

PA

ISSUE 6, SUMMER 2020

HEALTH

YOUR GUIDE TO FITNESS & WELL-BEING

**IT'S IN
THE
GENES:**

*Protecting
the health
of future
generations*



**THE DOCTOR WILL
SEE YOU NOW
(RIGHT AT HOME)**

**BIKING PENNSYLVANIA
PATHS**



As we move into summer 2020, we do so with a new perspective brought on by COVID-19 and the demands it placed on all of us, whether that meant doing essential work to keep our communities functioning or staying put at home. Regardless of each of our circumstances, finding time to enjoy the outdoors has been an outlet to stay active and fit, and to keep our spirits up. In that vein, within this edition of *PA Health*, you'll find suggestions for biking trails that are waiting for you to explore — and there's no better season for that than summer in Pennsylvania.

If we've learned anything this past spring, it's that keeping the pantry stocked is a good idea. In this edition, we'll not only show you how to preserve the food you grow in your garden or buy at the market, but we'll also give you a recipe that's as healthy as it is delicious.

And if there's any silver lining to what we experienced this spring, it's that physical distancing can lead to creative solutions. In these pages, you'll learn about telemedicine and how video visits with your doctor give you the care

you need from the comfort of your own home. It's an approach that's so effective and convenient that it will likely become a part of the new normal for medical care — even when we don't have to stay home.

Our patient story this month features Elysburg resident Dawn Snyder, who decided to participate in the MyCode® Community Health Initiative. And it's a good thing she did. What our researchers discovered, followed by the care she and her family received, is something Ms. Snyder says she's deeply grateful for. It's healthcare that touches generations.

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 for additional stories, recipes and health and wellness tips.

Wishing you and your loved ones a happy and healthy summer,



Jaewon Ryu, MD, JD, Geisinger 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.

On the Cover:
The information Dawn Snyder got from joining MyCode was unexpected. But she's grateful to have it. (Photo by Victoria Turel-Wiktor)

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Prepared for a BRIGHTER FUTURE

Thanks to MyCode, her
cancer didn't get the
chance to spread.

BY PAULA FRANKEN



The information Dawn Snyder got was unexpected. But she's grateful to have it.

In October 2019, Elysburg resident Dawn Snyder got a call from her primary care provider, Greg Burke, MD, giving her a heads-up that she'd soon be hearing from researchers with Geisinger's MyCode® Community Health Initiative. They'd found a gene mutation that put her at risk for thyroid cancer.

"I signed up for MyCode to support the research they're doing and to possibly help my children and grandchildren," Ms. Snyder explains. "I hadn't expected them to find anything. But now, after everything that's happened, I'm very glad they did."

Soon after Dr. Burke's call, researchers at MyCode called Ms. Snyder to schedule an appointment. She met with clinical genetics specialist Gary Bellus, MD, PhD, and two genetic counselors, Gretchen Thone and Kerriane Fry. "The team did an exceptional job of explaining everything to me — including the risks," Ms. Snyder says. "They answered all my questions and recommended additional

blood work."

"Dawn Snyder's condition is one of about 30 we look for," Dr. Bellus explains. "Whether it's cancer, a cardiovascular issue, a tendency toward seizures or another hereditary issue, the conditions we're concerned with are all medically actionable. There are steps that can be taken to manage these conditions."

When Ms. Snyder saw her lab results in myGeisinger, she understood immediately what it meant when it said her tumor markers for medullary thyroid cancer were elevated. Thyroid cancer was no longer just a risk. She had it. "I've been a nurse for over 40 years — most of my career was in oncology and palliative medicine. I knew what those results were saying," she explains.

After speaking with her genetic counselors, Ms. Snyder made an appointment with endocrinologist Madiha Alvi, MD, who ran a series of tests and referred her to Timothy Lindemann, MD, a surgeon who specializes

in thyroid and parathyroid surgery. “In less than one week, I saw three specialists,” Ms. Snyder explains. “If someone was booked, a cancellation would occur, and I could be seen immediately. It wasn’t that I was lucky. I felt the Lord’s presence throughout this journey.”

Dr. Lindemann performed an ultrasound and thyroid biopsy. “He was very honest with me,” says Ms. Snyder. “He thought the cancer had probably been there for years, even though I had absolutely no symptoms. In my mind, I was concerned that the cancer had already spread to my lymph nodes and possibly other organs.”

