

Healthy Living







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MedStar St. Mary's Hospital

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Letter from the president

Dear friends,

Summer has a way of energizing us. The longer days invite movement, clarity, and progress—qualities we're embracing fully at MedStar St. Mary's Hospital.

Across our campus, that momentum is visible. We're actively planning significant renovations to our Interventional Radiology suite, that would expand access to advanced procedures often only found in larger, urban centers. It's an ambitious vision, and one we're pursuing with our patients and their outcomes in mind.

As a physician, I know that every medical decision is personal. In this issue, you'll read about two patients with different paths to healthier lives—one through weight-loss surgery, the other through medical management. Their experiences highlight the value of individualized care and thoughtful planning, not just quick fixes. Similarly, our orthopaedic team helped two patients return to the activities they love through very different surgical journeys. What unites these stories is not just the expertise behind them, but the shared goal of restoring mobility, confidence, and quality of life.

Our job isn't only to treat illness, but to improve life. That's why our work this season also includes promoting brain health, and honoring the gift of life through organ donation. These efforts reflect our belief that better health is not a destination—it's a lifelong pursuit, supported by trust, compassion, and innovation.

We are building-literally and figuratively-for the future. At the heart of it all is our commitment to delivering a care experience that feels personal, proactive, and grounded in excellence.

Thank you for walking that path with us.

Warm regards,

Mini Novello, MI

Mimi Novello, MD, MBA, FACEP President



It was a pleasure to join Delegate Matt Morgan and fellow MedStar Health leaders at our legislative reception, where we welcomed regional lawmakers for thoughtful discussion. Events like these ensure MedStar Health's voice helps shape the future of health care—advancing access, innovation, and quality care across our region.

ON THE COVER

Now pain-free after double knee surgeries, Francis Hall is back to rebuilding his motorcycle and doing what he loves—thanks to orthopaedic surgeon John Kuri II, MD.

Overcoming injury with expert orthopaedic care.

Thriving again.

Back on the pickleball court, Kimberly Fischer is excited to improve her game after recovering from ACL reconstruction surgery with orthopaedic surgeon Emmanuel Atiemo, MD.



Injuries happen when you least expect them. As Kimberly Fischer was boarding an airplane, her foot got caught and her right knee twisted at an awkward angle. It was then she heard a loud "pop" and felt a sharp pain in her knee.



"I knew something was not right from the moment I heard that pop," Kimberly, 60, of Lexington Park remembered. While she completed her flight and the pain subsided, her knee continued to feel unstable and would give out when she walked.

Turning to the expertise of **Emmanuel Atiemo, MD,** orthopaedic surgeon and sports

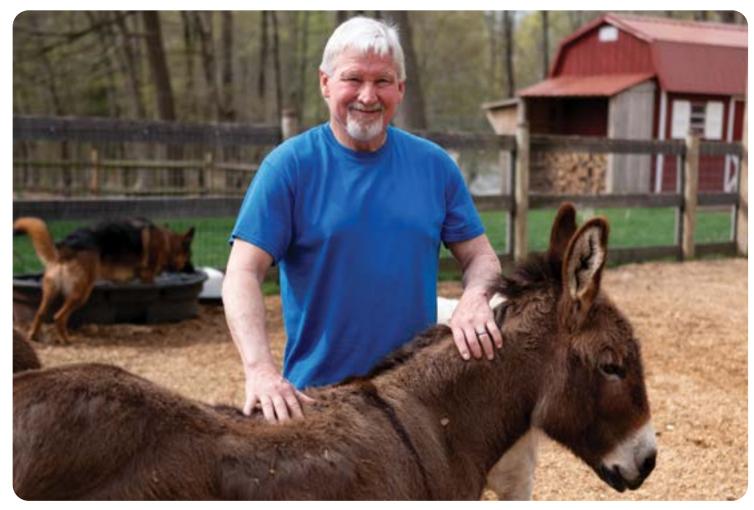
medicine specialist, Kimberly's exam and MRI revealed a torn ACL in her right knee. The ACL ligament is important for knee stability, connecting the thighbone to the shinbone.

"The need for surgical ACL reconstruction varies and is based on the individual," explained Dr. Atiemo. "For teens and people in their 20s and 30s who play competitive sports or are physically active, surgery is typically the best option to get them back to a high level of function. But, as people get older, whether to have surgery becomes a discussion of lifestyle."

