

PA HEALTH

ISSUE 14, Fall 2022 • Free

YOUR GUIDE TO FITNESS & WELL-BEING

Enjoying life to the fullest

How a small device gave
a Selinsgrove woman
her freedom



**THE SAFE, SIMPLE AND
STRANGE TRANSPLANT
FOR GUT HEALTH**

**RELIEF FOR THOSE PESKY
PHYSICAL PROBLEMS**

**THE WAYS YOUR WORLD
SHAPES YOUR WELLNESS**

Find us online:
geisinger.org/magazine

WELCOME

Have an amazing health story to share? We'd love to hear it. And maybe we'll feature it in an upcoming edition. Send us a note: pahealth@geisinger.edu



The air is crisp and cooling. Leaves are becoming brilliant. Bonfires are crackling. After a hot, dry summer, fall is finally here!

Kick the season off with this fun fact: There are more bacteria cells in your body than human cells. And that's a good thing.

In this edition of *PA Health*, we're looking at the gut microbiome and its effect on you. Plus, we share a savory recipe that will help keep your good bacteria in balance.

You'll also meet a woman whose overactive bladder controlled her life for years — until a simple but effective procedure gave her a new sense of freedom.

Of course, not every health condition is quite that serious. When you have something like a nagging cough or twisted ankle, do you know where to go? The ER isn't always the answer, so we've included some tips that will steer you to the proper place.

Staying healthy can even be fun. Check out Geisinger's new project, Zing, which makes it easy to keep good health top of mind, every day. We've included a challenge, too, to get you started.

I hope you enjoy this edition of *PA Health*, and I wish you and your family a healthy and happy autumn.

Jaewon Ryu, MD, JD
President and CEO
Geisinger

On the cover: Christina Myers of Selinsgrove, Pa., found relief from an overactive bladder that interfered with daily life. Photo by Mark Dastrup

PA HEALTH M a g a z i n e

**Chief Marketing Officer/
Executive Editor**
DON STANZIANO

**Vice President of
System Marketing**
JEFF BEAN

**Director of
Content Marketing**
KAYE SPECTOR

Contributing Writers
KIMBERLY ADLER-MORELLI
PAULA FRANKEN
BETH KASZUBA

Managing Editor
JESSICA MARTIN

Photography
MARK DASTRUP
VICTORIA TUREL-WIKTOR

Designer
DAN STIGLER

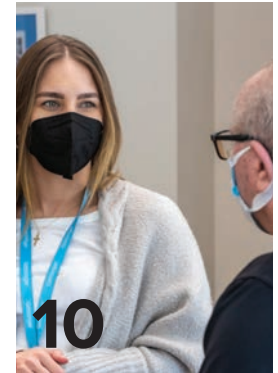
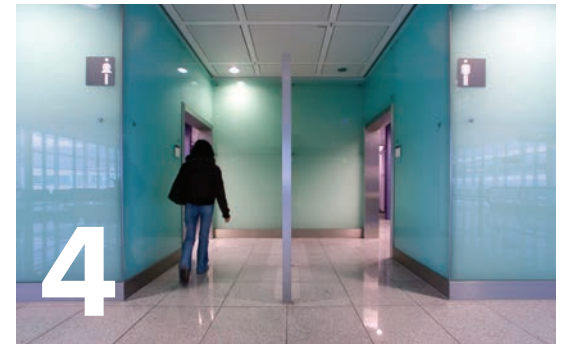
Want *PA Health* to come to you? It's free! Subscribe online at [geisinger.org/magazine](https://www.geisinger.org/magazine) or scan the QR code.



