

# Inspiring women

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# Letter *from* Franciscan

## Hello!

Crisp air and cooler temperatures are finally here! After quite a warm summer, we are ready to welcome the colder air with open arms. The colors of the world around us are changing into vibrant oranges and yellows, and we are so here for it!

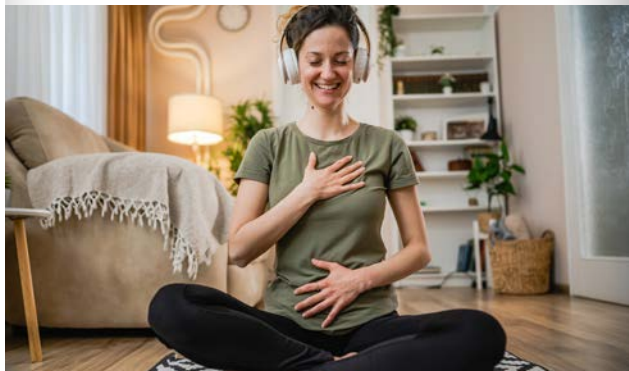
This quarter we're covering a multitude of topics, from phone addiction to an entrepreneurial spirit not even cancer can stop. Take a step away from your busy day with this issue as we dive into how our modern world is enveloped in our tiny pocket computers. It's great to have all that you need at the press of a button, but could too much of a good thing be bad?

We are honored to share the story of Kim Becker and her husband, Michael—a journey of entrepreneurship, cancer and God. Seeing the way Kim worked through all that was thrown at her in life is truly inspiring and a testament to what our faith can do for us!

Then, join us as we dive into the world of pelvic health. We understand it can be a difficult thing to gauge your pelvic floor health. So in this issue, we've got all the answers for you from Mackenzie Rush, a pelvic health physical therapist. Join her as she helps us understand how best to keep our pelvic floor healthy in any stage of life.

So here's to the closing of a great year. We hope this issue of Inspiring Women will bring comfort and joy to each of you and your families. We pray it helps build you up to give you the strength you need to be the incredible woman that God designed you to be.

Looking for more inspiring stories? Join us on Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest and YouTube at InspiringWomenFH.



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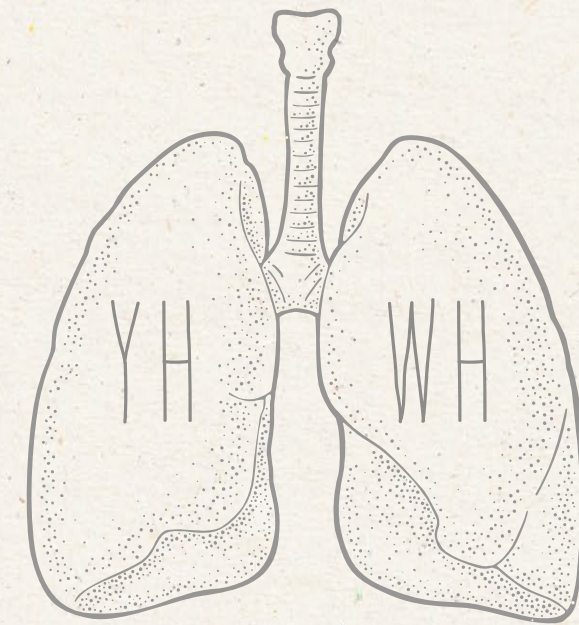
### A Toast to Perfection

*Harmonious wine pairings for a memorable holiday dinner*

## Yahweh: *The Breath of Life*

"Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being."

*Genesis 2:7 NIV*



When Moses asked what God's name was He responded, "Yahweh." In the original Hebrew, it didn't have vowels; those were inserted later during translation. It was just "YHWH." Translated from the original Hebrew, it means, "I Am" and is recognized as the most intimate name for God.

If you take the original spelling—YHWH—separate it and make those sounds by themselves, it sounds like breathing. Try it out: YH as you inhale and WH as you exhale. God is literally the breath that keeps us alive. Genesis 2:7 tells us that He breathed the breath of life into Adam. That breath is carried on in each one of us. When we were born, the first thing we did was gasp for air, and the last thing that will leave us before death is that same breath.

Every moment of our day, we are breathing. We breathe quicker when we are excited or scared, and we breathe long and slow when we are trying to relax. When we are tired, we take a deep breath in the form of a yawn to re-energize ourselves. Take a moment to meditate on the fact that God is literally the breath in our lungs.

Each breath is a gift. A gift from God, the most intimate part of Him.



CONFESSIONS OF A  
**phone addict**

Why you need to put that thing down

Smartphone usage has become so intertwined with our everyday lives, it's almost impossible to function in society without one. If you're a college student, your campus logins are probably secured through your phone. If you're an office worker, your professional accounts are likely linked to your device. And that's just the tip of the average smartphone-usage iceberg. Most people's phones have become their personal television

set for watching entertainment, their portable console for playing video games and their all-encompassing hub for consuming social media content. According to a 2021 survey, the average person spends five to six hours per day on their smartphone, and that number is rising even higher for the younger generations who have grown up with these devices.

There's a great case to be made, however, for limiting smartphone usage as much as possible. Here are some negative side effects of sustained smartphone usage.

**Bluelight exposure**

Screens emit a frequency of light called blue light. In itself, this wavelength of light isn't bad (it's naturally produced by the sun in much greater amounts than you receive from your smart-phone), but our bodies are designed to expect it only during the day. Nightly scrolling through social media may be negatively affecting your sleep and causing eye strain.

**Arthritis and carpal tunnel**

Cases of these painful chronic conditions have soared among young people ever since smart-phones appeared on the market. Constant tapping and scrolling on these devices can wreak havoc on your hands in the long term.

**Pinched nerves and spinal damage**

Your head weighs about as much as a bowling ball, and the muscles in your neck weren't made to support it tilted at a sharp angle for hours on end. That's exactly what smartphone usage en-tails, and the long-term effects are not something you want to live with.

**Dopamine dependency**

Perhaps the most insidious issue with smart-phones is the allure of stimulation they offer. Our brains absolutely love the instant gratification that streaming websites and social media provide. Research suggests that people's attention spans today are much shorter than they were just a few decades ago, and all fingers point toward smart-phone over-indulgence as the culprit.

Female college students spend  
**10 hours a day on their phones.**

**66%**  
of smartphone users are addicted to their phones.

**88%**

of smartphone owners use their phone while driving.

66% of Americans check their phones up to  
**160 times daily.**

It's time to take a more conscious approach to your smartphone. Old habits are hard to shake, so here are some tips for easing off your device.

**Timekeeping/screen time apps**

These are available on both the Apple and Android app stores. In their simplest forms, these apps keep tabs on how much time you spend in front of your phone on a daily basis. Just seeing the hard numbers behind your everyday smart-phone usage can help you cultivate awareness and forge healthier habits.

**Smartphone-free evening hours**

Some people use this strategy to clear their heads after work and sleep better at night. Pick a time in the evening—ideally an hour or two before bed—when the phone goes on the charger and away from your attention.

**Digital “detox” days**

These have become a rising trend in recent years. Once a month, select a day or two when you set the phone aside and live your life screen-free. The science has yet to be settled on the exact benefits to your brain from this practice, but many people report feeling fresher and more focused after a “detox.”



# PELVIC HEALTH

## ASK AN EXPERT .....

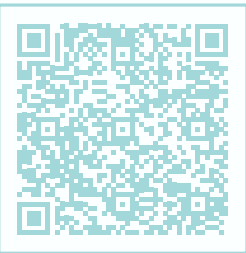


Mackenzie Rush, PT, DPT

Pelvic Health Physical  
Therapist

.....  
Wish your doctor was on speed dial? We talked with some experts at Franciscan Health to answer your most pressing questions. This is what they had to say!