With her sister being diagnosed with stage 4 lung cancer the week before her injury, Kimberly desperately wanted to be with her as she

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Orthopaedics



At home in Mechanicsville, Francis Hall enjoys time with his donkeys, horses, and loyal pup—grateful to be pain-free after double knee replacement surgery with orthopaedic surgeon John Kuri II, MD. With his mobility restored, Francis is embracing farm life, family time, and new adventures ahead.

underwent treatment. Dr. Atiemo recommended Kimberly attempt physical therapy to rehabilitate her knee instead of immediate surgery so she could help care for her sister. Despite this treatment, she continued to experience repeated shifting and instability of her knee, indicating the need for surgery to reconstruct the ACL to avoid further injury.

"Whether to proceed with or without surgery is an agreed upon decision between the physician and the patient often driven by factors such as one's age, activity goals, level of dysfunction, and health status," added Dr. Atiemo.

Time for surgery.

Following her return home, Kimberly's ACL allograft reconstruction surgery was performed in December 2023. With the allograft technique, Dr. Atiemo used a cadaver tendon, or donor tissue, to reconstruct the

torn ligament and fully restore Kimberly's range of motion.

Kimberly was more determined than ever to get through her recovery and back to life. Within five months, she not only regained her mobility, but the treatment plan also helped Kimberly meet her goal of returning to the pickleball court, an activity she had taken up shortly before her injury. "I recovered much quicker and better than I ever thought I would," she said, crediting the time she spent in rehab before the surgery for her quick recovery.

"After just a few weeks of physical therapy, my range of motion and stability had greatly improved. While I'm not an athlete by any means, being able to get back to daily activities had a major impact on my quality of life," she added. "Everyone from Dr. Atiemo and the rehabilitation team to the office staff were fantastic throughout the entire process. The doctor-patient relationship makes a huge difference."

Road-ready after knee replacement surgery.

Unlike Kimberly's knee injury, Francis Hall's knee pain was chronic and unforgiving. Climbing a flight of steps brought about excruciating pain in both knees, and Francis could no longer bend his knees to pick things up off the floor or even pivot. A mechanic and auto enthusiast from Mechanicsville, it was becoming increasingly difficult for Francis to work on cars or his favorite pastime of fixing up his motorcycle. Cortisone injections and knee braces provided little to no relief, and at 65, wear and tear, coupled with past knee injuries and arthritis, had finally taken their toll.



"My favorite thing to do is automobile mechanics, but getting down and climbing underneath cars became nearly impossible," Francis commented. "My knee pain was really slowing me down."

When Francis decided it was time for surgery, he had full confidence in orthopaedic surgeon **John Kuri, II, MD,** who performed his first knee

replacement procedure in January.

"Dr. Kuri explained every detail of what I was going to experience. Just three days after surgery, I was off the walker and pain medication and just went gangbusters," exclaimed Francis.

A comprehensive approach to knee replacement.

"A total knee replacement is an excellent procedure for pain relief, improving function and quality of life," explained Dr. Kuri. "Most patients tell us they wish they had done it sooner rather than later!"

Knee replacement surgery is performed to resurface or replace damaged knee joints to restore motion and relieve debilitating pain. Advanced techniques offer less trauma to the knee and a quicker recovery. Patients often go home the same day after surgery and gradually improve their ability to walk, exercise, and return to previous activities. Dr. Kuri added that most patients are walking at least one mile within two to three weeks post-surgery.

After completing rehabilitation on his right knee in March, Francis was feeling great, moving better than ever, and had his left knee replacement surgery with Dr. Kuri in April. "I didn't realize how much pain I was in until the right knee started feeling better. With the left knee replacement surgery, I'm looking forward to feeling 100% again."

"Patients who put in the time and effort during physical therapy and home exercises see and experience excellent results," Dr. Kuri added. "Mr. Hall did the work and is now reaping the benefits he wants for his everyday life."

With his knee pain behind him, Francis is going to school to become a school bus driver and getting his motorcycle road-ready. "I'm going to take it a little easier on my body than I did my first 60 years," he said. "I am enjoying life without being in pain."

About MedStar Orthopaedic Institute at Leonardtown

MedStar Orthopaedic Institute at Leonardtown is part of the MedStar Orthopaedic Institute, with 47 surgeons and 18 locations throughout Maryland, Washington, D.C., and Virginia. Visit MedStarHealth.org/Orthopedics for a complete listing.

