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Hospital privileges remain at Baptist Memorial Hospital-Golden Triangle.

Exercise and diet can help reverse effects of insulin resistance

Story by Theo DeRosa

tderosa@cdispatch.com

uring the COVID-19 pandemic, Dr. Josh Black gained 10 or 15 pounds without realizing it.
With his gym closed, the family practice doctor at OCH Medical Associates in Starkville wasn't exercising. He wasn't eating well, either, turning to junk food almost subconsciously. But when Black realized he'd gained weight, he took steps to work it off. He stepped up his exercise regimen and cut out carbohydrates from his diet nearly completely, staying away from high-carb foods like bread, rice and pasta.

The changes worked. Black lost 20 pounds, he has more energy, and he's sleeping better.

And while the doctor isn't one of the many Americans with insulin resistance — a common condition that can often go undetected — he's the perfect example of what to do to reverse its potentially dangerous effects.

Insulin resistance, which can lead to Type 2 diabetes over time, occurs when cells fail to respond well to insulin, a hormone produced by the pancreas to regulate sugar in the blood. The pancreas produces more and more insulin, but eventually it struggles, allowing blood sugar to elevate. That leads to increased risk for several major health problems — cardiovascular disease, kidney damage and damage to the retinas.

But there are ways to reverse these effects and turn

'There are many dietary changes that can be made that will healthfully lead to meeting this goal.'

OCH Regional Medical Center dietician and diabetes educator Nicky Yeatman

back the tide, Nicky Yeatman, a registered dietician and diabetes educator at OCH Regional Medical Center, said in an email. Weight loss is key, with a 7 percent reduction typically a good starting place.

"There are many dietary changes that can be made that will healthfully lead to meeting this goal," Yeatman said. "For some, it may be the elimination of sugar-sweetened beverages. For others, it may be focusing on portion control of specific foods commonly consumed in their diet. And for others, it may be helping them to identify more healthful quick on-the-go meals because they prefer not to prepare each meal from scratch."

There are certainly options for those hoping to change their diet and eat better. Black suggested green, leafy vegetables and lean proteins like grilled or baked chicken or fish.

Julia Boucher, health coach at Hollydale Health Store — which has locations in Columbus and Starkville — advised choosing unprocessed, organic foods whenever possible. Foods high in fiber and low in carbs — such as

nuts, seeds, and most beans and legumes — are the best options.

Boucher said healthy, whole and unprocessed carbs can actually be a good fuel source, but portion control is important.

"Moderation is the key to life," she said.

So is exercise. As Black explained, physical activity works to decrease a cell's resistance to insulin, making it easier for glucose to enter. Its benefits are manifold: improving quality of sleep, increasing metabolism, helping burn more calories at rest, causing weight loss, lowering blood pressure and more.

Black said both cardiovascular exercise and resistance training — which strengthens the muscles and often involves weights — are important. Yeatman said she typically recommends two and a half hours of cardio per week with resistance training three days per week — and the more, the merrier.

"I emphasize making physical activity fun and involving friends and family when possible," Yeatman said.

Apps that allow users to log food and exercise daily in order to have a record of their diet and activity can help establish a routine. Calendar reminders and non-food rewards are other ways to keep healthy habits.

"Most of us can find motivation to make changes when we first set a behavior change or health goal, but our hectic lives can result in losing focus if we don't have good support," Yeatman said.



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Theo DeRosa/Dispatch St

Julia Boucher, a health coach for Hollydale Health Store, said unprocessed, organic foods are ideal for reversing the effects of insulin resistance. Boucher pointed to vegetables, nuts, seeds, beans and legumes and other foods high in fiber and low in carbs.

Dr. Josh Black of OCH Medical Associates in Starkville gained between 10 and 15 pounds during the COVID-19 pandemic. Cutting carbohydrates from his diet helped Black lose 20 pounds, a change with several positive health effects.

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Yoga provides path for physical and mental wellness

Story by Garrick Hodge *ghodge*@cdispatch.com

hen Cynthia Mutch saw a traumatic event in her life staring her right in the face, she turned to

"It was life changing for me," said Mutch, who now teaches yoga classes at the YMCA in Columbus.

