, in 2013. ADMI's team of physicians, psychologists, genetic counselors, speech language pathologists, behavioral analysts and other staff diagnose and treat children with autism and other neurodevelopmental disorders — while ADMI researchers work to advance the understanding of causes and develop treatments for neurodevelopmental disorders.

"From the beginning, ADMI made FXS one of their priorities," says Alex's father, Ted Hosler. "They helped us manage Alex's existing symptoms and explained how new symptoms might manifest in years to come. They've



set Alex up with Geisinger cardiologists, orthopaedists and other specialists. And they've connected us with other FXS families. I'm also very excited by all the research ADMI is doing. It's my dream that a cure can be found for this condition — if not in my lifetime, then in Alex's."

According to Dr. Challman, the growing knowledge of what happens at the molecular level when genetic abnormalities cause synapses to malfunction is giving many people hope. "In the future, medicines will likely be developed to target these molecular differences and incremental treatments will be found to improve symptoms and areas of function," he says. "Researchers are working on it every day."

While research continues, the team at ADMI is dedicated to helping Alex and other kids with developmental challenges live their best possible lives. "No one at ADMI ever presumed what Alex could or couldn't do," Alex's father explains. "They didn't see him as a diagnosis, they saw him as a person and took the time to figure out what Alex is really capable of."

Alex's mother agrees. "When Alex was little, we thought he'd never ride a bike — before we knew it, he was off and running. Same with potty training. By third grade he no longer needed an aide with him in school. Last year, he swam in the Special Olympics — his list of accomplishments goes on and on," she says. "We didn't lower the bar for him, but we did understand when he couldn't clear it."

ADMI is committed to educating the community when it comes to children with developmental disabilities. "When these kids get overwhelmed, they often react in ways that are atypical," Ms. Hosler explains. "ADMI teaches businesses, like restaurants, how to be welcoming and safe. They work with medical staff, too, so simple procedures, like blood draws, can go more smoothly."

ADMI also sponsors events tailored to meet the needs of kids who are easily overwhelmed by sensory stimulation. Sensory-friendly screenings at the Campus Theatre in Lewisburg keep the house lights on and the sound low. Special trips for kids and their

families have also been arranged to family-fun sites like Clyde Peeling's Reptiland in Allenwood and Hoopla's arcade in Muncy.

"Families are a big part of what makes ADMI so successful. It's a two-way street with us," explains Dr. Challman. "We have a group of parents who give ADMI advice, and Alex's parents are very much involved. He's a terrific young man from a wonderful family. We're all very proud of his accomplishments."

*"It's my dream
that a cure can
be found for
this condition
— if not in my
lifetime, then
in Alex's."*

— Ted Hosler



4 SITES THAT CATER TO KIDS

With access to outdoor recreation, top-notch pediatric care, cultural venues and other community resources, central Pennsylvania is a great place to raise kids. Among the many exceptional child-centric assets are a few standouts, including Everyone's Playground™ in Selinsgrove and Geisinger Janet Weis Children's Hospital in Danville.

BY LISA Z. LEIGHTON



BLOOMSBURG CHILDREN'S MUSEUM

Although nearly 35 years old, the locally beloved Bloomsburg Children's Museum continues to evolve, always adding fun, educational events like water play days, international food days, Star Wars-themed events and pop-up crop swaps — to name just a few of the many special happenings. The more than 25 permanent hands-on exhibits allow kids to explore ancient Egypt, play dress-up, learn about coal mining or Hula-Hoop and try yoga in the exercise room.

Located at 2 W. Seventh St. in Bloomsburg, the museum's mission is to enrich young lives by fostering a love of learning, rooted in fun activities.

Admission is \$6.50 per person, ages 1 year and older. More information is available at The-Childrens-Museum.org.





FRITZ HEINEMANN

GEISINGER JANET WEIS CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL

When a child faces a serious health issue, nothing is more important than access to world-class medical care. For the past 25 years, families in central Pennsylvania have turned to Geisinger Janet Weis Children's Hospital, a national leader in pediatric healthcare.

The hospital — part of the Geisinger care network that has served local communities since 1915 — provides expertise in more than 30 medical and surgical disciplines including neonatal illness, life-threatening critical illness, traumatic injuries, neurologic disorders, cancer, diabetes, gastrointestinal disease, infectious diseases, heart and lung disorders and genetic disorders.

Supported by the Children's Miracle Network at Geisinger, Geisinger Janet Weis Children's Hospital cares for children from birth through adolescence. The staff also helps family members through the challenges and stress that accompany a critical illness. Patients and siblings have access to child life specialists who are specially trained to answer questions in age-appropriate ways, to help make the hospital environment feel less intimidating. And the nearby Ronald McDonald House is a home away from home for families of hospitalized children.

Learn more at geisinger.org/jwch.



EVERYONE'S PLAYGROUND

Every child deserves a chance to play in the fresh air, having fun with other kids and their family members. That's the driving belief behind the recent construction of Everyone's Playground™, located at the East Penn Township Recreation Complex in Selinsgrove.

The 9,600-square-foot, all-inclusive playground — the first of its kind in Pennsylvania — features 15 pieces of recreational and therapeutic equipment for people of all ages and abilities, including kids and caregivers who use wheelchairs or who are accompanied by service animals. The equipment, developed by Lewisburg-based Playworld, is designed to create opportunities for family fun and foster friendships among those with and without physical limitations.

The park is the result of a collaborative effort that included PlayPower Inc., Playworld and the Andy Russell Charitable Foundation Advisory Council, which coordinated the \$475,000 project. Evangelical Community Hospital and Geisinger are major sponsors of the playground, which opened in July.

Learn more on Facebook at All Inclusive Playground, Selinsgrove, PA.



EMILY PAINE/BUCKNELL UNIVERSITY

LEWISBURG CHILDREN'S MUSEUM

When the Lewisburg Area High School moved to a new location, the old building on the community's main street needed a new purpose. Spotting an opportunity, two local women dreamed up a plan to use part of the structure — in a way that would continue its tradition as a home for education.

Cofounded by Abby Gulden-Luthi and Erin Jablonski, the Lewisburg Children's Museum is all about educational, inclusive play geared toward children 12 and under. Along with exploring a space and science center, healing plush friends in the teddy bear clinic or "practice shopping" in a mini-grocery store, kids can take music, language and art classes. And there's a birthday party room, too.

The museum is located at 815 Market St. in Lewisburg. Admission is \$8 per person for ages 1 year and older. Learn more at LewisburgChildrensMuseum.org.

What kind of insurance finds you
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