Where we are located: 23503 Hollywood Rd., Ste. 101 Leonardtown, MD 20650

Call **240-434-7483** or visit MedStarHealth.org/ locations/orthopaedics-leonardtown to learn more, meet our providers, or schedule an appointment.

A full range of physical therapy and rehabilitation services can be scheduled at:

MedStar Health:
Physical Therapy at Leonardtown
23511 Hollywood Rd.
Leonardtown, MD 20650

Call **240-980-4543** or visit MedStarHealth.org/ PhysicalTherapy to schedule an appointment.

MedStar Health:
Physical Therapy at Hollywood
24035 Three Notch Rd.
Phillip J. Bean Medical Center
Hollywood, MD 20636

Call **301-373-1094** or visit MedStarHealth.org/ PhysicalTherapy to schedule an appointment.

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Investing in care that matters.

Proposed renovation aims to expand life-saving treatments.

Plans are in design to enhance Interventional Radiology (IR) services at MedStar St. Mary's Hospital through a \$3.8 million renovation of one of the IR suites. The 500-square-foot space will be equipped with the Philips



A glimpse of the Philips Azurion 7 C20, the advanced imaging technology coming soon to MedStar St. Mary's Hospital as part of our Interventional Radiology suite renovation.



"The integration of the
Azurion platform marks a
significant advancement in
our interventional radiology
capabilities," said **Moutasem Aljundi, MD,** Interventional
Radiologist at MedStar St. Mary's
Hospital. "This technology will
enhance our precision and

efficiency, allowing us to perform complex, minimally invasive procedures with greater safety. Ultimately, it means our patients can access advanced treatments locally, reducing the need for travel and improving recovery times."

Azurion 7 M20 Image Guided Therapy System, an advanced platform that integrates high-resolution imaging, real-time navigation, and seamless procedural control—empowering physicians to perform complex vascular interventions with greater accuracy and efficiency.

Benefits of the Azurion 7 M20 system include:

- Exceptional imaging quality, allowing physicians to perform very delicate procedures.
- Reduced radiation exposure for patients and staff.
- Support for a wide range of vascular and interventional procedures.
- More efficient patient care. Once completed, the renovated IR suite will ensure faster access to lifesaving procedures.

The updated suite and technology will support a wide array of minimally invasive procedures to treat vascular disease, cancer, chronic pain, and other conditions, bringing advanced care options to more patients right here in our community.

Gala to support upgrade.

With plans for the future renovation of the angiography and Interventional Radiology suite underway, fundraising efforts have also begun. The project will be funded in part by the hospital's annual Gala. All net funds from this year's **Midnight at the MedStar Gala,** to be held at the Hollywood Social Hall on Friday, Nov. 21, will support the proposed renovation and acquisition of this new technology.

Community partners and individuals who are interested in supporting the Gala and the hospital's Interventional Radiology suite upgrade may contact philanthropy@medstar.net•

A familiar face, a new role.

James Damalouji, MD, appointed chief medical officer and vice president of medical affairs.

One could say that **James Damalouji**, **MD**, has stepped into a professional role he was born to fulfill.

Continuing a family legacy of providing medical care to Southern Maryland, Dr. Damalouji became the chief medical officer and vice president of medical affairs at MedStar St. Mary's in March. During his 38-year career with the hospital, he has become well-known in the community for his compassionate care and medical expertise.

"My passion is providing quality care and patient safety for this hospital," he said. "I work to ensure the highest standard of quality, providing care to the people of St. Mary's County."

Dr. Damalouji began his career at MedStar St. Mary's in 1987 in general and vascular surgery. He transitioned to emergency medicine in 2002 and in 2023 became the director of Quality & Safety and Case Management, a role focused on improving clinical outcomes and elevating performance across key quality measures.

"Dr. Damalouji has long been a trusted physician leader and advocate for patient safety at MedStar St. Mary's," said Mimi Novello, MD, MBA, FACEP, president of MedStar St. Mary's Hospital. "His knowledge, experience, and unwavering commitment to high-quality care make him exceptionally well-suited for this next step in leadership."

Dr. Damalouji's career has given him a front-row seat to the remarkable evolution of medical care, as advancements in technology and innovation continue to enhance treatment and improve patient outcomes. "We have made tremendous advances in how we deliver patient care to the community," said Dr. Damalouji, who stresses that the state-of-the-art, minimally invasive procedures now offered at MedStar St. Mary's Hospital greatly benefit community members. "We can keep our patients here, allowing their families to avoid traveling and stay closer to home to care for their loved ones."

