

# PA

ISSUE 7, FALL 2020

# HEALTH

YOUR GUIDE TO FITNESS & WELLNESS

**SURGERY  
DURING  
COVID-19.  
SAFE. AND  
SMART.**



**WELLNESS  
THROUGH 3D  
PRINTING**

**KEEPING FUN  
IN THE FALL  
SAFE FOR ALL**





**A**utumn is finally here. With cooler air and changing leaves, Pennsylvania is waiting to be explored. Hike to a waterfall, jump in a kayak or cast a line into one of the beautiful waterways right in your own backyard. In this edition of *PA Health*, you'll find suggestions on where to go, what to do and how to stay safe as you enjoy the great outdoors.

For many Pennsylvanians, hunting is the best way to celebrate the fall. If you or someone you know brings home a deer this hunting season, our recipe for venison smothered in mushroom sauce will give you a savory way to enjoy it.

Also in this edition, we share two stories of recovery and survival. Frank Ditaranto of Winfield underwent 19 hours of surgery to remove a rare spinal tumor, all aided by a 3D model of the tumor. And of course, during the recent months of responding to the pandemic, COVID-19 forced many to delay planned medical care. But surgery and other services for life-threatening or urgent conditions continued at Geisinger. David Chapple of West Pittston

had emergency surgery for an abdominal issue — and learned he also had COVID-19. The expertise of his surgeon and surgery team are all the more impressive when you consider the precautionary steps taken to protect the medical team from the spread of the virus.

One of the good things to come out of this crisis has been the increased use of technology to access care and maintain health. Telemedicine (visiting your doctor by video on the computer or by phone) is here to stay. It's another way to make better health an easier and more accessible choice for all of us.

As always, I thank you for being one of our readers. If you'd like to see more of what *PA Health* has to offer, visit us online at [geisinger.org/PAHealth](https://www.geisinger.org/PAHealth) for additional stories, recipes and health and wellness tips.

Wishing you and your loved ones a healthy and safe fall,



Jaewon Ryu, MD, JD  
President and CEO



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

**On the Cover:** David Chapple had emergency surgery during the height of the pandemic. And it's a lucky thing he did. (Photo by Mark Dastrup)

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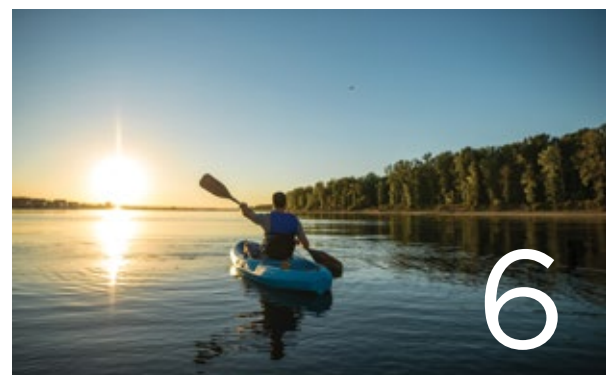
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and get inspired  
by stories of  
your friends and  
neighbors in nearby  
communities.



# Surgery during a pandemic: Successful *and* safe

**Luckily, the COVID-19 crisis didn't stop David Chapple from heading to the ER.**

BY PAULA FRANKEN

Looking back, David Chapple realizes he should have known something was wrong when he bit into his Italian hoagie and tasted only salt. “It was really strange,” he says. “I’d also had an annoying cough and a few body aches but assumed it was a typical flu, so I wasn’t too worried.”

What did worry the 64-year-old West Pittston resident was his stomach. It had been bothering him for a while, but when he first sought treatment, he was told he had a stomach bug. And because he didn’t have a fever and hadn’t been anywhere the virus was prevalent, they didn’t think he had COVID-19.

Days later, in the early hours of Easter morning, Mr. Chapple’s pain was so bad that he decided to go to the Emergency Department

at Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center. “I was hesitant because I was afraid of being exposed to COVID-19,” he says. “Turns out, that was ironic.”

At a screening tent outside the hospital, Mr. Chapple had a fever of 101.4° F, so he was tested for COVID-19 right away with a nasal swab. Then he went to the emergency room for a CT scan and an X-ray. When those results came back, he asked if they were going to admit him to the hospital.

“They told me I was most likely COVID-positive, had a touch of pneumonia and they were prepping me for emergency surgery for an abdominal aortic aneurysm — so yes, I was definitely being admitted,” he says. “Later, I learned that my aneurysm was the size of an avocado.”

An aneurysm is an enlarged area in a blood vessel. In Mr. Chapple's case, his aneurysm was in the lower part of the major vessel that runs from his heart through the center of his chest and abdomen.