Mutch started her accession into what would turn into her new passion slowly by looking at yoga techniques on Instagram and YouTube, then later signing up for classes at Columbus' Bliss Yoga Studio before becoming a certified yoga instructor herself. She was amazed to learn how much work goes into mastering the various techniques.

"It's not just stretching like I originally thought, there's a lot of strength involved," Mutch said.

The more she learned, the more she realized that yoga could help with anxiety, inner mental peace and provide mental health benefits as well as physical benefits.

"Because Yoga is a slow moving form of physical activity, some of the balance poses and strength that is involved forces you to turn your focus inward and come to an inward quiet place to focus on what you're doing," Mutch said. "That skill is a really good skill to develop to learn to focus and find that strength from inside you."

Mutch offers three classes a week, ranging from easy flow to strength and power courses, at the downtown YMCA that is free for members and \$10 for all other guests.

"It's never too late to get started," Mutch said. "You just meet yourself where you are and progress from there. I'd want someone to be kind to themselves and not expect they're going to practice yoga like they've done it for 20 years. I want people to come and do what feels right for them. They'll feel immediate benefits."

One of the beneficiaries of practicing yoga consistently has been Columbus resident Kelley Bassett, who has taken courses at Bliss Yoga for the last six years.

"I love it. There's no competition, it's just you being yourself and accepting yourself for who you are in the process of growth," Bassett said. "There's community to be found in it and encouragement. There's just a sense of growth. I'm always happy I did it, especially for my mental health because I feel stronger."



Photo courtesy of Bliss Yoga Studio

Bliss Yoga Studio owner Lindsey Nicholson has owned the Columbus-based business since 2017. Nicholson said several benefits of yoga include breathing techniques, building strength and more.

For beginners, yoga might seem overwhelming. According to Mutch, even if you're a bodybuilder or a marathon runner, if you've never moved your body in that way before, it's going to be a hard session the first time.

But Bliss Yoga Studio owner Lindsey Nicholson said first-time jitters shouldn't deter interested parties. "Yoga meets you where you are," said Nicholson, who has owned Bliss Yoga since 2017. "The biggest misconception is, 'I'm not flexible, I can't do yoga, or I've never done yoga so I can't do it.' People don't understand that really, yoga is for everybody. Young, old, male, female, it doesn't matter. It really does meet you whatever place you're in."

'I love it. There's no competition, it's just you being yourself and accepting yourself for who you are in the process of growth.'

Columbus resident Kelley Bassett

Nicholson offers mat and reformer pilates courses at her studio that Golden Triangle residents can sign up for on blissyogastudio.org.

"The Pilates and yoga really resonated with me, the breathing, the calming and then I just really realized as I got older hardcore workouts weren't for me," Nicholson said of her yoga journey. "I really liked the mind-body connection that came with yoga and that it's something you can build on

"You can make any class suitable for all levels. Whether it's the first time walking in the studio or whether you've been practicing for 50 years. It's a great way to crosstrain. What they're doing in the gym can be supplemented with yoga for strength, balance and flexibility with the breathing techniques learned from the mind-body connection."

According to an article from John Hopkins Health, one of the nine benefits of yoga includes the resources to help cope with stress.

"The breathing helps calm you down and it can slow your heart rate down," said Lee Ann Starr, an instructor at Bliss Yoga that said she started yoga decades ago to help ease back pain. "You think all of those things with mental health, somebody with anxiety, that breathing is going to help you get back to a place where your heart isn't racing and you aren't breathing fast."

Other benefits of yoga according to John Hopkins Health include Improved strength, flexibility and balance, back pain relief, eased arthritis symptoms, benefited heart health, improved sleeping habits, improved energy levels, improved stress coping mechanisms, a supporting community and better promotion of self care.

"When you finally get that pose or can finally do that balance, it's just really nice," Nicholson said. "You can do it anywhere, on vacation, you don't need any equipment. Hopefully I'm doing yoga when I'm 90 years old here at Bliss Yoga Studio."

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Left to Right: John Whitecar, MD; Karissa Boyd, MD; Amber Borden, MD; Wail Alnas, MD; Robert Jones, MD; and Amanda Mordecai, NP-C.