Geisinger

CONTENTS

- 4 Making No. 1 a lower priority**
After treatment for overactive bladder, Christina Myers' focus has changed from the bathroom to her work, her sleep and her life.
- 6 Life's little hiccups**
Are hiccups just an annoyance or a sign of something else?
- 8 Where to find care**
Is a backache worth an ER visit? (Spoiler: Not usually.) Know where to find medical help for everyday issues.
- 10 Health beyond the hospital**
Sometimes life can make it tricky to stay healthy. Whether you need a lift or help with the bills, you have options.
- 12 The bacteria that have your back**
Tiny microbes in your gut have a huge impact on your whole body. So keeping them strong is essential.
- 14 Fermented (and flavorful) foods**
Boost those good bacteria with this delectable recipe.



Get in the Zing of things

Everyone knows they should live a healthy lifestyle. But what exactly should you do? And how often should you do it?

Geisinger's Zing project answers these questions with an easy-to-follow formula you can use to start living a healthier life.

Aim for these goals every day:

- 5 servings of fruit and vegetables
- 4 positive affirmations
- 3 belly laughs
- 2 hours or less of recreational screen time
- 1 hour of outdoor activity
- 0 sugar-sweetened beverages

Get Zing-ing now! Join our challenge on page 7. If you complete it and send us your name and address, we'll send you a small reward for taking charge of your health.

Snap a photo of your completed card and send it to pahealth@geisinger.edu, or mail it to Zing Challenge, 100 N. Academy Ave., Danville, PA 17822-4020. You can also post it to Facebook and tag Geisinger!

Need to

Being proactive with overactive bladder

By Kimberly Adler-Morelli



Christina Myers of Selinsgrove, a 45-year-old nursing director at an assisted living facility, knows how to help people whose medical conditions impact their day-to-day activities. And she can empathize, having been diagnosed with overactive bladder in her teens. “I just thought it was something that I was going to have to live with for the rest of my life,” she says.

▶ Watch Christina Myers’ story in her own words: [geisinger.org/christina](https://www.geisinger.org/christina)



Ms. Myers had to urinate three or four times an hour at times. “I couldn’t travel anywhere without knowing where all the bathrooms were. I got up to pee five or six times a night. It was awful,” she says. “People really didn’t understand. They would tell me to drink less fluids. But it didn’t make a difference.”

Over the years, doctors had prescribed medication, which can help some people. But nothing seemed to help Ms. Myers.

Treatment brings relief at last

When you have an overactive bladder, you feel an urgent need to urinate — even when your bladder isn’t full. Symptoms can include bladder spasms and incontinence, as well as frequent urination.

Steps to treating an overactive bladder include:

1. Making changes to behavior and diet
2. Prescribing medication
3. Surgical intervention (such as sacral nerve stimulation)

Sometimes the behavioral modification and medications don’t work, as in Ms. Myers’ case. Geisinger urogynecologist James Daucher, MD, suggested sacral nerve stimulation, otherwise known as a “bladder pacemaker,” to relieve her symptoms.

To prepare, Ms. Myers had a one-week trial period using a temporary type of stimulator outside her body. It improved her condition significantly, so she was a good candidate for the implanted version.

Dr. Daucher implanted a small device just under the skin of the upper buttock, connecting a wire to the nerves near Ms. Myers’ bladder. The device regulates faulty electrical signals between the bladder and the brain. She can increase or decrease the stimulation with a small remote.

Dr. Daucher has been performing this procedure for 15 years and is among the top 10% of implanters in the country. He says what’s important to him is his patients’ quality of life.

“With overactive bladder, little senses are perceived as big senses,” he explains. “People with the disorder may urinate up to 20 times a day. The data from sacral nerve stimulation therapy show a 60% improvement, on average, which is far better than improvements with medications.”

Some people may not see as big of an improvement as they’d hoped with the implant, but adding medication into the mix can boost the impact.