Geisinger endovascular surgeon Boyoung Song, MD, operated on Mr. Chapple even before the results of his COVID-19 test were ready. "It really didn't matter what the results would be," she says. "An aneurysm larger than 5.5 centimeters in an adult male needs to be treated. If this type of aneurysm ruptures, it's usually fatal. Mr. Chapple's was at 8 centimeters. We proceeded as if he was COVID-positive — which in fact he was."

There are two ways to treat an aneurysm like Mr. Chapple's. The traditional way is to reach it through a large incision in the abdomen, which involves a lengthy stay in the hospital and a long recovery. Dr. Song used a less invasive method — endovascular surgery — which requires only two small slits in the groin.

Because he was COVID-positive, Mr. Chapple had to spend some time recovering in a negative-pressure isolation room. No visitors were allowed and any staff who entered his room wore full protective gear. "The staff was fantastic, very compassionate and friendly," he says. "Still, it was very strange to be isolated with my own thoughts and worries. I had total confidence in Dr. Song — I knew the surgery was a success. But still, I worried. Would I end up on a ventilator? Would the COVID lead to unforeseen complications?"

Ultimately, Mr. Chapple says he found comfort in his faith, Nichiren Buddhism, a practice he's followed for more than 50 years through Soka Gakkai International (SGI), a worldwide Buddhist network that promotes peace, culture and education.

"We learn from all our experiences and try to find the most valuable outcome in any situation," he explains. "I reflected on that wisdom and practiced the mantra *Nam myoho renge kyo*. I really believe that, and focusing on my family and friends at SGI, are what got me through."

In Sanskrit, the word "*nam*" means "to devote oneself" and "*myoho renge kyo*" is the title of



**Recovering in isolation, Mr. Chapple found comfort in his faith. Prayer beads called *juzu* are used in Nichiren Buddhism.**



the Lotus Sutra, widely regarded as one of the most important sacred scriptures of Buddhism.

On the Tuesday after Easter, Mr. Chapple went home. Within a month, he was taking extended walks and looking forward to getting back on his bike. And best of all, his pain was gone.

"My recovery has been seamless, and my scars are healing great," he says. "Dr. Song is an outstanding surgeon. She could probably work anywhere. We're very lucky to have her here."

For her part, Dr. Song is glad Mr. Chapple paid attention to the warning signs. "Geisinger has taken numerous steps to make sure patients and staff are protected from COVID-19," says Dr. Song. "I cannot stress enough that it's safe to come to the hospital, and there's no reason to ignore symptoms or put off needed care. In fact, doing so can be very risky. Mr. Chapple is very fortunate that he came in when he did."

**"My recovery has been seamless."**

– David Chapple

**▶ Watch David Chapple tell his story in his own words at [geisinger.org/PAHealth](https://www.geisinger.org/PAHealth).**



# MAKE A SPLASH ON LOCAL WATERS

Whether it's rushing or cascading, flowing or still, water makes a great focal point for fall activities.

BY BETH KASZUBA

**F**rom quiet lakes to bubbling creeks and, of course, the Susquehanna River, our region is filled with bodies of water waiting to be explored. And just because the air is getting cooler doesn't mean you can't enjoy healthy activities in and near the water. In fact, fall is a great time to view the foliage while paddling, fishing or even splashing around — in waders or waterproof hiking boots, of course.

So gather the family and visit one of the following local watering holes, any of which are sure to be a hit.



## Teach a person to fish

Along with luring you outside for some healthy activity, fishing has the added bonus of (hopefully) providing you with dinner at the end of the day. And with about 85,000 miles of streams and rivers, not to mention about 4,000 lakes and ponds, Pennsylvania is a great place to cast for your supper.

If you've never tried fishing before, or you're not sure about the rules and regulations, don't worry. Help is available from the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission. Along with maintaining a comprehensive website with everything from state laws to conditions on local waterways, there are links to classes on topics such as introductory fly fishing for women, family fishing — even ice fishing. Check it all out at [FishAndBoat.com/fish/FishingFundamentals](https://FishAndBoat.com/fish/FishingFundamentals).

### Watch a waterfall

If you're not comfortable dipping a toe (or a boat) in the water, you can still enjoy our amazing network of waterways by foot. Fall is an especially good time to hike to the many waterfalls that dot the landscape. The trails are a bit cooler, possibly quieter and the vibrant foliage frames the scenes.

If you're looking for an easy hike, try Dry Run Falls in the Loyalsock State Forest or Nay Aug Falls in Scranton. The trails at Rickett's Glen are more challenging, but you'll be rewarded with falls as high as nearly 100 feet. And if you hike in Hickory Run State Park, in Carbon County, you'll find waterfalls and Boulder Field, a national natural landmark.

Whichever way you choose to enjoy the water, follow safety rules and state laws, and be sure to wear a lifejacket, if you're boating. Then get out there and make the most of one of our best natural resources.