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After pandemic year, area gyms bounce back

Gyms weathered storm of pandemic by moving online; some have kept a presence there

Story by Zack Plair

zplair@cdispatch.com

since TaylorMade Fitness opened in Starkville in 2015, owner Chase Taylor had steadily built the active membership to about 130.

In spring 2020, COVID-19 threw his fitness gym, along with others all over the country, into an abrupt scramble centered on the same basic question: "What do we do now?"

For parts of April and May, an executive order from Gov. Tate Reeves mandated gyms, along with other businesses deemed non-essential, be closed to the public. Even after gyms were allowed to reopen, capacity restrictions, social distancing requirements and the hesitancy of some clients to return to public spaces kept the virus very much at the forefront of the business models for those that weathered the storm.

When those challenges arose, Taylor didn't panic. He adjusted. When his members went home, he and his staff - in the only ways they could - went with them.

TaylorMade specializes in CrossFit, strength conditioning and functional fitness, Taylor said. Paying members, when the shutdown began, could check out equipment packages, from barbells to cardio equipment and more, and Taylor would post at-home workout programs online associated with each package. He offered Zoom classes, led by a fitness coach, as well as free nutrition consultations for "the people who stuck with us."

"We kept about 80 percent of our membership (through the pandemic)," Taylor said. "COVID is a terrible thing, but one cool take away from it was that people developed workout routines and habits when they were at home."

Whitney Brown, training director with Fitness Factor in Columbus, said that gyms saw a similar metamorphosis to online during the pandemic.

Fitness Factor allowed members to check out equipment for home workouts and it maintained its entire training team to teach members-only Zoom classes, Brown said. Trainers also posted free workouts to YouTube and social media for



7ack Plair/Dispatch sta

Chase Taylor, center, instructs Matthew Thornton, left, and Tanner McReynolds through stretching exercises at TaylorMade Fitness in Starkville. Taylor opened his gym on University Drive in 2015 and moved all of his instruction online during the pandemic. Now, he's back in full swing teaching in-person classes, and he expects membership to boom in the fall.

'It feels more like normal, and even better than that. It's nice to be back together in person.'

Fitness Factor training director Whitney Brown

public access. Sometimes those workouts were filmed from trainers' homes.

"Most of our members stayed with us and used the online platform," Brown said. "It was like a bonding experience from afar."

Brown said Fitness Factor has kept up its digital workouts, even as more and

more people are coming back to the gym. "It feels more like normal, and even better than that," she said. "It's nice to be back together in person."

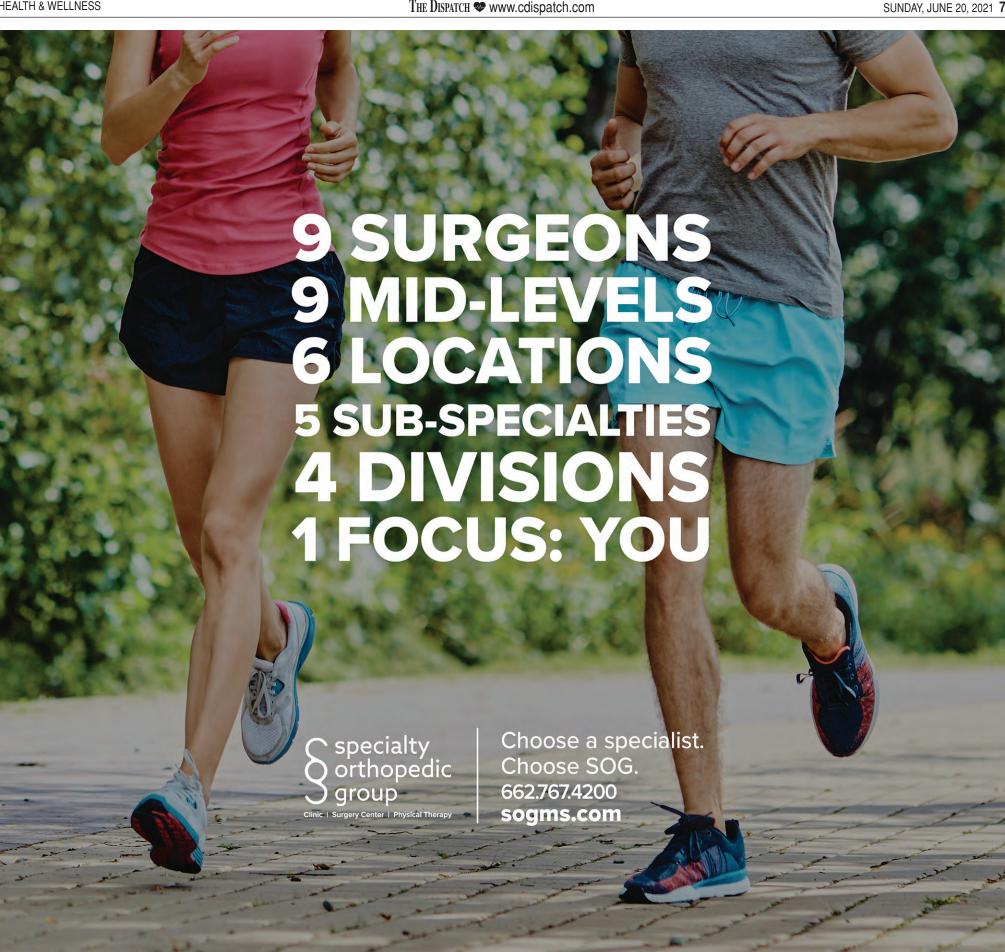
Since reopening, Taylor continues to cap his in-person classes at 15 participants each and practices a more rigorous cleaning regimen between sessions at his