For Ms. Myers, it was a life-changer

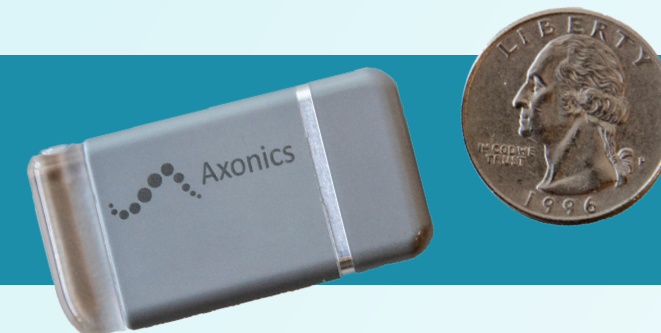
The surgery was quick and minimally invasive. Ms. Myers was back home the same day and recovered easily using ice and a little Tylenol® to help manage the pain. Her only regret? That she didn’t learn about sacral nerve stimulation years ago.

“I have my life back,” Ms. Myers says. “I sleep through the night now. I can travel without having to stop or know where every gas station is or carry a portable toilet with me. I feel like I live a normal life now. I just want people to know there’s help.”

It might be embarrassing to talk to your doctor about symptoms of overactive bladder, but if you’re having them, be sure to ask for help. Left untreated, symptoms can worsen over time. And tell your doctor if they’re affecting your daily life and mental and emotional health, too.

So if you’d rather be on the go than always going, you’re in luck. Treatment can help.

As shown in the size comparison at left, the implanted sacral nerve stimulator isn’t much bigger than a quarter!



Geisinger is the leading medical center in Pennsylvania for sacral nerve stimulation. In fact, it was recently recognized as a Center of Excellence for this treatment.

Life's little hiccups

By Beth Kaszuba

They're synonymous with minor but annoying interruptions. That's because hiccups, while not usually dangerous, definitely interfere with your concentration, conversations and consumption of food and drinks.

And although anyone can get them — even babies in the womb — we don't know for certain why they happen or what, if any, purpose they might serve for our bodies.

We do know that they're basically spasms of your diaphragm. When you hiccup, your diaphragm pulls down, making you suck in air, and the space between your vocal cords closes to stop that flow. The closing vocal cords cause you to make the "hic" sound.

Hiccups might be related to low levels of carbon dioxide in the blood and irritation of the phrenic and vagus nerves, which are involved in the breathing process.

Some triggers include:

- Stress — both good (excitement) and bad (fear)
- Eating and drinking too quickly
- Eating too much
- Anxiety medications (benzodiazepines)
- Anesthesia
- Drinking alcohol

Hiccups usually go away on their own within a few hours. But according to Geisinger family medicine physician Ashley Lewis, MD, if your hiccups last for a few days, it's time to see your doctor, because they can be a symptom of an underlying medical issue. Potential related conditions range from pneumonia to cancer to pancreatitis. Prolonged bouts of hiccups are also mentally and physically exhausting, so it's best to get them checked out.

Once you've been examined, your doctor might prescribe medication that can help.

As for the hiccups that are, well, minor hiccups, you can choose from lots of home remedies. These are time-tested as opposed to scientifically proven, but you can probably find a friend or relative who will swear by any or all of them.

1. **Drink upside down.** Fill a glass with cold water, bend at the waist and put your head down. Take a few sips from the far side of the glass until your hiccups subside.
2. **Hold your breath for as long as possible,** then exhale gently. This increases the amount of carbon dioxide in your blood — and distracts you, which might help break the cycle.
3. **Eat sugar.** If sugar is safe for you, the sweet treat might help. Prefer sour to sweet? Many people drink vinegar to combat hiccups.
4. **Breathe into a paper bag.** This common way of calming down also increases your blood's carbon dioxide levels, which can help banish hiccups.
5. **Gently pull on your tongue.** Preferably not in public.

And if someone nearby notices your repeated "hics," they might step up and scare you — which could turn out to be a pleasant surprise if you're soon breathing normally again.

*The formal name for a hiccup?
"Synchronous diaphragmatic flutter,"
aka "SDF" or "singultus."*

Zoom toward better health with Zing

Geisinger's Zing project is designed to get you laughing, get you outdoors — and get you feeling good in every way. Complete at least six activities, choosing from our suggestions or making up your own. See p. 3 to find out how you can get a reward for Zing-ing. This is open to everyone — you don't need to be a Geisinger patient to participate.