FIND A  
FRANCISCAN DOC



1. My pre-teen is showing signs of puberty. Is there anything I should look out for concerning her pelvic health?

Issues surrounding your daughter's menstrual cycle can help signal other health issues. See a healthcare provider if your child has not yet started her period by 15 years of age, has severe period cramps, experiences pain with tampon insertion or wearing, has periods that occur more frequently than 21 days or less often than every 45 days or she is requiring pad and tampon changes every one to two hours.

- .....  
2. What age is normal for my daughter to start her period?

Periods typically begin between the ages of 11-14 and most commonly start at age 12. There is a wide range of what is considered "normal" and this is because many factors influence when a period begins.

- .....  
3. How old does my daughter need to be to use a tampon or menstrual cup?

As long as it is comfortable, any age is acceptable for using these products. Make sure you explain the dangers of Toxic Shock Syndrome. If forgetting to change a tampon out could be an issue for your daughter, maybe a menstrual cup/disc is a better option.



Have questions you'd like to see answered in future issues? Visit [inspiringwomen.org/ask-a-doc](https://inspiringwomen.org/ask-a-doc) or scan the QR and submit them today!



# BACK OR NECK PAIN? FIND RELIEF

Back or neck pain can get in the way of life. Our specialists can help find the right path for relief.



MEET OUR BACK &  
SPINE SPECIALISTS



# Menstruation Memoirs

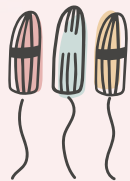
Period woes have been haunting women forever. Whether you leaked right through your white pants during your high school years or you couldn't swim at your friend's pool party in middle school, it's safe to say every woman has had a traumatic experience with her period. Before disposable products were available, rags had to be washed out after use. We have all heard the stories of women in biblical times being shunned during menstruation because they were seen as unclean.

Before you think that this information doesn't apply to you because you are heading into menopause or are already beyond it, think again. Your kids might have already been through it, but what about your grandchildren? The tools that are available now are the best that they have ever been. Keep reading for information on our favorite tried and true period products!



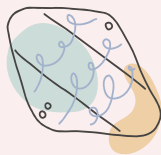
## MENSTRUAL CUP

This product has been out for a while, but it can be very intimidating. It is a silicone cup that is inserted and catches any liquid.



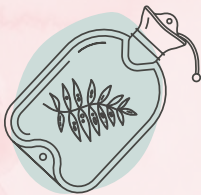
## ORGANIC TAMPONS

You can find these anywhere that sells regular tampons. We let so many toxins and chemicals into our body on a daily basis. This is one easy way to avoid introducing unnecessary toxins to yourself.



## WASHABLE PADS

Most women are turned off by the thought of having to launder absorbent underwear or pads, but it isn't nearly as unsanitary or difficult as you may think. Pre-rinse them and wash in cold water—that's it!



## HEATING PAD

This is probably not news to most of you, but heating pads can make a world of difference with menstrual cramps or period back pain. You don't need anything fancy either. You can purchase an electrical heating pad, a microwavable heating pad or just fill a wool sock with rice and microwave it!



## PERIOD UNDERWEAR

EVERY woman needs at least one pair of these. They are an absolute game changer. Every pre-teen and teenage girl should have a back-up pair of these in their backpack or locker. These are incredible for pregnancy, postpartum and forever after you have kids to catch small leaks! They come in a ton of sizes and various levels of absorbency.



## FLEX DISC

This is a newer product, but it is revolutionary for period care and products. The disc is self-emptying—yes, you read that right. You put it in when your period starts and when you use the restroom it is designed to empty itself. No mess. These are available in reusable silicone or disposables which last 12 hours.



## MY FIRST PERIOD KIT:

Have a preteen ready to start her period? Here are some musthaves to always keep with her!

- LEGGINGS
- PADS
- PERIOD UNDERWEAR
- MINTS
- IBUPROFEN
- AN ENCOURAGING STICKER OR NOTE!

# From First Foods TO FAST FOODS

A guide to eating on the run with kids of every age



Lacrosse practice in thirty minutes? In the pickup line and remembering you forgot to start the slow cooker this morning? Finishing up errands, and your toddler is screeching for fries? Whether you're shuttling one kiddo to after-school activities or a carload of famished teens to a choir concert, eating on the run can be just another long day in the hectic schedule of your minivan.

Healthy, kid-friendly snacks keep energy levels up and prevent busy days from becoming meltdown central. Good-for-you treats boost metabolism, help burn calories and keep kids from becoming cranky—no one wants that, right? Whether you have a toddler or teen, here are a few ways to encourage positive eating habits even in the busiest of households.

**Mixed nuts** For older kids, nuts are a protein-packed snack and a great grab-and-go choice. Varieties without flavoring or added salt are the healthiest, yet your kids may be more inclined to eat them if accompanied by dried fruit or chocolate chips.

**Yogurt** If you have access to a small cooler, single-serve yogurts pack a massive portion of protein in a small package. If you can stick with Greek, unsweetened versions, that's 15 grams of protein goodness in a low-sugar, low-fat snack!

**Cheesy popcorn** That's definitely not a typo. Popcorn is an excellent source of fiber and, when not dripping in movie-theater butter, is low in calories. A little parmesan sprinkled on top is oh-so-good. If you can air pop a batch ahead of time, even better!

**String cheese** Fun to peel and perfectly portable, string cheese has eight grams of protein in each serving. Although processed, it's a favorite with nutritionists, moms and also kids who love fun-to-peel, portable snacks.

**Whole-grain protein bars** Not all protein bars are created equally. You may see "protein" on the label, but that doesn't mean it is the healthiest bar to reach for. Choose ingredients that are low in sugar and include more protein than carbs.

**Low-fat chocolate milk** Chocolate milk is gaining a big reputation as a recovery drink of choice in the fitness world. It's delicious, high in protein and—for goodness sake—it's chocolate milk, people! Low-fat versions reduce caloric intake without sacrificing the protein needed to help build muscle.

**H2O** Stock your car with bottled water and snacks that can withstand a little time in the car. Drinking water can help stave off hunger, quench thirst and may just hold everyone over until they get home. Be mindful of temperature fluctuations, not letting bottles become too hot or icy.

**When it must be fast food** Fast food is better than no food. If you need to grab something quickly, choose deli-style restaurant chains. Order a sub on whole-wheat bread. Stay away from mayo-laden tuna salad and opt instead for more veggies. Stop by the supermarket and pick up a small tray of fresh fruit or veggies and hummus. Although tacos and double burgers are delicious, healthier choices are better when you're feeding your crew on the run.



# The Beauty in *The Struggle*

Kim Becker's Story of Faith,  
Cancer and Calling

**C**ancer. The very word strikes a chord of panic and distress. Loss and suffering. Fear and struggle.

Growing up as a spunky midwestern girl with aspirations the size of Texas, I never dreamt that my career and creativity would both one day come to revolve around this dreaded disease. Nor did I ever think that I, myself, would have to battle it to save my own life.

But you know what? On both accounts, I'm grateful. I thank God for the way He has woven my life's thread with cancer (and severe illness in general). I thank Him for the shadows that He's cast across my path. I'm sure you're thinking, Thank God for cancer? Are you crazy? Well, yes! I am crazy, but let me explain.

## *Just a small town girl...*

My story began in South Bend, Indiana. I was the oldest of four girls born into a loving family. My parents both held TWO jobs, always. They were as hard-working as they come with an infectious work ethic. Despite how much time they spent on the clock, it never felt like they were absent in our lives. They made each of my sisters and I always feel so special.

The women in my family were the best influences any girl could hope for. My mom was involved in everything we did. Softball, 4-H, pom-pom squad—she was always there cheering us along. Aunt Sue would be alongside her, and Grandma Jean (always wearing her trademark red lipstick) was never too far away either. Having that network of strong, supportive women was God planting the seed for what I would eventually be called to do.