Ms. Snyder received a positron emission tomography (PET) scan to assess whether the cancer had spread from her thyroid. This “eyes to thighs” view uses a radioactive drug to show suspicious activity and can often detect disease before it shows up on other imaging tests.

“I got my results on Christmas Eve via myGeisinger. I was a little reluctant to open them, expecting the worst and not wanting to ruin our Christmas,” Ms. Snyder explains. “I said a prayer and opened the email. My bones and organs were fine — the results were completely negative outside the thyroid. I felt the Lord’s presence once again.”

On Dec. 30, Dr. Lindemann removed Ms. Snyder’s thyroid gland and central lymph nodes. The surgery took more than five hours, but it confirmed that the cancer was confined to her thyroid. Now, she just needs to take thyroid replacement medication daily.

“I thank God that I chose to participate in the MyCode program. I was completely asymptomatic. How else would I have known about the cancer?” says Ms. Snyder. “I hope people realize how fortunate we are to have such state-of-the-art healthcare in a rural area. From the research and counseling at MyCode to the diagnostic capabilities of our

“I signed up for MyCode to support the research they’re doing and to possibly help my children and grandchildren. I hadn’t expected them to find anything. But now, after everything that’s happened, I’m very glad they did.”

– Dawn Snyder

labs to the skills of our specialists and surgeons — it’s all right here.”

One of the most important aspects of the MyCode program’s discoveries is the fact that genetic mutations can occur in relatives. Ms. Snyder’s counselors worked with her family members so they, too, could understand the risks. Both her sons, her siblings and her cousins have either gotten tested or have their paperwork to be tested. Most results have been negative, but the few who have tested positive are preparing to take their next steps.

Genetic counselor Kerriane Fry

explains that genetic testing isn’t always necessary for family members. “Once we know there is a possible mutation, we can look for symptoms,” she explains. “In many cases there are blood tests and other diagnostics that can be run once we know what we’re looking for. Our goal is to educate people and empower them to talk to and work with their providers to get the care they need.”

Fellow genetic counselor Gretchen Thone agrees. “We encourage genetic testing, but we also understand that some people feel uncomfortable with it,” she says. “We’re also very sensitive to the fact that some results might require people to make lifestyle changes they weren’t expecting — athletes who have an inherited risk for heart problems, for example. We’re here for them if they have questions and concerns. And we work closely with their providers, too.”

As for Ms. Snyder, she’s extremely thankful that she chose to participate in the program. “If I hadn’t gotten my results when I did, who knows what might’ve happened,” she says. “Thanks to MyCode, my family members can be prepared for a brighter future.”



Dawn Snyder’s granddaughter Grace was her motivation for participating in MyCode.

PEDAL POWER

Biking is a fun — and healthy — way to see PA.


BY BETH KASZUBA

Bicycling is a great workout — adaptable to all fitness levels, good for the muscles and cardiovascular system and safe for the joints in motion. Biking also lets you explore a variety of terrains and sights, from picturesque woodlands to city streets. Last but not least, you can ride as a family, a group or solo and still have fun.

Here are a few local routes that range from short to long, easy to challenging and rural to urban.



Capital Area Greenbelt

 **If you're looking** for a relatively flat trail with lots of variety, check out this 20-mile loop through and around Harrisburg. The Greenbelt will take you along the Susquehanna River and through wooded areas, urban office parks, residential neighborhoods and scenic parks, including Reservoir Park and Wildwood Park. Parts of the trail share the road, but most of the loop is on dedicated paths. You'll also encounter gravel in a few spots. Parking is available all along the route, but the best spot to drop your car is probably the spacious lot on the Harrisburg Area Community College campus along Industrial Road. Plan your route using maps available at caga.org/the-trail.



Rail Trails



Rail trails are suitable for cyclists of all levels. They're usually relatively flat, because they trace historic railroad and sometimes canal routes. But what they lack in hills, they often make up for in potential length, depending on how far you want to pedal.

For example, if you're ambitious, you could follow the scenic, gravel D&L Rail Trail for more than 140 miles through eastern Pennsylvania. If that's too far for your taste, explore the local NEPA sections, which run through Lehigh, Carbon and Luzerne counties. One of the most scenic sections heads straight through the Lehigh Valley Gorge, where you'll see waterfalls and spot some wildlife, if you're lucky. The northern trailhead is located in Mountain Top. Learn more about trail access and parking at DelawareAndLehigh.org.