- Put down your device and pick up a book before bedtime.
- Who's your funniest friend? Call them and share a laugh.
- Eat three orange fruits and vegetables today.
- Find a partner and play catch.
- Use foot or pedal power to run an errand.
- Replace a lunchtime soda with carbonated water.
- Look in the mirror and tell yourself you look amazing. (You do!)
- Write down three things you like about yourself.
 1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____
- Attempt a challenging yoga pose — bonus points if you have a good laugh while trying!
- Try a new veggie or fruit.
- Power down for a midday break and step outside.
- Eat a healthy food that begins with G, like granola, grains or grapes.

Make up your own Zing things:

- _____
- _____

Back to better

Where to find care when you're not 100%.

By Kimberly Adler-Morelli

Some medical conditions, like cancer or heart disease, need immediate and thorough treatment. But what about those irritating everyday health problems? Colds. Rashes. Earaches. Conditions like this can usually be treated at home. However, if they worsen or don't go away, it might be best to get professional treatment. So where do you go to get relief from some common pesky health issues? You have options.

The nagging cough

Most of us reach for the cough drops when we have a cough that lasts more than a day or two. That can do the trick much of the time. But what if the cough gets worse or doesn't go away?

If your cough hangs on after a week or so, it might be something a little more serious. When over-the-counter treatments aren't working and you can't sleep because you're hacking, your best bet is to make an appointment with your doctor (also called a primary care provider, or PCP).

Cough going from annoying to serious very quickly? If you can't get an appointment to see your PCP soon, try an urgent care clinic. They don't require an appointment and can treat that irritating cough and what's causing it.

Oh, my aching back!

You tried to move a heavy dresser or raked too many piles of leaves. Now your back is not happy with you. So should you treat it at home or see a doctor?

Most back pain gets better after home treatment. Use over-the-counter medications (ibuprofen or naproxen sodium) and heat, and keep moving as much as you can tolerate.

But if you still have pain after a few weeks and it's not improving, see your PCP. You may have a bigger problem than just a strain. Your doctor can try other treatments and get you on the mend.

Sometimes back pain is serious and needs immediate attention. Get care right away if the pain is severe and caused by a fall or injury. Try an urgent care clinic or even an emergency room if the pain is unbearable.

Feeling the burn

At the gym, feeling the burn is great. In the bathroom? Not so much. A burning sensation when you pee — and having to go constantly — probably means a urinary tract infection, or UTI. Can this be treated at home? Yes and no. A doctor can prescribe antibiotics to knock out those burn-inducing bacteria. But you can make yourself a little more comfortable while you're scheduling an appointment.

Some things you can do to ease a UTI:

- Drink plenty of water
- Avoid acidic drinks, like coffee, alcohol and citrus-based beverages
- Use a hot water bottle or heating pad on your abdomen to relieve the pain

Over-the-counter medications can also help with the burning and urgency.

You may think you have your UTI under control with home treatment, but it's best to see your doctor. Left untreated, the infection could come back and possibly damage your kidneys or lead to sepsis, a serious infection that can be life-threatening.

There's no need to go to the ER for a urinary tract infection. Make that appointment with your doctor, or visit an urgent care clinic, and you'll be feeling better soon. A virtual visit to your PCP or urgent care works, too. The provider can prescribe medications just like at an in-person visit — and you don't even have to get off the couch.

Is it a UTI or something else? Check out the article on overactive bladder on p. 4.

