

Robotics at the ready

Mather Hospital employs some of the most cutting-edge technology available

While robotics is prized for innovation and precision, Mather Hospital has made a considerable investment in it for a more human reason: our patients. These technologies are giving surgeons and lab technicians the cutting-edge tools they need to speed test results, make minimally invasive surgery more available, and continuously improve patient outcomes.



da Vinci surgical robot

Mather Hospital has two of these robots, used by surgeons for thoracic, gynecological, bariatric and urological procedures. Complex procedures can be performed with a few tiny incisions and the system uses large screens that allow surgeons to navigate through procedures more easily. Surgeons from across the U.S. and Europe have visited Mather to learn advanced techniques with the robot, said Arif Ahmad, MD, bariatric surgeon and director of robotic surgery at Mather, designated as part of the Robotic Center of Excellence™.

"This is the most advanced surgical platform available for performing precise, minimally invasive surgery," said Dr. Ahmad. "Even for routine procedures, we can use advanced imaging techniques incorporated within the robotics system for greater accuracy."

Robotic chemistry testing automation

In the 1990s, Mather Hospital was one of the first community hospitals in the region to adopt robotics in the clinical laboratory. Today, labs need to deliver more diagnostic tests than ever before, and robotic testing equipment allows our clinical laboratory technologists to deliver fast, reliable, consistent patient results at a high level of efficiency.

"The benefits to Mather, as well as the patients we serve, are the ability to perform test prioritization, decreased turnaround time and early error detection," said Raymond Gulino, DPM, administrative director of pathology and laboratory services at Mather Hospital. "This is truly state-of-theart instrumentation."



Precision CyberKnife of New York

Considered a state-of-the-art, precisely focused robotic radiosurgery system that can treat inoperable or surgically complex tumors with less pain, CyberKnife involves no cutting. Instead, beams of high-dose radiation target tumors with pinpoint accuracy.

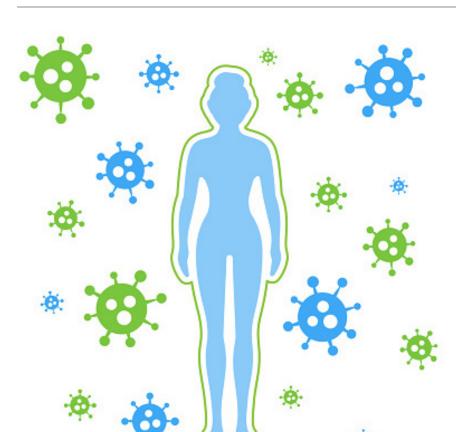
"What's unique about this technology is the ability to track tumor motion in real time," said Martin Silverstein, MD, specialist in radiation oncology at Precision CyberKnife of New York. "In my many years of experience, CyberKnife is one of the most impressive treatment modalities, since it's highly effective in eradicating select tumors and accomplishes this with minimal side effects."



Navio robotic-assisted surgical system

In 2016, the first surgeon in the world to perform a robotic-assisted total knee replacement using Navio robotics was Brian McGinley, MD, of Long Island Bone & Joint (a practice of Orlin & Cohen), and he did it right here at Mather Hospital.

"It's the next step in technology," Dr. McGinley said, adding that a patient's anatomical data is entered into the computer, and the robotic attachment adjusts itself with that data. "It allows us to do a very precise preparation of the bone surfaces, so we can cut the surface of the bone to accurately restore the patient's normal leg alignment and stability."



Top tips for better immunity

A Mather Hospital infectious disease doctor offers three strategies for strengthening your immune system

With Covid-19 still a significant concern and flu season coming up fast, now is a great time to make sure you're employing healthy habits that bolster your immune system.

Although there's no single way to ensure this complex system can get on track quickly, there are some strategies that not only give you the infection-fighting power you need, but also provide benefits for your body's other systems. Here are three top tips from David Galinkin, DO, specialist in infectious disease and internal medicine at Mather Hospital.



Make your health a top priority

The body's immune system functions at its peak when you're living as healthfully as you can, said Dr. Galinkin.

He suggested consuming a wellbalanced, nutritional diet that's high in fruits and vegetables, getting seven to nine hours of quality sleep every night, exercising regularly, drinking alcohol in moderation and quitting smoking. "All of these contribute to improve the immune system, and they're very important steps to take," he said.



Get your flu shot

This is not the year to skip it or even put it off until later in the season, advised Dr. Galinkin.

"We're entering an unpredictable time with the potential re-emergence of Covid-19 coinciding with the onset of flu season," he said. "This year, it's especially important for everyone to get their flu shot." And of course, continue to practice social distancing, use masks when you're going to be around others and wash your hands often.



Manage your stress

Right now, stress levels are soaring, and for good reason. With uncertainty about the pandemic's course, coupled with potential financial or employment instability, and ongoing adjustments to the "new normal," it feels like everyone is on edge. But that can be tough on your immune system, said Dr. Galinkin.