## Along the way, I met Michael:

the man I'd be wed to for 23 years, and one of the most amazing people to ever walk this planet.



Here is a video to learn more about our late Founder Michael Becker, The Man, The Myth and The Legend.

### *Livin' in a lonely world...*

Long before I heard that calling, my teenage heart was set on becoming a lawyer. I loved to argue, after all! My parents were supportive, as always. "That's great," they said, "but you're on your own" when it came to paying for law school. I didn't expect anything different. There weren't 529 savings plans back then, and the notion of working hard for what you wanted had been drilled into me from the cradle.

### *She took the midnight train goin' anywhere...*

I was working at a tanning salon at the time I was considering law school. Some of the ladies who worked with me said, "You know what? You should think about going to beauty school first. That way you could cut everybody's hair in your dorm to help pay your way through law school." It was brilliant. I could see the whole thing playing out in my head. I fell in love with the idea. So, off I went to beauty school to pave the way to my future law degree... and then I fell in love with beauty. What I had planned on being a bridge into law school quickly turned into the destination itself. Becoming a lawyer fell to the wayside (although I never lost my love for arguing), and owning a salon became my new goal.

### *Just a city boy...*

Along the way, I met Michael: the man I'd be wed to for 23 years, and one of the most amazing people to ever walk this planet. One day he said to me, "I have the perfect name for the salon. We should call it: Hello Gorgeous!" I politely informed him that was the stupidest name I'd ever heard. "No, no, it'll be great," he replied, "because every time you answer the phone you get to say, 'Hello, gorgeous!' It'll make people smile."

The idea was Michael's personality in a nutshell: upbeat, supportive and lighthearted. It was everything that made me love him as a husband, but it wasn't what I wanted for my dream salon. My heart was set on something more sophisticated.

Soon after, we opened Cheveux Professional Hair Design: my vision was for it to be the classiest salon in Indiana. French for hair, Cheveux, was the epitome of France itself. I poured everything I had into making it the bougiest salon possible. My dream was to pamper our clients beyond anything they had ever experienced. And that's what I did.

### *Some will win, and some will lose...*

Michael had been diagnosed with a rare liver disease three years into our marriage. It was slow-acting, but severe. It meant we became used to spending time in hospitals. It also meant we were used to missing holiday gatherings, leaning on friends and family for extra support and adapting work schedules to suit a strict medical regimen. Just three months after Michael's diagnosis, his mother passed away. It was a tough blow for our whole family, but we persevered. I think it was God's way of preparing us for the calling that He would soon reveal to me.

Over the next decade, despite Michael's diagnosis, our lives revolved around Cheveux. We were blessed with plenty of success throughout those years, but something about the business always felt off to me—something I could never quite place. Even though the salon was more successful than we could have ever imagined, there was something missing. We had seventeen stylists and packed bookings every day, yet it felt empty.

### *Their shadows searching in the night...*

One day, the answer struck me like a bolt of lightning sent by God. I heard God's call. Michael was driving us home when I looked at him from the passenger seat and said, "I know what we need to do. We need to have a mobile day spa that caters to women fighting cancer. We need to have this beautiful, elegant palace on wheels that'll show up just a few feet from their doors and treat them like queens during a time when they don't feel very special." Michael just shook his head with disbelief. He knew all too well how hard it was to launch and build up a new business. So naturally, what I said next made all the color drain from his face.

"We're going to do it free of charge."

### *Workin' hard to get my fill...*

I realized Hello Gorgeous! wasn't the name meant for the salon. It was meant for this. Afterall, it perfectly suited the idea: making a woman feel special, supported and beautiful at a time when she needed it most.

It took some convincing to win Michael over to the idea, but he eventually became the organization's most enthusiastic supporter.

Down the road, even as his disease worsened, he continued to answer the phone from his hospital bed with a giant smile on his face. He'd greet our callers with a "Hello, gorgeous!" so enthusiastic, nobody hearing his voice on the phone would ever dream that he had IVs, tubes and wires hooked up to his failing body.

Before Michael reached the point of being bedridden, he had plenty of strength to help me with the monumental task of starting Hello Gorgeous! I always say that God should have chosen two people with marketing degrees from Harvard to do what He called Michael and me to do. Instead, He picked a salon owner and a man with a degree in Pre-Columbian archeology... Yes, seriously. *As the saying goes:*

God doesn't call the equipped.  
*He equips the called.*

Michael was great at finding resources for getting the idea off the ground—books on writing grants and guides on starting a nonprofit. But the best piece of advice came from Millard Fuller, the co-founder of Habitat for Humanity. He told us to forget our funding concerns and "just start."

"There are women that need this service now," he said, "and they don't care if you do it in an alley over a garbage can. You just need to start." So we did. Not with the palace on wheels I'd envisioned, but from the salon we already had and with whatever connections and donations we could get our hands on.

### *Up and down the boulevard...*

In 2006, we began working out of Cheveux and other local salons with donated brushes, wigs and beauty supplies. Word of mouth got around, and women going through cancer treatments were nominated by their loved ones to receive our services. We would roll out a red carpet and they'd show up to a surprise day in the salon.



The transformations were incredible. Women would come in with shoulders slumped, hands clutching onto bags they feared they might throw up in. They'd leave with shoulders back and heads held high, with the confidence of a runway model.

It didn't take long to know the idea was a hit. Eventually, my beauty palace on wheels came to fruition. In 2010, we were able to tour all of Indiana with our mobile day spa. During that trip, we touched so many lives and learned so many things about health, struggle and what it truly means to battle cancer as a woman. I later compiled many of those moving experiences in my book: *Hello Gorgeous!: A Journey of Love, Faith and Hope*.

### ***For a smile they can share the night...***

It was great to make so many incredible women feel special. And yet, the women fighting cancer that I hadn't touched were weighing heavy on my heart. Over 800,000 women are diagnosed with cancer in the United States every year. How could we reach more of them? As with all things, God revealed a little more of His vision in my head to give the answer.

While on tour, we developed a salon training program so other business owners could offer people the Hello Gorgeous! experience, multiplying its impact. We taught volunteer stylists how to work with people who had compromised immune systems and made deals with manufacturers to help stock our new affiliates with supplies.

Soon, participants poured in from all over the country. Before COVID hit and shook things up, Hello Gorgeous! had 33 affiliate locations in 15 different states from Maryland to California. Today, many of those salons are still giving free monthly makeovers to cancer patients, and our organization is hard at work building our affiliate network back up.

### ***Some are born to sing the blues...***

I wish I could tell you the story ends there, and that Michael and I—plus the rest of our fabulous team—went on to run Hello Gorgeous! happily ever after. Unfortunately, God had other plans. Michael's condition continued to worsen over the years. In 2017, the Lord took him back home.

Michael had always said to me, "When my time comes, I want to use up every ounce of everything that I have. I want to go sliding into home base with absolutely nothing left and say, 'that was awesome!'" I believe with all my heart he did just that. Today, Hello Gorgeous! lives on as his legacy. The phrase is even written on his headstone so that people walking through the cemetery might see it and smile during a time when they need it the most.

My husband's death wasn't unexpected. For years we had known it was coming, and so I had plenty of time to make peace with the fact I would one day lose him. I wasn't angry at God for taking Michael from me—not for one second. On the contrary, I was grateful He had given me 23 bliss-filled years with my soulmate. Three years later, my faith would be tested yet again. God decided it was my turn to be diagnosed with cancer.

### ***Don't stop believing...***

When my husband died, I really tried to instill into our son that life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you react. Attitude is everything. I always told him, "Your dad was an amazing man, but he would want us to go on." With my diagnosis, that advice was put to the ultimate test.

I am happy to say that, thanks to my past experiences with cancer patients, my vast rock-solid support network and the growth mindset that I'd cultivated through Hello Gorgeous!, I was able to sail through my battle with cancer unscathed. Even better, I was able to do it my way.