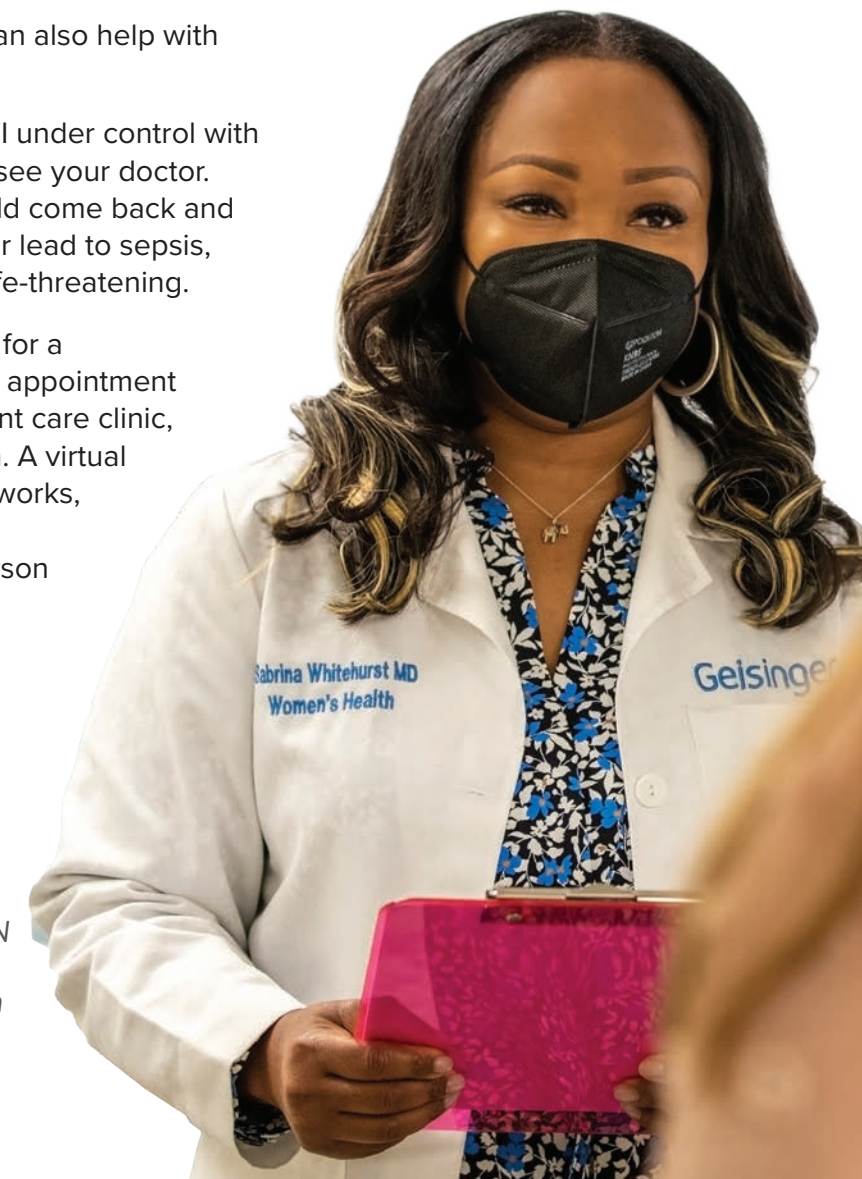
Sabrina Whitehurst, MD, an OB-GYN and director of women's health for Geisinger's western region, talks with a patient.

Trust your body

Your PCP can treat most common conditions, but if your body tells you to get care quickly, urgent and convenient care clinics are the way to go. Save the ER for true emergencies, like chest pains, trouble breathing and serious injury.

UTI, STD, unexplained bleeding or early pregnancy issues? The team at Women's Walk-In Care at Geisinger Medical Center in Danville is here for you.

No appointment needed. Call 866-932-0623 or visit [geisinger.org/walkin](https://www.geisinger.org/walkin) to find out more.



What impacts your health?

Just look around.

By Beth Kaszuba

Maybe you need a ride to the doctor's office but can't find one. Or your childcare fell through. Or you're having trouble paying for nutritious food.

Any and all of these factors, which aren't technically "medical," can impact your health.