For a guaranteed flat, fast and short ride, try the Buffalo Valley Rail Trail, which connects Lewisburg and Mifflinburg — just under 20 miles roundtrip, without a single significant hill. You can also stop for ice cream, or a cold beer, at several locations along the route and at the trailheads. Easily accessible parking areas are available in both towns. Learn more at bvrec.org/buffalo-valley-rail-trail.

Mountain Biking in Geisinger's Stewardship Forest



Ready for an adventure, right in our backyard? Tune up your mountain bike and explore 300 acres nestled behind Geisinger Medical Center in Danville. With trail names like Life Flight, Amnesia and Concussion, you know you're in for a (potentially) wild ride — or hike, because the hilly, wooded trails are multi-use. Start at the information kiosk, where you can pick up a color-coded map compiled by Geisinger's Sports Medicine Department to make sure you're armed with important information like distances and elevations for each of the routes. Parking is available in the Geisinger lot off Powder Mill Road. Learn more at geisinger.org/sites/stewardship-forest.

Happy riding — and don't forget your helmet!



TODAY'S HOUSE CALL: *SEEING YOUR DOCTOR FROM HOME*

↑
**Video visits let you
see your doctor from
the comfort of your
own home.**

BY PAULA FRANKEN

The need for physical distancing in the past few months made video healthcare a necessity. Thanks to telemedicine, care was just a chat away — no need to cancel appointments. The trend gained popularity as a response to COVID-19, but will be around long after the pandemic is behind us. Haven't tried it yet? There's a good chance you will.

"Telemedicine lets our doctors see and talk to their patients in real time, even though they are miles apart," explains Tejal Raichura, director of the Center for Telehealth at Geisinger. "It works like any other video chat technology — either on a smartphone, a laptop or a computer that

has a webcam and a speaker. All while our patients stay safe at home.”

Geisinger is using telemedicine to replace in-person visits at many primary care clinics. Video appointments are also being offered in more than 70 specialty areas to address cardiac issues, diabetes care, neurological disorders, mental health issues, children’s health concerns, endocrinology, rheumatology and more.

Telemedicine appointments are conducted over a secure network with patient data and privacy carefully protected. And the provider has all of their patient’s electronic health information, including X-rays and MRI results, right at their fingertips.

“Geisinger has had telemedicine in place for years,” explains Ms. Raichura. “But before the concern for social distancing began, we had about 20 specialties seeing patients through telemedicine. Now we have over 70 specialties as well as primary care. The amount of telemedicine appointments we’re seeing per day is what we used to see in a month.”

The sudden increase in demand for video appointments meant providers had to ramp up quickly and be trained to use the technology — a process that takes about 10 days. The first week and a half of the training saw 1,600 providers newly certified to see patients via telemedicine. Ten days later, that increased to over 2,000 providers. “If there’s any silver lining to the COVID-19 pandemic, it’s that it’s driven innovation,” Ms. Raichura says.

Eric Newman, MD, director of Quality and Innovation for Geisinger’s Medicine Institute and former director of the Department of Rheumatology, has been an enthusiastic proponent of telemedicine for years. “Telemedicine has served many patients well in providing care from a distance in situations where travel may be difficult,” he says, adding that in most cases, patients went to their local clinics, often in rural areas, to speak to a remote specialist who was working in a hospital.

“Then came COVID-19 and our world was turned upside down. We very quickly had to figure out how to provide excellent care to our patients with varying degrees of chronic complex disease, without increasing their risks

of infection. And the Geisinger response was decisive, quick and utterly fantastic: the expanded deployment of telemedicine at home, which until this time had only been practiced by a limited number of providers.”

Geisinger pediatric pulmonary medicine specialist Johnathan Spahr, MD, says seeing his patients through telemedicine has been great for him — and for the children. “In pediatrics, it’s reassuring for the provider and the parents when the provider is able to see the child,” he says. “Using telemedicine to examine my patients ensures that their care at home is appropriate and can spare them visits to the office, urgent care or Emergency Department in this time when we’re trying to limit exposure. This is especially important in my line of work taking care of children with chronic respiratory issues.”