When it came time for the surgeons to operate on my tumor, I knew that I needed to hand over control to God in a way that made me feel good too. So I requested that as I was put under by the anesthesiologist that Journey's "Don't Stop Believin'" be blaring in the operating room. I wanted everybody belting it out! Nobody can hear that song without having their mood lifted, and I wanted everyone in their best spirits for the occasion. It was the last thing I heard as I drifted out of consciousness on the operating table. Because that's the way that I wanted to do it. By God's grace, that surgery was the only treatment I had to endure.

### ***Hold on to that feeling...***

Today, I share that same sentiment with the women we serve at Hello Gorgeous! It's your battle and your journey, so do it your way. Want to shave your head and wear a wig? Great! Not your thing? That's great too! However you handle your struggle, we'll be with you every step of the way. And so will everybody that you love.

To me, that's the beauty inherent in struggle. That's why God challenges us with Goliath-sized problems like cancer: because every challenge is a chance for us to learn, to appreciate the people who support us, to let His strength shine through us and—if He wills it—to come out on the other side knowing that we're capable of overcoming in our own special way.

Sometimes we just have to shoot a rock with our slingshot to defeat our enemies. Sometimes the battle is a lot harder and it takes a lot longer than we could've imagined. No matter your journey, God has your back, and that is all a girl can really ask for.



Hello Gorgeous! is supported by donations and the generosity of its donors. Scan the QR Code to learn more and to support their cause.

*"...you are fearfully and wonderfully made" psalm 139:14*

GLUTEN-FREE

# Cheesy Bacon Butternut Squash

A warm, hearty side dish complete with cheese and bacon? Count us in! This is the perfect comfort food for you and yours this fall.

PREP: 10 minutes • COOK: 35 minutes • SERVES: 10

## Ingredients

- 2 lb. butternut squash, peeled and cut into 1-inch pieces
- 2 Tb. olive oil
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 Tb. thyme, chopped
- 1/2 lb. bacon, chopped
- 1 1/2 cups mozzarella cheese, shredded
- 1/2 cup Parmesan cheese, grated
- Kosher salt
- Ground black pepper
- Parsley, chopped

## Directions

- 1 | **PREHEAT** oven to 425°F.
- 2 | **IN A LARGE BAKING DISH**, toss butternut squash with olive oil, garlic, thyme, salt and pepper.
- 3 | **TOP WITH BACON** and bake for 20 to 25 minutes or until the squash is tender and the bacon is cooked through.
- 4 | **REMOVE FROM OVEN** and top with cheeses. Bake for another 5 to 10 minutes or until the cheese is melted.
- 5 | **GARNISH** with parsley and serve warm.



### We want to hear from you!

Inspiring Women would love to feature your favorite recipes in future issues! Visit [inspiringwomen.org/share-recipe](https://inspiringwomen.org/share-recipe) or scan the QR code to submit your favorite tried and true dishes!



Feeling burnt out? Are you tired of constantly taking care of others and having no time for yourself?

Women often feel immense pressure while juggling the daily responsibilities of being an employee, a mother, a wife, a friend or a daughter. It's important that they take care of themselves amidst the craziness of everyday life.

### Focus on You

There are many ways women can prioritize their mental health; learning that self-care is a necessity is the first step. Self-care can be any activity that strengthens you mentally, physically, emotionally, intellectually or spiritually. In order to make time for self-care, you have to set healthy boundaries and know that you do not always have to say "yes," especially when you're feeling drained. Although it may seem hard, creating boundaries sets a clear guideline for how much you are willing to handle before needing time for yourself. One way to set healthy boundaries is to plan around yourself. Schedule time for yourself first and for others second, creating a well-balanced lifestyle.

### What Affects Women's Mental Health?

Around one in five women live with depression or anxiety. There are many reasons these two conditions develop, but they are more common in women because women often carry the weight of being caretakers. This kind of responsibility can lead to stress, anxiety and isolation. Furthermore, women may internalize feelings that can lead to depression and self-harm, different from men who may act out their feelings through disruptive behaviors. Hormonal imbalances or changes like menopause or perinatal depression may also affect women's mental health and wellbeing. As you navigate everyday life, it's important to understand that seeking help and focusing on self-care is not taboo. What matters most is acknowledging when you need to seek help and taking time to focus on yourself. Without taking care of yourself, how will you be able to take care of others?

### Next Steps

In order to improve your mental wellbeing, set self-care goals. One way to efficiently set a goal is by using the SMART approach. SMART is an acronym for making specific, measurable, action-oriented, relevant and timely goals. SMART goals can help you achieve meaningful steps toward your self-care aspirations.

# Self-Care CHECKLIST

Give yourself some stand-out resolutions and goals by accomplishing a self-care activity every week or two. Have no fear, a list is here to get you started and give you an opportunity to personalize each self-care activity that interests you.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Start a gratitude journal           | <input type="checkbox"/> Try new essential oils                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Decorate your workspace             | <input type="checkbox"/> Do something creative                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Spring clean                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Get your nails done                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Take a hike                         | <input type="checkbox"/> Spend some time in the sun               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hydrate your body                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Work out with your friends               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Call a loved one                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Create a vision board                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Practice meditation and mindfulness | <input type="checkbox"/> Prioritize napping                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Catch some z's                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Try coloring books                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cook yourself a nice meal           | <input type="checkbox"/> Take up a new skill                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Plan a date night for one           | <input type="checkbox"/> Switch up your routine                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Practice breathing exercises        | <input type="checkbox"/> Buy yourself flowers                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Read your Bible                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Do something that makes you laugh        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Listen to a meaningful podcast      | <input type="checkbox"/> Stretch to relieve tension               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Read a new book                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Spend time with someone who inspires you |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Do affirmations in the morning      | <input type="checkbox"/> Do something nice for someone            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Take a pilates or yoga class        | <input type="checkbox"/> Make a self-care kit                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Unplug from technology              | <input type="checkbox"/> Bake a sweet treat                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Make a bucket list                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Plant some greenery                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> List what you're grateful for       | <input type="checkbox"/> Sleep in on the weekends                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Volunteer around your community     | <input type="checkbox"/> Take yourself to dinner                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Take an Epsom salt bath             | <input type="checkbox"/> Declutter your living or work space      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Snuggle up and watch a movie        | <input type="checkbox"/> Join a club or new group                 |

## From Kegels to Confidence:

# Caring for Pelvic Health at Every Age

Written by Guest Author:

Mackenzie Rush, PT, DPT

Pelvic Health Physical Therapist

Franciscan Health Stones Crossing

Everyone has a pelvic floor; from potty-training toddlers to teenagers, middle-aged women to seniors. Throughout any normal lifespan, people commonly experience bladder and bowel dysfunctions as well as pelvic pain. However, common does not mean normal. Your aunt Cindy may have said that everyone leaks when they sneeze after becoming a mom, but that simply isn't true, and more importantly, it doesn't have to be true for you! Oftentimes, these symptoms are dismissed as "normal" even though they often indicate an issue with the pelvic floor. Below you'll find information on these symptoms and what to do if you or someone you know is experiencing them.

### Childhood

On average, one in 20 visits to a pediatrician is going to be in regard to a child's constipation. For children, constipation often shows itself in a myriad of different ways: abdominal pain; less than three bowel movements a week; hard, lumpy stools; painful bowel movements and incomplete emptying can be some of the signs that your child may be experiencing constipation. Ideally, children (approximately 10 and under) should be having at least three bowel movements a week, with soft and formed stools that take less than five minutes to complete. If your child is struggling in this area, there are several options to try at home to improve their symptoms.

#### Toileting Technique

Make sure that your child has a stool that they can place their feet on while they are sitting on the toilet. It should be high enough to where their knees are higher than their hips. Knees should be relaxed outward, and they should breathe as if they are blowing up a balloon in order to empty. Sometimes an actual balloon to blow up is helpful until they get the hang of it!