Dr. Damalouji also highly praises MedStar Health's strength and resilience in navigating medical crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the recent intravenous fluid shortage caused by the destruction of a manufacturing facility in North Carolina during severe hurricanes.

"It is one of the advantages of being part of MedStar Health," said Dr. Damalouji. "As a system, we were able to decrease usage of those fluids by 50% of our normal. Like a community, we come to each other's aid in emergencies."

Dr. Damalouji stresses the sense of community that has kept him at MedStar St. Mary's and continues to inspire him to care for the residents of Southern Maryland.

"I have stayed at MedStar St. Mary's because of the fellow physicians, the staff, and the care delivery is better," said Dr. Damalouji. "We work hard to keep our care patient-centered."



James Damalouji, MD, has taken a new role as the chief medical officer and vice president of medical affairs following nearly four decades at MedStar St. Mary's Hospital.

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A tale of two weight loss journeys.

How patients reclaimed their health and futures.

Bobbi Hatch and Margaret Menard's stories are about much more than just numbers on a scale. Their weight loss journeys have been about putting past struggles behind them and looking forward to a healthier future.

Bobbi's journey began in February 2023 at her heaviest weight of 336 pounds. She avoided social outings with friends, could not walk her dogs without getting short of breath, experienced joint pain, and gave up on air travel because coach seats were too small.

Health concerns fuel change.

But it was her family history of heart disease that had her truly concerned. At 39 years old, Bobbi did not want to follow the path of her many relatives. "My dad's entire side of the family had heart disease, and almost everyone had a heart attack." recalled Bobbi, who lives in Great

Mills. "It scared me. I knew I had to start taking care of myself."



She found her way to **Sameer Alrefai, MD,** director of the Minimally Invasive Robotic and Bariatric Surgery Program at MedStar St. Mary's Hospital, whose approach was unlike the many one-size-fits-all weight loss programs she had tried in the past.



After losing close to 200 pounds through gastric bypass surgery, Bobbi Hatch is embracing a new, healthier life—enjoying active days at the dog park with her energetic husky.

With a body mass index (BMI) of 56 and obesity-related health issues including pre-diabetes, high blood pressure, sleep apnea, and high cholesterol, Bobbi was considered an excellent candidate for gastric bypass surgery, which she had in December 2023. The bariatric surgical procedure was one step in her journey that also included group therapy, meal strategy training, and comprehensive nutritional counseling to help her transform her lifestyle and overall wellness.

"Each person is unique in their health and overall goals, which is why we take a very personalized approach to each patient's case," explained Dr. Alrefai. "Our weight loss program focuses not just on losing the weight but also changing a patient's relationship with food."

A different weight loss path—medication.

Medical weight loss with GLP-1 medications has become another viable option for patients who may not be candidates for surgery, who have had previous bariatric surgery, or who may want to try medical weight loss first.

Margaret Menard, a 65-year-old high school teacher from Hollywood, found continued success with medication. Having had weight loss surgery several years prior, her weight loss plateaued after knee replacement surgery. She consulted Dr. Alrefai about GLP-1 medications and, with his guidance, found the right medication and dosage. In four and a half months, Margaret lost 70 pounds. This combined approach of surgical and medical weight loss is what Dr. Alrefai calls "synergistic".

"The medication gives me a good sense of when I have eaten enough so I don't go past that point. It has been a positive tool that I will continue using to stay healthy and to keep my weight loss journey moving in the right direction," said Margaret.

Weight loss surgery vs. medical management.

The benefits and risks of each approach differ. Dr. Alrefai explained, "Bariatric surgery typically offers more dramatic results, with patients typically losing 50-80% of excess body weight and often resolving obesity-related conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, and sleep apnea."

Medical weight loss can be beneficial for those with lower BMIs, and helps control blood sugar and insulin sensitivity, which is especially important in patients with type 2 diabetes, but may cause side effects as the body gets used to the drug.

Dr. Alrefai stressed that whether a patient chooses surgery or medication, the goal is to change dietary habits and incorporate healthy lifestyle modifications for long-term success.

Thrilled with the outcomes.

Today, Margaret feels more encouraged than ever. She has increased her physical activity and works out several days a week in the high school weight room while continuing to sing in her church choir and remaining active in her community. She hopes to lose an additional 70 pounds through a combination of medication, healthier eating, and monthly follow-up appointments with Dr. Alrefai, which she said has kept her motivated and accountable.