### Go up the creek (with a paddle)

One of the best things about kayaking and canoeing? You can tailor the activity to your fitness level by choosing the type of water and the amount of time you spend paddling.

Prefer opportunities to coast and relax? Go with the current down the Susquehanna, Lehigh or Delaware rivers or in a deep creek, like Penn's Creek in central Pennsylvania. If you need to rent a kayak, lots of outfitters are available to help you plan a route, drop you off and pick you up — even provide instruction or guide you, if that's your preference.

For more of a physical challenge, visit one of the many state parks that offer kayak and canoe rentals for paddling in lakes, where your muscles provide all the momentum. Good choices in our area include Bald Eagle, Poe Valley and Locust Lake. Search "where to boat state parks map" for a full listing of parks with boating options.

And if you're looking for an adrenaline rush, our region also features some white water. Novices can join trips hosted by outfitters in Jim Thorpe and Weatherly. For more information, visit [StepOutside.org](http://StepOutside.org).

# TECH TO THE RESCUE

**Confronted with a tricky tumor, a surgeon turns to a 3D model.**

BY PAULA FRANKEN

**T**reating Frank Ditaranto's rare cancer, diagnosed in an unusual location, required out-of-the-box — or in this case, out-of-the-printer — thinking.

"I'm one in a million," says the Winfield resident, who developed chordoma, a cancer that really does impact an estimated 1 in 1 million people. And the odds of developing a tumor in the neck, where Mr. Ditaranto's was located, are even lower.

His original doctor suspected Mr. Ditaranto had ALS, also known as Lou Gehrig's disease, because he had some troubling symptoms. He walked carefully, for fear of falling. His toes were curled, his hands and feet were numb, and his tongue quivered involuntarily. But tests showed a mass on the side of his neck, and Mr. Ditaranto was referred to Geisinger, where neurosurgeon Sanjay Konakondla, MD, told him he had chordoma. It was a condition Dr. Konakondla was familiar with, having trained with world-renowned specialists in the disease at Brown University's Rhode Island Hospital.

"With chordoma, it is very important to get all of the tumor out without cutting into it," Dr. Konakondla explains. "If you break into the capsule, the cancer can spread. I knew I had to



Read more about Geisinger's 3D lab at [geisinger.org/PAHealth](https://www.geisinger.org/PAHealth).





Frank Ditaranto, back home in Winfield with his wife Marie.

work on all the healthy areas around the tumor while avoiding it completely.”

To prepare for the surgery, Dr. Konakondla worked with Sarah Flora, program director of Geisinger’s 3D Imaging and Printing Lab. “Medical 3D printing is being used for a multitude of reasons here at Geisinger such as presurgical planning, surgical simulation, patient and learner education and surgical aid tools,” Ms. Flora explains. “In Mr. Ditaranto’s case, we provided printed models to Dr. Konakondla for surgical planning and simulation. The 3D models were direct replicas of Mr. Ditaranto’s tumor as well as any important anatomy near the mass such as his spine, airway, esophagus and the arteries in his neck. The only other way surgeons get to see this anatomy prior to operating is from a CT or MRI scan, which are made of thinly sliced black-and-white images.”

“Geisinger’s 3D lab truly sets us apart,” says Dr. Konakondla. “These models are created at no cost to patients and are great tools for explaining upcoming procedures to them. Frank got to hold his own spine in his hands — and keep it as a souvenir.”

Mr. Ditaranto’s surgery began on Oct. 8, 2019, and ended 19 hours later. Dr. Konakondla never

took a break other than to eat a granola bar while his team maneuvered Mr. Ditaranto onto his back. “It was a very complicated procedure because of the tumor’s location,” Dr. Konakondla explains. “Ultimately, it involved the second through seventh cervical vertebrae as well as the first and second thoracic levels.”

And even after such a complex surgery, which removed the entire tumor, the 64-year-old was out of the ICU after two days and up and walking soon after that.

When Mr. Ditaranto asked his oncologist about next steps, he was told no radiation was needed. Every 6 months, he’ll get an MRI to make sure he’s still clear. But for now, he’s fine.

Mr. Ditaranto says he can’t say enough good things about Dr. Konakondla. He even sent a picture of the two of them together to Dr. Konakondla’s instructor at Brown. “He’s a great doctor and a great man, even if he is a Yankees fan,” laughs Mr. Ditaranto. “Guess I’m lucky he still did my surgery after seeing my Mets blanket.”

As for the 3D model of his spine, Mr. Ditaranto is happy to show it to anyone who wants to see it. “It’s a terrific way to tell my story,” he says. “I’m glad Dr. K. let me keep it.”