#### The "ILU" Massage

This technique is nick-named the "I Love You" massage because of the direction of the kneading. Use light to medium pressure over your child's abdomen. This can be performed over the top of clothing or with lotion directly on their skin.

- **I:** On your child's belly, knead from the bottom of their ribcage downward to their left hip bone repeatedly for one minute.
- **L:** Then, beginning just below their right ribcage, knead across to their left ribcage and then downwards to their left hip bone repeatedly for one minute.
- **U:** Lastly, start at the top of their right hip bone and knead upward to just below their right rib cage, then across to their left rib cage and then downward to just above their left hip bone, also for one minute.

#### Dietary Changes

Fiber and water are often the magic ingredients to healthy bowel movements! Children should be getting around 25 grams of fiber a day; that is a lot of fiber! For example: 25 grams of fiber is five cups of broccoli, three and a half cups of blackberries or around six cups of spinach. That's not just a lot of fruits and vegetables, that's a lot of food for a child to consume! Raw foods like these are best. However, it is helpful to supplement with high-fiber cereals, wraps or a fiber gummy to ensure they have the appropriate daily intake. For children four to eight years old, it is recommended that they consume eight ounces of water multiplied by their years of age. So, for an eight-year-old, that would be 64 ounces of plain water a day. Involve your child in picking out a water bottle for them to use. Often, it will tell you the number of ounces somewhere on the bottle so that you know how many refills they will need to reach their water goal.

If these changes aren't working for your child, it is an excellent idea for them to be seen by their pediatrician or your family physician to make a plan on next steps. Ask about pelvic health physical therapy as an option for conservative treatment.

### Tweens and Teens

Not being able to wear tampons due to pain or discomfort can impede participation in day-to-day activities. Swimming and sports are often the reason many girls make the switch from pads to tampons. Tampons should insert with ease and without pain; it should not hurt or feel uncomfortable when worn. If there is pain or discomfort, this can indicate pelvic floor dysfunction. However, pelvic pain can also be a symptom of many other diagnoses like endometriosis, PCOS, uterine fibroids or infection, so it is important to tell a doctor about the pain.

When tampons are uncomfortable because of pelvic floor muscles, it is typically called pelvic floor dysfunction. Pelvic health physical therapy is an excellent option for the first line of treatment. When someone feels pelvic pain or has trouble with tampon insertion, this often indicates that the muscles surrounding the vaginal vault are tight. Imagine that the pelvic floor is a bowl; the vaginal opening is at the bottom of the bowl. The pelvic floor muscles must relax for the tampon to be inserted and must maintain healthy tone (not too tight or too relaxed) to stay in the appropriate position within the vaginal vault. The tampon needs to be inserted far enough into the "bowl"

in order for the muscles to be below the bottom of the tampon. For treatment, a pelvic health physical therapist (PT) will focus on restoring normal pelvic floor muscle tone and muscle "give" or compliance. If you feel the inside of your forearm muscle at rest, this is what the pelvic floor should feel like; when you flex your forearm and the muscle tightens, this is what the pelvic floor can feel like when the muscles have high tone. If we're inserting a tampon into a high-tone pelvic floor, then it's like we're trying to stretch a muscle that is contracting which can produce pain and discomfort. To treat pelvic floor muscles with high-tone, pelvic health physical therapists will instruct their patients to use various hip and pelvis stretches to restore pelvic muscle length.

Another excellent treatment is diaphragmatic breathing. Often, we can find ourselves breathing into the upper chest and keeping our tummy tucked in all day. Contrary to what we may think, this is not good for your core muscles or the pelvic floor. When we breathe, we should be utilizing our diaphragm and allowing it to descend, leading to lower rib and abdominal expansion. The diaphragm and the pelvic floor have a synergistic relationship, meaning that they work together! During diaphragmatic breathing, the pelvic floor lowers and relaxes when breathing

in. Then, during your breath out, the pelvic floor lifts and returns to its resting position. Because of this relationship, breathing is an excellent way to improve the pelvic floor muscle length and tone.

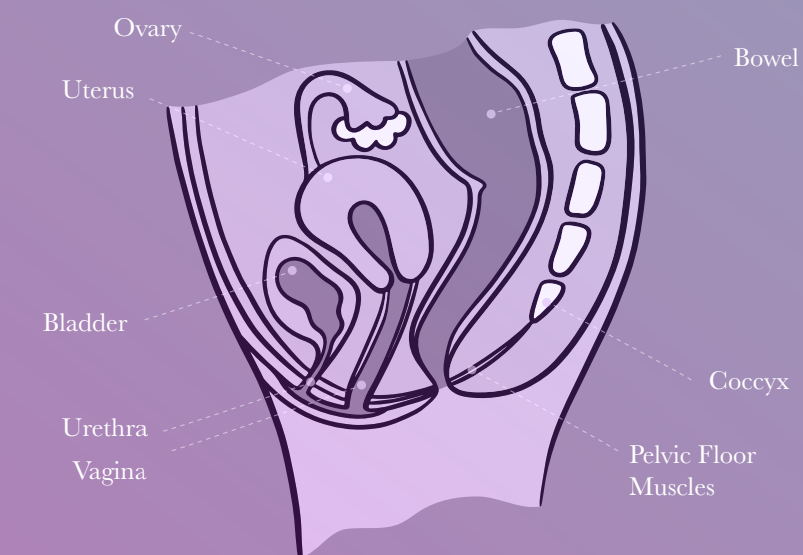
In addition to stretching and diaphragmatic breathing, vaginal dilators, also called trainers, can be helpful to improve pain or discomfort that can be experienced with tampon use. Vaginal dilators typically come in a set that progresses from very small (smaller than the size of a tampon) to large so that the muscle can improve in their elasticity and so that we can coordinate relaxation during insertion. A pelvic health physical therapist will instruct the patient through a home program that works best for the patient and show them step by step how to coordinate and breathe in such a way that they can work up to inserting a tampon pain free.

### Adulthood

Oh, the age-old problem of laughing so hard you pee, not being able to jump on a trampoline anymore or having to cross your knees when you sneeze—stress incontinence is urinary leakage that occurs because of a change in pressure within and around the bladder. Laughing, sneezing, going from a seated to standing position, jumping, running, coughing and even yelling can cause urinary leakage because of the deficits in intra-abdominal pressure management.

When the pelvic floor is working the way it is supposed to—it should contract and lift in anticipation of the change in pressure so that you don't leak. When the muscles don't squeeze, lift or even do the opposite—bulge and relax—urinary leakage is imminent. It is not normal to leak, but nearly half of all women do. It's so common that it has been normalized and even expected by women, especially after they've had a baby. So what do we do about a problem that so many women experience? Luckily, pelvic floor muscle strengthening has been shown to improve urinary leakage in 75% of women.

## Female Pelvic Anatomy



Pelvic floor muscle strengthening isn't just doing your Kegels. Pelvic floor muscles should work as part of the greater system of the core so that they can contract in anticipation of the changes in pressure just as your abdominal muscles do. So if you've been trying Kegels and you're still leaking urine, it may be because you are either contracting your muscles incorrectly or because they are not working in sync with your core muscles.

*Pelvic Health Physical Therapy*

In this targeted therapy, people learn how to coordinate, strengthen and utilize these muscles as part of the greater core system. The pelvic floor muscles are similar to other muscles in the body—they can be too tense, tight, painful, relaxed, uncoordinated or weak. Depending on the issue, your pelvic health PT can help correct the problem and guide you through improving muscle coordination, increasing strength and training the pelvic floor to work automatically with changes in intra-abdominal pressure like laughing, jumping, running, sneezing or coughing.

**Menopause**

Think of how it feels when you get out of bed, go to the bathroom or when you've been on your feet all day. Ideally how your pelvic region "feels" throughout the day remains unchanged thanks to your breath, core and pelvic floor working harmoniously together to optimize intra-abdominal pressure during your everyday tasks.