Bobbi, too, is thrilled with her newfound health. Down close to 200 pounds since the start of her journey, she is no longer dependent on a CPAP machine for sleep apnea, walks her dogs without getting winded, and travels without limitations.

"Working with Dr. Alrefai and the entire team was fantastic," Bobbi reflected. "He gives you all the facts and options for weight loss and how they will affect your lifestyle afterward. Having the gastric sleeve surgery was one of the best decisions of my life."

Call **240-434-4088** to schedule a consultation with Dr. Alrefai. Visit <u>MedStarHealth.org/Weightloss</u> to learn more about bariatric and weight loss surgery.



With support from the bariatric program at MedStar St. Mary's Hospital, Great Mills High School teacher Margaret Menard broke through a weight-loss plateau-losing 70 additional pounds with the help of a GLP-1 medication and staying motivated to continue her journey.

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News briefs

"A" Grade from LeapFrog Safety Group

A recent report from the **Leapfrog Safety Group** highlights MedStar St. Mary's Hospital as a top performer in safety, earning an **A grade** for Spring 2025. This rating helps inform consumers about the safety and quality of healthcare facilities, empowering them to make the best choices for their care. With 11 A grades to date, MedStar St. Mary's remains committed to excellence, continuously striving to lead in high-quality, safe patient care.

Celebrating the gift of life through organ, tissue donation

MedStar St. Mary's Hospital partnered with Infinite Legacy to celebrate National Donate Life Month with a flag-raising ceremony on April 2. Donate Life Month raises awareness about the critical need for organ,



eye, and tissue donors and the importance of registering as an organ donor. Infinite Legacy is a nonprofit organ procurement organization (OPO) serving almost 10 million people in Maryland, Northern Virginia and Washington, DC. The celebration honored donors and celebrated the lives they saved. Participating in the ceremony were Mimi Novello, MD, MBA, FACEP, MedStar St. Mary's Hospital; Leesha Johnson, Infinite Legacy; Deanne Blankenship, Holly's Hearts Foundation; and Colleen Corliss, RN, BSN, Gero-B, living donor. MedStar Georgetown Transplant Institute offers the complete spectrum of care from evaluation and medical management to cutting-edge surgery and transplant procedures. The Institute is one of the highest volume organ transplant programs in the country and offers the expertise of some of the foremost U.S. transplant specialists. Call 202-444-3700 to learn more.

New security measures

MedStar Health is committed to ensuring a safe environment for patients, visitors, and our staff, which is why it has been strengthening security measures at all of its locations, including MedStar St. Mary's Hospital. Additional security officers, new uniforms, new vehicle, upgraded video surveillance equipment, a new weapons detection system, as well as expanded training and officer state licensing, are all measures that have been put in place during the past year. "These enhanced safety features reflect our unwavering commitment to providing the highest standard of care in a secure and compassionate environment," said Mimi Novello, MD, MBA, FACEP, president of MedStar St. Mary's Hospital.



Population & Community Health has a new home.

The **Population & Community Health** department, also known as Health Connections, made a spring move from the MedStar St. Mary's Hospital Outpatient Pavilion to the former Education & Simulation Center, 41550 Doctor's Crossing Road in Leonardtown. The new location will be the site of all community health classes and support groups (see page 12) and also houses MedStar St. Mary's outpatient case managers and community health advocates. Visit MedStarHealth.org/Classes for more information or call **301-475-6019**.

Summer 2025 calendar

To register for support groups or classes, call **301-475-6019** or email **msmh-populationhealth@medstar.net.**

Support groups

Health Connections at MedStar St. Mary's Hospital hosts support groups. Because no registration is required for these, please reach out using the contacts below to verify if meetings are scheduled as planned.

- **Lactation** (every Wednesday, 10 a.m. to noon)
- **Parkinson's** (second Tuesday of each month, 4:30 p.m.)
- **Stroke Survivors** (second Tuesday of each month, 1 p.m.)

Call **301-475-6019** to learn more or register.



Bariatrics

Virtual **Bariatric Support Group** meetings at 10 a.m., second Saturday of each month. Initial registration required. Call **240-434-4088**.

Breast cancer support group

Monthly, virtual. To receive an invite or learn more, please call **301-877-4673**. Visit <u>Facebook.com/groups/MedStarBreastHealthProgram</u> for support.