gym — remnants of a pandemic that has abated but has not quite yet gone away. He expects membership to boom in the fall, but instead of packing in more in each class, he plans to add more class sessions if necessary.

Even with those changes, he said his members appreciate the in-person camaraderie.

"People were eager to get back," Taylor said. "The way we're designed as humans is to want to be around people and have that sense of community. I think that increases health as well."

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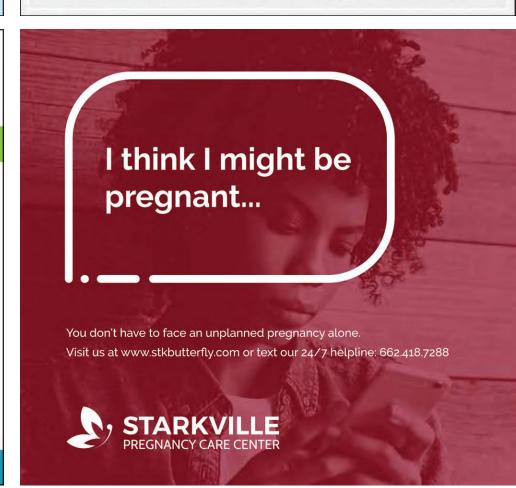


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COVID-19 questions answered

Story by Tyler B. Jones tjones@cdispatch.com

s COVID-19 case numbers dwindle in the state of Mississippi and the Golden Triangle, many still have questions surrounding the virus and its vaccine. The first COVID-19 vaccination was administered in the United States in December 2020. Now, three different vaccines are available with nearly 2 million doses already administered to Mississippians.

The Pfizer-BioNTech is a two-dose vaccine given three weeks apart, and the Moderna vaccine is a two-dose vaccine given four weeks apart. The Johnson & Johnson's Janssen vaccine is a one-dose vaccination.

Anyone ages 18 and older are eligible for any of these types, but the FDA just recently approved ages 12-17 to qualify and receive the Pfizer vaccination.

"Pfizer is the only one approved for kids in the age group," Mississippi Department of Health State Health Officer Dr. Thomas Dobbs said.

Some people believe the vaccine can cause irreversible transformations to the human body such as causing an individual to become magnetic, altering DNA or provoking infertility, but the Center for Disease Control and Prevention have debunked all of these myths and proven them to be false. The CDC has also established that the vaccine will not cause someone to be infected with the virus after receiving it.

While the effectiveness of the vaccine is higher than 90 percent, even those who have received the vaccination can acquire the virus. Those who choose not to receive the vaccine, though, have a substantially higher chance of contracting the virus, Dobbs said. Even though fully-vaccinated individuals can catch COVID-19, the chance of death or long-term illness is considerably lower than those who choose not to get vaccinated.

Starkville Kroger Pharmacist Jay Cumberland said he has not seen many people in the Golden Triangle area catch COVID-19 after being vaccinated.