Feeling like there is something falling through the vagina, lower abdomen pressure and even low back pain are symptoms of pelvic organ prolapse. Pelvic organ prolapse, commonly referred to as "POP," means that the pelvic organs are pushing into the side wall or the top of the vaginal vault downwards with gravity because of a deficit in the support system. Typically, POP is a result of poor intra-abdominal pressure regulation over a long period of time.

There are several treatment options for POP. In pelvic health physical therapy, the focus of treatment is improving intra-abdominal pressure regulation through optimizing the hip and pelvic floor muscle length-tension relationship, improving the coordination between breathing and the pelvic floor. Pelvic health physical therapy will also provide education over toileting technique and lifting mechanics.

Hip and pelvic floor muscles should have adequate length to allow your joints to work through their full range of motion and plenty of strength to maintain optimal pelvic load transfer. This means that your muscles have to be strong enough to where the pelvic floor isn't trying to take up the slack for your bigger muscles. For example, if you have trouble with getting up from a chair, there is more pressure going through the bottom of your pelvic floor which is going to increase your risk of getting or worsening POP.

Pelvic floor muscles are supposed to work in sync with our breath, and we want to use their relationship to our advantage. Whenever performing a task that typically increases the intra-abdominal pressure, for instance, getting up from a seated position, we can exhale and squeeze the pelvic floor muscles, and train them to perform this automatically, so your pelvic floor supports your organs and your breath helps to decrease the pressure change.

Another risk factor for POP is constipation which is caused by the increase in pressure that happens during pushing and straining to complete a bowel movement—but there is another way! Toileting technique that utilizes a squatty potty, or any step stool that fits around the base of your toilet allowing your knees to be above your hips, and a forced exhale with an abdominal contraction can decrease the pelvic pressure and also decrease the risk for POP.

If you, your child or a loved one are experiencing any of these symptoms, know that there are treatment options available! These symptoms are not normal, and there are many women and children that have the same issue. Ask your primary care provider about treatment options including pelvic health physical therapy. There are qualified and experienced professionals ready to help walk you through treatment options to help restore your body's normal functions.

\*  
*There are qualified and experienced professionals ready to help walk you through treatment options to help restore your body's normal functions.*  
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# Overnight Cinnamon Apple French Toast Bake

Your visiting relatives will love waking to the sweet smell of tender cinnamon apples, soft brioche bread and gooey cream cheese filling. Prepping this breakfast the night before makes it perfect for feeding company over the holidays!

**PREP:** 2 hours • **COOK:** 20 minutes • **SERVES:** 8

## Directions

- 1 | PREHEAT** oven to 350°F. Lightly coat a 9×13 baking dish with nonstick spray.
- 2 | MELT BUTTER** in a large skillet over medium heat. Add apples and cook, stirring often, until tender, about 5 minutes.
- 3 | STIR IN** brown sugar and 1 teaspoon of cinnamon. Continue cooking until the sugar has dissolved, about 1 to 2 minutes. Let cool.
- 4 | PLACE A LAYER** of bread cubes evenly into the baking dish. Top with cream cheese and half the apple mixture in an even layer. Top with remaining bread cubes and remaining apple mixture.
- 5 | IN A LARGE BOWL**, whisk together eggs, milk, maple syrup, vanilla, salt and remaining 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon. Pour the mixture evenly over the bread cubes. Cover and place in the refrigerator for at least 2 hours or overnight.
- 6 | REMOVE** the baking dish from the refrigerator and let stand for 30 minutes.
- 7 | SPRINKLE** with pecans then place into the oven and bake, covered, for 30 minutes.
- 8 | UNCOVER** the dish and continue to bake for an additional 25 to 30 minutes or until golden brown and the center is firm.
- 9 | SPRINKLE** with powdered sugar and serve.

## Ingredients

- **3 Tb.** unsalted butter
- **3** large apples, peeled and diced
- **2 Tb.** brown sugar
- **1 1/2 tsp.** ground cinnamon, divided
- **1 loaf** brioche bread, cubed
- **8 oz.** cream cheese, cubed
- **12** large eggs, beaten
- **2 cups** whole milk
- **1/3 cup** maple syrup
- **1 tsp.** vanilla extract
- **1/2 tsp.** kosher salt
- **1/2 cup** chopped pecans
- **1 Tb.** powdered sugar

# How to Care for Someone Living with Dementia

Caring for someone with dementia is a big commitment that can be frustrating at times. With these tips, you can start out on the right foot and work to find the routines that work best for you and the person you're caring for.



### Find a Routine that Works

Routines can help someone with dementia feel more grounded. They might not remember where they are or why you're there caring for them but they will remember a small detail like when lunch is served. Their routine can give them something to focus on instead of their confusion. Every day won't be perfect, but do your best to incorporate as much structure as possible around times like meals, getting ready in the morning and preparing for bed.

### Do Activities They Enjoy

Adding some fun to your daily or weekly routines can help boost your mood and the mood of the person you're caring for. You don't have to plan out complicated trips that could become overwhelming. Instead, focus on simple joys. Their favorite movie, an art class, books or music can help relax them or even jog their memory. Keep a list of the things they enjoy so you're never at a loss for ideas.

### Eliminate as Much Stress as Possible

Stress is not good for anyone, but it's especially not healthy for dementia patients. If the person you're caring for is getting overwhelmed by a decision, try to reduce the number of choices they have. For example, give them two shirts to choose from instead of an entire closet. Distractions can also cause stress. Try to limit background noise like the TV when having conversations, as it can make it more difficult to focus. Lastly, naps can sometimes lead to confusion so try to limit them when possible.

### Plan Ahead with Safeguards

You never want someone with dementia to end up in a dangerous situation because they're confused. There are a few things you can do to help them avoid those situations. Add rails and seating to areas where falls are likely to happen (like the shower) and try to remove any throw rugs or other trip hazards. It's also possible the person you're caring for may forget they've already taken their medication for the day. Keep it locked away along with items like cleaning supplies that could be harmful to someone who is confused.

### Be Patient and Listen

You may know that the person you're caring for is forgetting things, but cutting them off while they're speaking and refusing to listen will only make everyone more stressed. It can be difficult to stay patient, but do your best to listen to their concerns and assure them of your desire to help without becoming angry. It's scary to forget things. And if words aren't doing the trick, try showing them something familiar like family pictures to help them stay calm. Treat them with the compassion you would want for yourself, and let them keep as much independence as possible.

### Take Time to Recharge

Caring for someone with dementia can be a big commitment, so it's important that you take time to care for yourself too. Lean on your support networks and try to make room in your schedule for the things you enjoy so you don't burn out. And remember, no one is a perfect caregiver—you will make mistakes. Learn from them and keep doing your best.

# PLANTS THAT CLEAN YOUR HOME

Plants enliven a room with pleasant colors and aromas, but they're more than mere decorations—they also help filter out harmful chemicals, mold spores and bacteria from your living space. Here are five helpful houseplants that can improve the atmosphere of your home in more ways than one.

**1. IVY** | Easy to care for and highly adaptable to different conditions, evergreen ivy is some of the best air-filtering flora that money can buy. Keep it out of direct sunlight to help it really thrive and, in turn, enjoy more breathable air for you and your guests.

**2. PEACE LILY** | Lingering chemicals from paint, carpets and smoking can wage a silent war on your lungs. Luckily, this lily comes in peace to clear the air. It's a resilient species that's great at communicating when it needs water (just keep watch for drooping leaves), making it a great choice for households with hectic schedules.

**3. BAMBOO PALM** | This hardy, fast-growing plant is a living humidifier for your space. It prefers spaces with circulating air and can grow up to six feet in height, so make sure you place it somewhere with lots of room for growth!