In fact, things like access to basic resources or the condition of your home environment (called "social determinants of health") play a role in lifespan, birth weights, mental health — and the list goes on.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention identifies five main social determinants of health:

- Access to quality healthcare
- Access to quality education
- Social and community "context," which includes things like conditions where you work, whether you face discrimination and how involved you are in your community
- Your economic stability
- Your "built environment," which includes the quality of your housing and the air you breathe, your access to healthy food and your local crime rate

Because all these factors affect your health, Geisinger started screening for social needs in 2021. The optional pre-visit questionnaire asks patients about access to food, transportation, housing and other similar potential challenges to good health.

The results?

So far, more than 150,000 people have completed the screening. Of those, 21% asked for help with finding local resources.

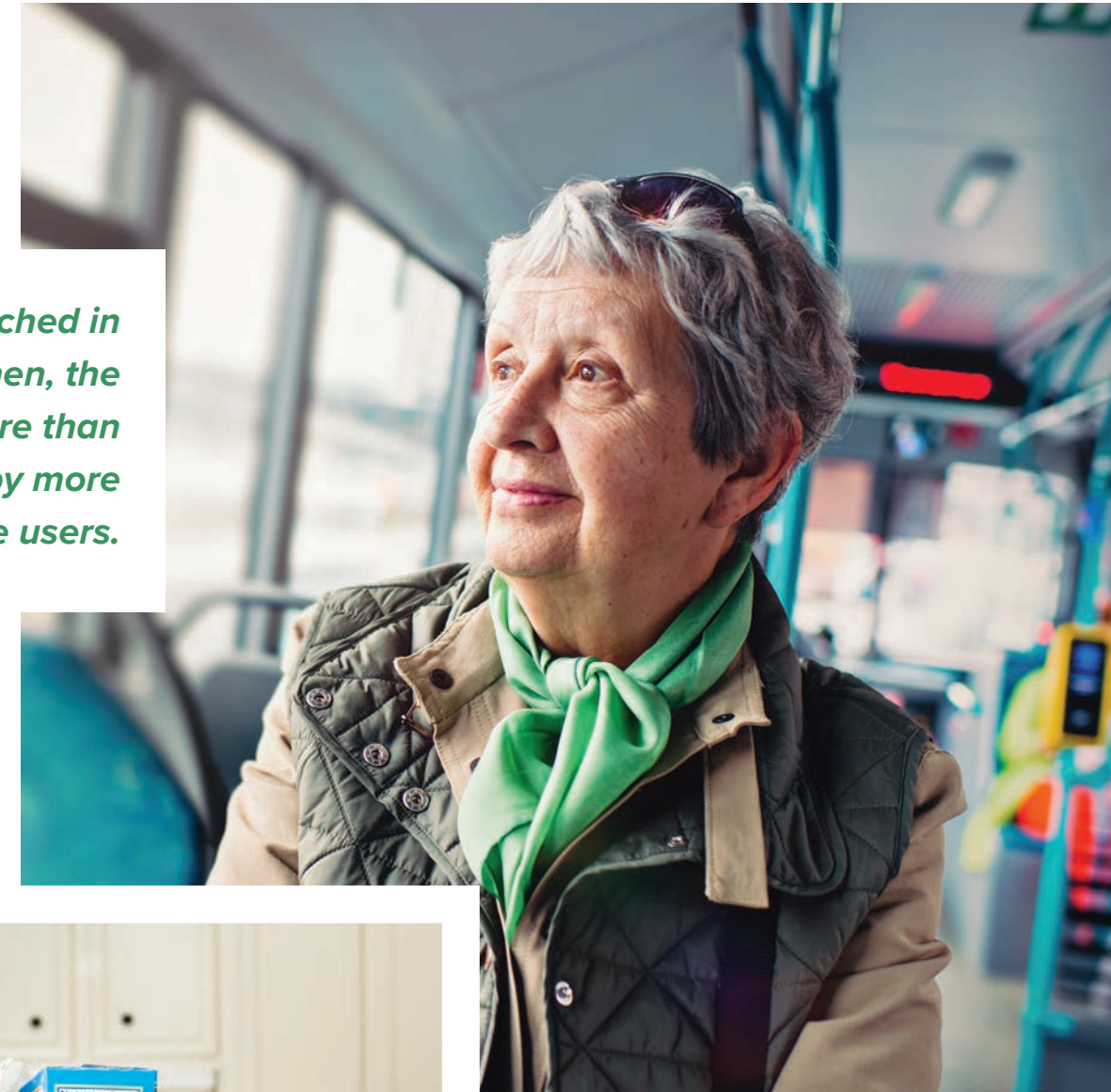
Fortunately, support is readily available through neighborlypa.org, Geisinger's social care platform.