Telemedicine is effective and convenient for providers and patients. Will it continue to be offered at Geisinger after the need for physical distancing is over? “Definitely, yes. For an appointment where a physical exam isn’t necessary, it really is a great option,” says Ms. Raichura. “If a patient prefers an in-person appointment, or a provider feels it would be better to meet face to face, office visits will always be available. But now telemedicine appointments are an option, too.”

“Telemedicine lets our doctors see and talk to their patients in real time, even though they are miles apart.”

– Tejal Raichura,
Director of
Geisinger’s Center
for Telehealth



Pediatric pulmonologist Jonathan Spahr, MD, talks with a patient and his mother via a telemedicine visit.

Canning:

An Old-Fashioned Skill Perfect for Modern Life

Whether you grow your own produce or buy it at a farmers market, canning is a great way to keep enjoying it for months to come.

BY BETH KASZUBA

Canning summer's harvest might seem like an antiquated, complicated activity that only your great-grandmother could master.

But canning and freezing fruits and vegetables is actually fairly easy, and a cost-effective, healthy way to enjoy the best of summer's produce in the worst of winter's weather.

Best of all? You don't have to grow a bumper crop to preserve food.



"You can buy fresh fruits and vegetables in bulk at farmers markets," says Emily Newhard, RDN, a dietitian with Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center in Wilkes-Barre. "And you can preserve some foods in water or their natural juices, so it's very nutritious."

While some home canners use a pressure-canning process, most use a simpler and inexpensive water-bath method that requires very little special equipment.

Novice canners will want to begin by preserving acidic foods, Ms. Newhard notes. That's because acid is a natural preservative. Good options include:

- Tomatoes
- Apples
- Pickles

"You can make tomato sauce or can whole tomatoes," Ms. Newhard adds, explaining that she likes to can apples as applesauce. "I don't add sugar. Canning is kind of a blank slate that lets you control some additives like salt and sugar."

The basic process

While canning might seem tricky, the procedure involves just a few simple steps, from preparing a recipe to cleaning all the jars and equipment, then boiling the sealed jars for



What do you need to get started?

- Pot designed for canning, with removable rack
- Funnel
- Jar lifter
- Magnetic wand to lift lids from boiling water
- Jars
- Lids that have never been used before

Inexpensive starter kits are available at most grocery, hardware and big box stores.



“Canning is kind of a blank slate that lets you control some additives like salt and sugar.”

– Emily Newhard, RDN

prescribed lengths of time.

The heat both kills microorganisms that would cause spoilage and helps drive oxygen out of the jars, creating a vacuum seal.

“It’s totally safe as long as you clean diligently and know what you’re doing,” Ms. Newhard says. “If you’re new to the process, look for a good resource to learn the basics.”

Ms. Newhard recommends turning to the Penn State Extension — **extension.psu.edu** — for reliable information, including webinars on food preservation. “The information is out there,” she adds. “If you have a reliable source, it’s easier to get started than you think. It’s very rewarding, too — and canned goods make great gifts. Everybody’s always happy to get home-canned goods.”



Summer Salsa

This recipe preserves some of summer’s most bountiful ingredients — tomatoes and peppers — so you can enjoy them all year round. It’s also easy to prepare, making it a perfect introduction to canning if you’ve never tried it before.

Makes 8 pints.

INGREDIENTS:

- 12 cups chopped tomatoes (16-18)
- 1 cup diced jalapeño peppers
- 3 cups chopped onions
- 3 cups chopped green peppers
- 10 chopped garlic cloves
- 2 teaspoons cilantro
- 2 tablespoons oregano
- 2 teaspoons cumin
- 2 tablespoons hot sauce
- 2 tablespoons salt
- 2 tablespoons black pepper
- 1 (6-ounce) can tomato paste

DIRECTIONS:

- 1.** Combine all ingredients and bring to a simmer in a stainless steel saucepan.
- 2.** Cook, stirring frequently, for 30 minutes, until salsa thickens slightly.
- 3.** To can salsa, process in water bath canner for 20 minutes, following the detailed canning instructions available at [geisinger.org/PAHealth](https://www.geisinger.org/PAHealth).



Find another delicious recipe to enjoy, now or in the months ahead, at [geisinger.org/PAHealth](https://www.geisinger.org/PAHealth).

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