**4. ALOE VERA** | Aloe is a highly useful plant that likes lots of sun. The vitamin-rich gel found inside its leaves can be used as a natural sunburn treatment, skin moisturizer and more. It's an organic air filter and medicine cabinet all in one!

**5. WEEPING FIG** | This plant can be a little trickier to care for than others on the list, but what you will reap is well worth the effort. It's one of the best species for filtering toxins that cling to furniture and carpets, and it adds a gorgeous accent to any room. Keep it in a brightly lit room (but not directly in the sunlight) with a stable temperature.

Owning houseplants is a low maintenance way to easily liven up any space. Aren't sure where to start? Most all-purpose stores carry houseplants, just read the label thoroughly to make sure that you know how to take care of it! There are lots of apps available that can map out a watering and pruning schedule for you. When in doubt, ask a friend! Houseplants are easy to propagate and share with each other, too!



# FAMILY PLANNING

## ASK AN EXPERT .....



Marilyn Haywood,  
RN, CFCP  
Manager, Natural Family  
Planning

.....  
Wish your doctor was on speed dial? We talked with some experts at Franciscan Health to answer your most pressing questions. This is what they had to say!

FIND A  
FRANCISCAN DOC



1. **Why should I come to the Franciscan FertilityCare Center?**

We teach women to truly care for and appreciate their fertility. This includes teaching them about their cycles and how to track them using the Creighton Model FertilityCare™ System. This identifies any underlying conditions that may be present, which are then addressed by our specially trained physicians.

2. **I thought Creighton was a method of Natural Family Planning and is only used by couples. Can single women use it too?**

Absolutely! It can be used by all females from teenage years up to menopause, whether single or married. Couples use it to achieve or avoid a pregnancy, but all females can use it to monitor their cycle health. Many problems can be identified through charting, including PCOS, endometriosis, infertility and risk for miscarriage. If problems are identified, the patient is referred to one of our specially trained physicians for diagnosis and treatment.

3. **Can your FertilityCare Center help with infertility or miscarriage(s)?**

We can! Unlike IVF or IUI, our approach is to discover the root cause of both conditions. Why is this occurring? Our team helps women attain healthier cycles, which increases the likelihood of achieving a pregnancy and carrying that pregnancy to term.



Have questions you'd like to see answered in future issues? Visit [inspiringwomen.org/ask-a-doc](https://inspiringwomen.org/ask-a-doc) or scan the QR and submit them today!



# Breast Cancer Care That's Specialized For You



Schedule a Consultation  
OR a Second Opinion!

No two breast cancers are the same, and no two treatment plans should be either. Advancements in diagnosis and treatment make it possible for our specialists to pinpoint your exact cancer and build a personalized plan with you. When you choose Franciscan Health, you can always expect unwavering compassion, dedication from your entire multidisciplinary team, the latest technology and innovation and years of experience resulting in improved outcomes.

Breast cancer treatment looks different for everyone, because it should be specialized – just for you.





# 5 HOLIDAY MYTHS THAT STEAL YOUR JOY

Say “*bah humbug*” to these holiday hoaxes

Why is the “most wonderful time of the year” also the most stressful? It’s no secret that the holiday season comes with added expenses and anxieties, but your family’s festivities don’t have to be tainted by falsities and folklore. Check out these myth-busting holiday facts and stay merry this holiday season.

1

## WEIGHT GAIN IS UNAVOIDABLE.

The holidays are known for indulgent food, family dinners and countless sweets to snack on. However, this exorbitant eating can be a source of stress for many, especially those watching their waistlines. While there are plenty of weight management strategies, such as portion control or opting for healthier alternatives, you shouldn’t feel the need to restrict your diet choices. In fact, research shows that the average American only gains about a pound during the holiday season (a pound that won’t even stick around once you return to your normal eating habits). So, instead of fearing the scale and warding off your favorite desserts, listen to your body and eat what you please.

2

## YOU’RE GUARANTEED TO BREAK THE BANK.

During the holidays, watching your wallet can become just as anxiety-inducing as watching your waistline. Though the average American spends more money during the holiday season than any other time of the year, there are several budgeting strategies you can try to make your money fa-la-la-last. Setting a spending limit and collecting coupons are two great ways to keep some change in your pocket without sacrificing the holiday spirit.

3

## POINSETTIAS ARE POISONOUS.

Nothing encapsulates the holidays quite like poinsettias. With bold, red leaves that ward off wintertime weariness, poinsettias would be the perfect decoration if only they weren’t poisonous, posing a threat to young children and pets. Well, contrary to popular belief, poinsettias are not lethal—in fact, they aren’t even poisonous. According to recent research, poinsettias contain a sap that can cause mild irritation if ingested but has no long-term detrimental effects. So, as you decorate your home this year, be sure to bring out the poinsettia shrub for all to enjoy.

4

## YOU MUST FOLLOW TRADITIONS.

The holiday season brings with it an abundance of expectations—eating a specific meal, seeing certain family members or bringing someone special home, to name a few. While traditions can make the holidays feel more exciting, they also add the unnecessary pressure of getting everything “right,” which can ultimately spoil your fun. Instead of sticking to strict traditions, try mixing things up this holiday season. Order takeout, stay in with the kids and unwrap gifts when you feel like it—not when you feel like you should.

5

## YOU NEED SOMEONE TO KISS UNDER THE MISTLETOE.

If every cheesy holiday movie couple shares a kiss under the mistletoe, you have to find someone too, right? While there’s always pressure during the holidays to couple up, there is so much more to celebrate during the season of giving than having a significant other. Instead of focusing on finding love, spend time with family and friends—they’re your original loved ones after all!



# PCOS:

## Four Letters That Impact More Than *Four Million Women*

If you are struggling to get pregnant, have painful and irregular periods, notice an increasing amount of facial hair or experience acne breakouts like never before, you may be dealing with polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS).

### THE CAUSE

PCOS is a common health issue caused by an imbalance of reproductive hormones. Women's bodies create the female hormones estrogen and progesterone and replicate small amounts of androgen—a male hormone, like testosterone. When the body produces too much androgen, the hormone deviation between female and male hormones creates a problem within the ovaries. The out-of-balance hormone levels can cause ovaries to multiply in size and harbor cysts. Between 5% and 10% of women in their

reproductive years have PCOS. Affecting close to five million women in the United States alone, it is usually diagnosed when women are in their 20s and 30s. Although this issue can occur at any age after puberty, most women are diagnosed after seeing their physician when struggling to become pregnant. PCOS affects women of all backgrounds and ethnicities, yet the risks are higher when overweight or if a hereditary thread among immediate family members exists.



# THE SYMPTOMS

Although PCOS has multiple causes and a variety of symptoms, some of the signs to look for include:

**Irregular cycle** Yes, everyone’s periods are different. If your cycle is unpredictable or you do not have one for several months in a row, consider those signals to see your doctor.

**Heavy bleeding** Periods that are extremely heavy happen when the lining of the uterus builds up over a longer amount of time and can be an indicator of PCOS.

**Adult acne** Just when you thought you left breakouts behind in high school, right? When hormones are out of balance, your skin may be telling part of the story. If you are in your 20s or 30s and experiencing bouts of acne that are not cleared up with a dedicated cleansing routine or simple skin treatment, PCOS may be the cause.

**Weight gain** If you have unexplainably gained weight or can’t seem to keep weight at even levels despite a healthy lifestyle, it may be an indicator of PCOS. It is not clear whether the weight change is related to the hormone disorder or the hormone disorder is triggered by weight gain.

**Changes in hair growth** From alopecia to excess hair growth, these changes may hint that PCOS is the cause. If noticeable differences accompany other symptoms, a diagnosis may be easier to pinpoint.

**Darkened skin or skin tags** If you notice unusual dark patches of skin in the creases of your neck, under your breasts or in your groin area, or the formation of skin tags (small, excess pieces of skin), these may be indicators of PCOS.