Neighborly connects care providers, patients and the general public with more than 16,000 free and reduced-cost programs and services based in Pennsylvania and more than 540,000 nationwide.

If you need help, don't wait for your next doctor's appointment. Head straight to Neighborly. And when you do have a scheduled Geisinger visit, take the screening and talk to your care team, too.

Finding the resources and support you need won't just make your life easier. It could also boost your overall health.

Neighborly launched in March 2020. Since then, the site has recorded more than 100,000 searches by more than 16,000 unique users.





A healthy gut microbiome means a healthier you

By Paula Franken

Learning that trillions of bacteria, viruses and fungi live in your intestinal tract might make you just a little bit queasy. But it shouldn't. These little creatures play a big role in keeping you healthy.

The microbes in your intestines are referred to collectively as the gut microbiome. There are as many as 1,000 different species of bacteria in there — some are crucial for maintaining good health, while others cause disease. So it's important to make sure the good bacteria in your gut outweigh the bad. How? By eating a diet that supports microbiome diversity. It should include:

- **Fiber-rich foods:** Legumes, beans and fruits
- **Fermented foods:** Yogurt, sauerkraut, kimchi and kefir
- **Prebiotic foods:** Artichokes, bananas, asparagus, oats and apples
- **Polyphenols:** Plant compounds found in green tea, dark chocolate, whole grains, olive oil and red wine

Artificial sweeteners stimulate the growth of bad bacteria and can lead to gut dysbiosis — an imbalance of healthy and unhealthy microbes. It's a good idea to limit them or avoid them completely.

Gut dysbiosis has been linked to intestinal diseases such as irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) and inflammatory bowel disease (IBD). Eating yogurt and taking probiotic supplements that contain *Bifidobacteria* and *Lactobacilli* can help reduce symptoms by introducing more good bacteria into the system.



It makes sense that the gut microbiome would affect your digestive health. But studies show it affects your heart, brain and immune system health, too. And a healthy gut biome can even help control your blood sugar and weight.

The poop on fecal transplants

Antibiotics kill good bacteria along with the bad. You may need them occasionally to fight infection — and in most cases, eating a little yogurt when you do will help protect your microbiome.

But sometimes, antibiotics kill off too many good bacteria, allowing bad bacteria called *Clostridium difficile* to take over. And too much *C. diff* leads to fever, diarrhea and cramping. It can be fatal for people with a chronic condition or weak immune system.

Just like a bone marrow transplant infuses your body with healthy cells to replace those that aren't working right, fecal transplantation can reverse the effects of a depleted microbiome. It involves collecting feces (aka poop) from a healthy adult donor who:

- Has not taken antibiotics in the past six months
- Has a strong immune system
- Is not at risk for infectious diseases
- Has been carefully screened for:
 - Gastrointestinal disorders such as IBS and IBD
 - Hepatitis
 - HIV
 - Syphilis
 - Intestinal parasites
 - *C. difficile*

The healthy fecal matter is introduced into the digestive tract of the person with *C. diff*. The good bacteria grow, eventually outnumbering the unhealthy microbes that were causing disease. It's an effective and entirely medicine-free solution to a potentially serious condition.

But how is fecal transplantation done?

If you've been on the receiving end of a colonoscopy, the process is similar. The prep is the same and the scope is guided through your colon. But as it's withdrawn, a solution containing donor feces is deposited. Other approaches involve a capsule that can be swallowed or taken as an enema.