"I really haven't seen a lot of people who have gotten the vaccine that have been gotten COVID," Cumberland. "It's statistically still a possibility, but it's very minute."

While Dobbs said he recommends everyone obtain the vaccine, the CDC cannot mandate or require vaccination for individuals, but people should know the consequences when they choose not to receive it.

Most healthcare personnel are able to administer vaccines, but the CDC recommends that they receive comprehensive, competency-based training on vaccine administration policies and procedures before administering them.

Mississippi Department of Health State Epidemiologist Dr. Paul Byers said people can have some natural immunity from the virus for a short period of time, but that immunity does not last forever and is not equivalent to the vaccination.

"I think the thing that we want everyone to understand is yes, you can get some immunity from previous



'I really haven't seen a lot of people who have gotten the vaccine that have been gotten COVID. It's statistically still a possibility, but it's very minute.'

Starkville Kroger Pharmacist Jay Cumberland

infection, and yes, that can protect you from becoming reinfected...," Byers said. "It's important to know, even if you've been infected, that the best way to ensure immunity, to ensure that you have long-term and full protection is to get vaccinated."

While the vaccine is the only way to truly prevent the possibility of contracting COVID-19, Dobbs said there are side effects of which people should be aware. Because it takes time for a body to build up protection after any vaccine, individuals could experience tiredness, headache, muscle pain, chills, fever or nausea after the first or second dose

Those who receive the Johnson & Johnson vaccine may be at risk of developing a rare adverse event called thrombosis with thrombocytopenia syndrome (TTS), which involves blood clots, typically in women 50 years or younger, but only seven in every 1 million vaccinated with Johnson & Johnson acquire this syndrome. Dobbs said myositis, inflammation of the muscles, is also an extreme side effect that could occur from any vaccine but is also rare with only 16 in every 1 million statistically contracting the condition.

"The virus is going to cause myositis at a far higher rate

than even theoretical concerns about the vaccine will," Dobbs said.

Multiple variants have arrived in Mississippi over the last few months, prominently the variant strain originated in the United Kingdom. Other variants found in the state include the South African variant strain and the Indian variant strain. While some of these variants can be highly transmissible, Byers said all the vaccines prove to protect against them.

"There have been a number of variant strains identified in Mississippi," Byers said. "Today, we see that the vaccine still protects against the variant strains we have identified and are circulating in Mississippi. This is why we still want people to get vaccinated."

The CDC announced in May that individuals who are fully vaccinated do not have to wear masks. Masks were recommended in all public settings to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Even though people can still contract COVID-19 even after receiving the vaccine, masks are not required anymore for fully-vaccinated individuals.

"I really think healthcare providers should still be wearing masks," Cumberland said. "But if you've been vaccinated, you don't have to wear one anymore."

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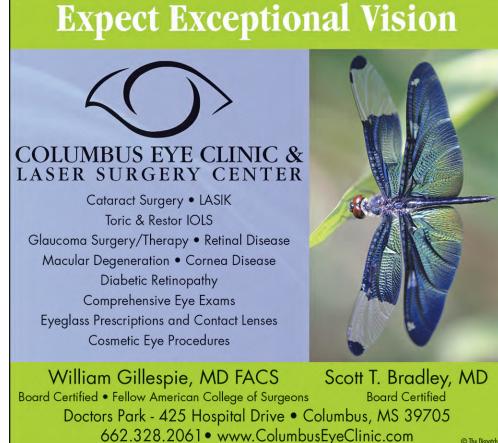
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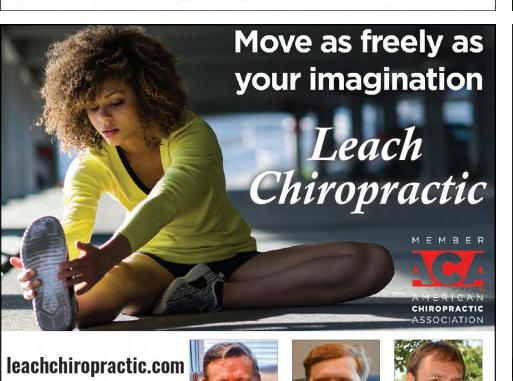


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