**Headaches** Along with the hormone shift, some women experience headaches and migraines. Chart how often they happen and how long they last to provide your doctor with as much information as possible.

**Struggling to conceive** PCOS prevents the ovaries from either releasing a viable egg or ovulating altogether. It is also the most common cause of infertility. If a year has passed and you have been unsuccessful in becoming pregnant, this diagnosis is one to investigate.



Between **5% and 10%** of women in their reproductive years have PCOS.

# THE TREATMENT

Part of determining whether you have PCOS includes scheduling an appointment with your doctor. Before providing a diagnosis, your physician will gather information to construct a picture of what may be going on medically. When visiting your physician, you may encounter:

- A run-through of your medical history
- Weight, blood pressure and BMI checks
- A physical and gynecological exam
- Blood work and hormone level tests
- A glucose level check to monitor insulin levels for diabetic concerns
- An ultrasound to detect ovarian cysts

Once your doctor reviews those results, it’s time to discuss if you need a PCOS treatment plan. Although there is no simple solution, if you are wanting a child, there are measures you can take to reduce your risk of further health challenges and increase the likelihood of getting pregnant. Additionally, you’ll be in better health overall. Some of the doctor-recommended treatments include:

**Weight loss** The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists have noted that four out of five women who have been diagnosed with PCOS are overweight and can ease symptoms through increasing activity and healthier eating habits. By moving more often and adding more good-for-you foods into your diet, monthly cycles are likely to get back on track and make you feel better.

**Medication** Birth control pills are one of the most prescribed medications to level a woman’s hormones. They contain controlled amounts of estrogen and progesterone, which, once in the bloodstream, stop the ovaries from producing hormones. If diabetes is determined to be the cause of your diagnosis, there are medications that treat type 2 diabetes and PCOS at the same time. If you are trying to conceive and have PCOS, ask your provider what options are available to you.

**Hair growth** Whether you want to stop hair growth or encourage it, an array of treatments are available.

**Surgery** When fertility treatment options for those with PCOS have been exhausted, surgery may help increase your chances. An ovarian drilling procedure—tiny holes made in the ovary with a heated needle or laser—can help you return to regular ovulation cycles, increasing your odds of conceiving.

PCOS has no cure, yet you can partner with your doctor to make a plan that works best for you. Leaving PCOS untreated can lead to other health challenges, such as anxiety, depression, sleep apnea, heart disease and endometrial cancer (cancer of the uterine lining). Women who do not seek treatment at the onset may have problems becoming pregnant later. Remember, regular checkups with your healthcare provider are the best way to stay one step ahead when it comes to your overall health.

# A Toast to Perfection

## Harmonious Wine Pairings for a Memorable Holiday Dinner

Picking out the perfect bottle of wine to accompany your holiday meal can be overwhelming. That wine aisle has hundreds of bottles in it, all types of names that are hard to pronounce, and how do you even begin to know what the flavor is like? If curating wine seems like an impossible task, these tips and techniques may give you just the insight you need to pick a bottle that will perfectly compliment your meal and leave your guests' palates unbelievably satisfied.

### The Whites

**Pinot Grigio** - Pinot grigio is a light, dry and crisp white wine with airy fruit flavors. This acidic wine's main flavors are apple, lemon, lime, pear and white nectarine. Lighter foods pair well with pinot grigio such as light pasta, appetizers, seafood, soft cheeses and salads.

**Sauvignon Blanc** - Sauvignon blanc is also a fruity, acidic white wine with green apple, passion fruit, peach and gooseberry flavors. This wine balances the salt in seafood well and compliments grilled vegetables, sushi, salad and goat cheese.

**Chardonnay** - Chardonnay is a medium to full-bodied, dry white wine. It features a wide range of flavors from pineapple to lemon with hints of vanilla and cream, making this wine a beautiful match for many foods including chicken, pork, seafood, vegetables, cheese, creamy dishes, spices and herbs.

**White Zinfandel** - (This one is actually pink!) This airy wine is light-bodied and low in tannins and acidity. The alcohol content is lower by volume and it is typically dry to moderately sweet. Flavors of red berries, melon and citrus compliment the undertones of nutmeg and clove. The sweetness can have an affect on appropriate pairings, but generally chicken, pork, crab and vegetables are safe bets.

**Moscato** - This crisp white wine is known for its light and fruity sweetness. Its main flavors include orange, peach and apricot with floral notes of rose petals and elderflowers. Moscato pairs beautifully with your typical charcuterie board, curry dishes, blue cheese and spicy wings.

**Riesling** (Can be dry or sweet) - This white wine embodies fruity flavors like grapefruit, pear, peach, apricot and apple. Sweeter rieslings favor apricots and peaches more, and dry rieslings lean more toward apples and grapefruit. Dry riesling pairs perfectly with fish, seafood, poultry and pork. A semi-dry riesling, which is a little softer, will work well with lightly spiced or fruitier foods like Thai or Indian cuisine.

### The Reds

**Pinot Noir** - This low-tannin red wine is dry but embodies complex fruity flavors. The underlying flavors include mushrooms, cherry, raspberry and forest floor. It pairs very well with roasted and grilled meat, salmon, red-sauced pasta, mushrooms and soft cheeses.

**Cabernet Sauvignon** - This full-bodied red wine is high in tannins and on the dry side. The flavors reside with dark fruits such as blackcurrants, blackberries and black cherries with undertones of vanilla, tobacco, spice and bell pepper.

**Merlot** - This dry red wine is medium bodied with fruity flavors and medium tannins. Blackberry, plum, black cherry and raspberry lead the way with undertones of vanilla and mocha that follow each sip. Merlot is excellent with red meat, poultry, sweet sauces, tomato sauces and chocolate.

**Syrah** - Another dry red wine, syrah boasts a peppery and fruity flavor with a full body. This wine pairs well with rich and hearty foods such as grilled or roasted meats, game meats, barbecue, Moroccan dishes, mushrooms, hard cheeses, dark chocolate and spicy food. Be careful when pairing with spicy dishes because syrah can amplify the spice exponentially because of its high alcohol content.

**Malbec** - This dry, full-bodied red wine is known for its dark fruity flavors and smoky finish. These fruits include blackberries, black cherries and plums. Underlying flavors include leather, violet flowers, milk chocolate, cocoa powder and tobacco. Rich flavors and sauces pair well with malbec and most meats like steak, lamb, pork, dark meat poultry, salmon and game meat.

## Common Wine Terms Explained

**Body** - Wine body is defined by the weight, texture and richness of a wine. A light-bodied wine will have a smooth, feather-light mouth feel, while a full-bodied wine will give you a thicker and heavier mouth feel. See "Weight" below for more details.

**Tannins** - These are naturally occurring molecules called polyphenols. Wine tannins are extracted from grape skins, seeds and stems and can also come from oak barrels. Tannins are what give your mouth that dry, rubbing sensation. Tannins provide weight, structure, mouthfeel and texture to wine. Tannins can lower cholesterol and blood pressure while also stimulating the immune system. They provide natural antioxidants and have antimicrobial properties that can fight tooth decay.

**Acidity** - Acidity is the tartness of wine. Think about how lemons make you pucker and your jaw hurt a little, this reflects the lemon's high acidity. Acidity gives wine balance and flavor and allows you to pair it well with different foods by cutting through the richness.

**Aeration** - Aerating wine means exposing the wine to air in order to trigger oxidation and evaporation. It accelerates the evaporation of less favorable sulfites and ethanol compounds of wine, which boosts the flavor and reduces the risk of a hangover!

**Weight** - When speaking about wine, weight refers to the amount of alcohol. This is measured by talking about the body of the wine—full-bodied, medium-bodied or light-bodied. You might hear the word weighty as well, which refers to the feel in your mouth because the heavier a wine feels, the more alcohol content.

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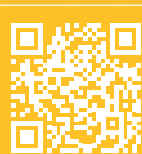
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