Cancer care support group

MedStar Georgetown Cancer Institute at MedStar St. Mary's Hospital offers a cancer care support group. For meeting times and more information, call **240-434-7247**.

Blood drives

June 20, July 25, Aug. 21, and Sept. 26 from 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., Health Connections. Registration is required through the Red Cross. Register at RedCrossBlood.org.

Ask the Experts: Quarterly Lunch and Learn

Thursday, Aug. 14, from 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m.,

Join us for lunch and a discussion with a MedStar Health expert.

New Location! Health Connections classrooms, Population & Community Health 41550 Doctor's Crossing Road, Leonardtown

No cost. Call **301-475-6019** to register.



Plan ahead: add the summer Aug. 14

Ask the Experts luncheon to your calendar now!

Community education

Take Control of Diabetes

Appointments available to meet one-on-one with a registered dietitian. A provider's order for diabetes education is required. Services may be covered by Medicare, Medicaid, and most private insurance plans. Call **301-475-6185.**

Diabetes Self-Management Class

In this four-week diabetes self-management program, participants can engage in conversations about their experience with diabetes, blood sugar monitoring, healthy eating and activity, and long-term disease management. Call **301-475-6019** to register for upcoming classes or to learn more.

Childbirth & family education

Parents-to-Be Workshop

In-person classes are held from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Population & Community Health, \$100/couple. Call for upcoming dates. This program combines four traditional parenting classes into a one-day overview. Topics include childbirth, breastfeeding, infant CPR, and practical baby care skills. Virtual options are also available. Call **301-475-6019** to register.

Please note: some classes require a minimum number of participants to hold the course. If the need arises to cancel a class, we will try to accommodate you on an alternate date..

Pulmonary

Nicotine Cessation Program

The Nicotine Cessation Program is free and takes place over the course of seven weeks (weekly one-hour sessions). Participants learn behavioral modifications, stress management, and other techniques to help them quit using nicotine products. Visit <u>SMCHD.org/Tobacco</u> for dates and details.

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10 tips for a healthy brain.



Just as your body needs exercise to stay healthy, mobile, and strong, so does your brain. The saying, "use it or lose it," applies to cognitive function and brain sharpness as you age. MedStar Health neurologist Toluwalase Tofade, MD, explained that brain health is a lifelong commitment and shares her top 10 strategies to keep your mind sharp and fit.

- 1. Manage blood pressure: Dr. Tofade recommends a systolic blood pressure of 130 or lower to reduce the risk of mini strokes, which can impact memory and brain function.
- **2. Check your hearing:** Sound is a powerful brain stimulant. Studies show that a lack of auditory stimulation due to hearing loss increases dementia risk. Use hearing aids when needed to fuel brain activity and slow cognitive decline.
- 3. Prevent head injuries: Wear a seatbelt, use helmets when biking or riding a motorcycle, and reduce fall risks in the home to protect your brain from injury.
- 4. Limit alcohol consumption: Excessive alcohol use is linked to cognitive impairment. Dr. Tofade recommends five or fewer alcoholic drinks per week to minimize brain risks.
- **5. Avoid or quit smoking:** Smoking, including prolonged exposure to secondhand smoke, is associated with higher risk of cognitive impairment, dementia, and stroke.

- 6. Maintain a healthy weight and control blood sugar: Obesity and associated health conditions, including type 2 diabetes, are risk factors for dementia and other neurological conditions. Maintain a healthy weight and manage blood sugar levels through a healthy diet and regular exercise.
- 7. Get your zzzzs: Retorative sleep is important for memory processing, concentration, mood regulation, and decision-making. Sleep apnea is a leading cause of sleep disturbances. If you constantly wake up feeling tired, talk to a healthcare provider about a sleep evaluation.
- 8. Stay physically active: Regular exercise-including walking, cardio, and strength training-improves blood flow to the brain and helps maintain mental acuity.
- 9. Reduce exposure to air pollution: Avoid prolonged exposure to environmental toxins particularly air pollution, which can negatively impact brain health.
- 10. Stay social: Staying socially engaged through close relationships, group activities, and friendships helps stimulate brain activity and promotes positive mental health.

"Whether you are in your 20s or your 70s, it is never too early, or too late, to make brain-healthy choices," said Dr. Tofade.



MedStar Health Neurology at MedStar St. Mary's Hospital Outpatient Pavilion, second floor 25500 Point Lookout Road. Leonardtown, MD

P 240-434-7929