***“These models are created at no cost to patients and are great tools for explaining upcoming procedures to them. Frank got to hold his own spine in his hands — and keep it as a souvenir.”***

—Sanjay Konakondla, MD





**Seasonal tips to keep you active and healthy outdoors**

BY BETH KASZUBA

# ENJOY FALL — SAFELY

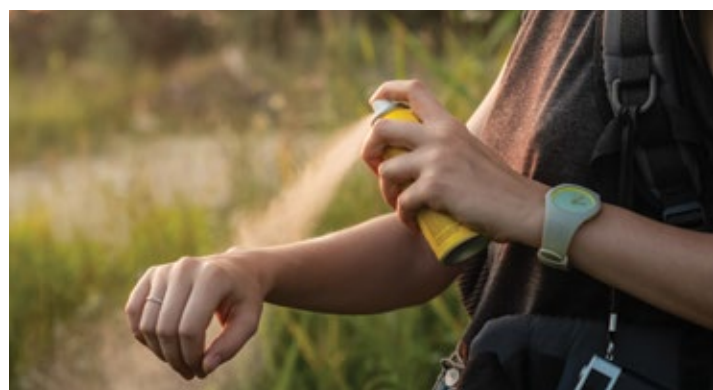
**A**s we transition from summer to fall, it can be tempting to jump right into new activities, like a kid leaping into a pile of leaves. But before you get a running start, a few safety hints can keep your autumn fun from being hampered by an accident or injury.

## **1 Hike with a helper.**

Fall is a beautiful time to hit the trails, but the same foliage that adds to the views can make surfaces slippery. Blankets of leaves can also hide rocks and ruts that can trip you up or twist your ankle.

You might want to grab a walking stick or, better yet, invest in a set of hiking poles. Not only will you gain stability, you'll also be able to probe the ground ahead to avoid unwanted surprises — like a concealed animal burrow.

And if you haven't been working those core muscles, hiking helps to get them in shape. A strong core aids balance and stability, which is a good thing anytime.



## **2 Insects? They're still out there.**

Just because the leaves are changing colors and the air is a bit cooler doesn't mean pests like mosquitoes and ticks are gone.

Mosquito "season" doesn't officially end until the first frost, so if you're headed outdoors before then, take precautions. And ticks, which can spread illnesses like Lyme disease, continue to be active in autumn.

Protect yourself by:

- Staying on trails and avoiding overgrown areas
- Wearing long pants, even if it's warm
- Applying insect repellent to your skin and clothes
- Doing a tick check afterward

If you find a tick attached to your skin, use tweezers to remove it, then thoroughly wash the area and your hands with soap and water or rubbing alcohol.

Not every tick carries Lyme disease, but if you develop a fever or rash within several weeks, contact your doctor.





### 3 Heart health. It's part of safe hunting.

If you're a hunter, you know all about handling firearms, wearing the right clothing and identifying your target. But as you put that knowledge into action this fall, consider your health and fitness levels, too.

If you've been inactive lately, don't overdo it outdoors. Watch for signs of exhaustion or, more importantly, a cardiac event. Stop and rest if you feel tired, short of breath or have any pain — especially in your chest, neck, back or arms. The same goes for dizziness or rapid heartbeat. Those are signs to take a break or get help.

Not sure if you're fit to hunt? Contact your doctor and get a checkup.

And even if you're in great shape, it just makes sense to carry a cell phone, hunt with a buddy and let people know where you'll be. Accidents and illness can happen, no matter how carefully you've prepared. Do all you can to have a safe day — whether or not you bag that buck or doe.

***Certain this is your year to bring home a deer? Check out our venison recipe on the right.***



## Tender venison smothered in mushroom sauce

**N**ot all meat is created equal, in terms of health benefits. Venison is leaner than beef and has less saturated fat. This recipe pairs this healthy protein with mushrooms, which contain B vitamins and fiber.

A bonus? If you're new to venison and looking for a way to incorporate a different food into your diet, this recipe is easy to prepare. And it's affordable, especially if you're a hunter or have friends who hunt and share the harvest.

#### Ingredients:

½ teaspoon seasoned salt  
 ½ teaspoon black pepper  
 ½ teaspoon garlic powder  
 1–2 lb venison, in small cuts or chunks  
 Flour  
 1 can cream of mushroom soup  
 1 cup fat-free milk  
 1 package sliced fresh mushrooms, any type  
 1 onion, sliced

#### Directions:

1. Mix seasoned salt, black pepper and garlic powder and rub over venison (or use your own seasoning).
2. Coat the venison in flour.
3. Put the venison in a slow cooker and cover with cream of mushroom soup. Add milk, fresh mushrooms and onion.
4. Cook on low 4 to 5 hours.



Even more deliciousness awaits at [geisinger.org/PAHealth](https://www.geisinger.org/PAHealth).

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