Here in Pennsylvania, fecal transplantation is routinely performed at major healthcare systems, says Geisinger gastroenterologist Amitpal Johal, MD. However, due to the COVID pandemic, it's been restricted to hospitalized patients at Geisinger who meet certain criteria.

Could fecal transplantation help with other conditions? So far, scientific evidence supports using it to combat *C. diff*, but researchers are looking into whether it might have benefits for things as diverse as IBD, autism and obesity.

But avoiding the need for a fecal transplant in the first place is the best bet for your body. Keep your gut microbiome as healthy as possible by eating right, avoiding artificial sweeteners and only taking antibiotics when absolutely necessary.

Trillions of little critters living in your gut are depending on you — as much as you're depending on them!



It's alive! (with health benefits)

By Paula Franken

Good bacteria do wonders for your health — and yogurt is full of them. Also known as probiotics, the living bacteria in yogurt help keep your digestive system healthy by altering your gut microbiome, lowering inflammation throughout your body, boosting your immune system and protecting you from a range of diseases.

Other foods with these healthful qualities include kimchi, sauerkraut and kombucha. But the beauty of yogurt is you can eat it alone or use it as an ingredient in everything from smoothies and marinades to salad dressings and dessert. Something for everyone in the family. Even the kids!

Greek-style flank steak with tangy yogurt sauce

Ingredients

- 1 beef flank steak (12 ounces)

For marinade:

- ¼ cup lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 2 teaspoons fresh oregano, rinsed, dried and chopped (or ½ teaspoon dried)
- 1 tablespoon garlic, minced (about 2–3 cloves)

For yogurt sauce:

- 1 cup cucumber, peeled, seeded and chopped
- 1 cup nonfat plain yogurt
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon fresh dill, rinsed, dried and chopped (or 1 teaspoon dried)
- 1 tablespoon garlic, minced (about 2–3 cloves)
- ½ teaspoon salt

Directions:

1. For the marinade, combine lemon juice, olive oil, oregano and garlic in a large bowl.
2. Lay steak in a flat container with sides and pour marinade over the steak. Let the steak marinate for at least 20 minutes or up to 24 hours, turning several times.
3. Combine all the ingredients for the yogurt sauce. Set yogurt sauce aside for at least 15 minutes to blend flavors. (Sauce can be prepared up to 1 hour in advance and refrigerated.)
4. Preheat oven broiler on high temperature, with the rack 3 inches from heat source.
5. Broil steak for about 10 minutes on each side (to a minimum internal temperature of 145° F). Let cool for 5 minutes before carving.
6. Slice thinly across the grain into 12 slices (1 ounce each).
7. Serve three slices of the steak with ½ cup yogurt sauce on the side.

Tip: Try serving in a sandwich with pita bread, lettuce and tomato.

Source: healthyeating.nhlbi.nih.gov



Curious about other fermented foods? They're found in cultures (pun intended) worldwide. So stimulate those taste buds with some tempeh, miso or kefir.

Geisinger

M.C. 40-20
100 N. Academy Ave.
Danville, PA 17822

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Lucky find?

If you picked up this copy of *PA Health* in a hospital or clinic, why not subscribe? Have health and wellness delivered free to your mailbox or inbox.

geisinger.org/magazine

CONVENIENTCARE



Because you want to feel better fast.

Not feeling well? Don't have an appointment? No problem. Just walk into any **ConvenientCare**. We treat minor injuries and illnesses for patients 12 months and older, including:

- Allergies
- Cold/flu/fever
- Cuts/scrapes/abrasions
- Insect bites/tick removal
- Minor lacerations
- Rashes
- Sinus, ear, urinary, respiratory and other infections
- Sore throats
- Sprains and strains

Visit geisinger.org/urgent to find a location near you and save your spot online.

Geisinger

A mask is still required when you come to Geisinger. Thanks for protecting our patients. Learn more: geisinger.org/safe

Safety