"We are all more vulnerable to infection when we feel stressed or are anxious," he noted. "It's important for people to be conscious of how they're feeling and to be able to find that activity, support or healthy outlet that relieves stress."

Consider going outside for a walk, catching up with distant friends and family via Zoom, or making a telehealth appointment with your primary care physician or mental health professional.

Need a doctor? Go to doctors.matherhospital.org

Back to being pain-free

When Teri Connors experienced debilitating back pain, the Back & Neck Pain Center at Mather Hospital went above and beyond

In late December 2018, Teri Connors of Center Moriches was experiencing tightness in her lower back. The next day, she was immobilized in pain.

She sought relief from various local providers, including a nearby walk-in clinic, an orthopedic surgeon and a local emergency room. None of them could diagnose her problem and give her the relief she desperately needed. Her boyfriend, Al Roman, started to look for other providers online and found the Back & Neck Pain Center at Mather Hospital. They scheduled an appointment for the next day.

Cindy Price, NP, the nurse navigator at the Back & Neck Pain Center, got Ms. Connors in for an MRI right away. "I can't even describe the pain I experienced just to get me on the table for the scan, I was screaming," said Ms. Connors. On their way home from the scans, she and Mr. Roman got the call from Ms. Price explaining she had an aggressive infection in her spine called vertebral osteomyelitis and discitis that spread into her bloodstream. Ms. Price told her to go to Mather's emergency department immediately. There, additional imaging studies were done to see if the infection had spread to her heart or brain.

Luckily it had not. Neurosurgeon Stephen Leon, MD, came in to explain the results of the studies and plans for two surgeries to remove the infection and the discs in her spine that were compromised as a result.

"When Dr. Leon went to remove the discs, he said the infection was so aggressive that they crumbled in his hands." Ms. Connors said. The surgeon replaced them with titanium discs. The surgeries were followed by a month of inpatient rehabilitation and a long course of antibiotics.

"During my first surgery, you'd think I would be nervous, but I wasn't. I was so grateful that I was in good care," she said. "Ms. Price really went above and beyond for me and Dr. Leon is an excellent doctor. He is honest and direct and answered all of our questions."

Ms. Connors is now back working as a real estate agent and a life coach. And just five months after walking into Mather's Back & Neck Pain Center, she walked down the aisle pain free and married Mr. Roman.

How bad is your back or neck pain? Find out at matherhospital.org/backpainscreening.









Smooth sailing

How a hip replacement got this boat lover back on the water

As soon as he saw the sleek, 22-foot fishing boat, Tom Ryan knew it was the buy of a lifetime. He immediately thought of all the places he and his wife could cruise to for fishing and clamming. But with a heavy heart, he passed it up.

"At that point, my hip was in such bad shape, I knew I wouldn't even be able to get in and out of the boat without incredible pain," he said. He already owned a boat, but it was getting less use. "At that point, I couldn't even get out of my car easily."

Then 71, Mr. Ryan, who lives in Manorville, had been dealing with increasing pain and decreasing mobility for a couple of years. He thought more often of all the things he couldn't do than the ones he could. Off the list: going up stairs, grocery shopping with his wife, taking a walk whenever he wanted, putting on socks without a tool to help.

He made a determined effort to get his boat out a few times during the summer of 2019, but eventually gave up. "I thought this is how it had to be, with getting older," he said. "A big part of me felt like it was inevitable that I'd end up sitting in a chair most of my days."

Then, in late January, he heard about a talk on joint replacements at Mather Hospital given by orthopedic surgeon Michael Fracchia, MD, of Long Island Bone and Joint, a practice of Orlin & Cohen Orthopedic Group.

Though not sold on the idea of undergoing surgery and skeptical that it could help, he decided to attend anyway, as the hospital was only about 20 minutes away. It wasn't long into the talk — during which Dr. Fracchia outlined the procedure, the various

specialties involved and how rehab figured into it — that he was sold.

Mr. Ryan went up to Dr. Fracchia after the presentation. "I asked if he could squeeze me in that night," he said with a laugh. "But honestly, if he'd said yes, I would have done it."

Instead he had to wait a couple of months — he had his hip operation on March 10th, and it ended up changing everything.

What's involved

Although each patient is unique, in many ways, Mr. Ryan is typical of the type of patient Dr. Fracchia sees who have hip issues.

"These patients are often in a lot of pain, have limited mobility, and it's getting worse," he said. "Usually, the pain is in the groin, which surprises people because they think it'll be the outer hip."

Patients like Mr. Ryan tend to curtail activities they once enjoyed, either because of pain or out of fear the hip will get "stuck" in a certain position.

Often, they've tried many other avenues for relief, like anti-inflammatories and physical therapy, to no avail.

The hip replacement surgery takes about an hour, Dr. Fracchia said. Mather's focus on having the newest surgical technologies and techniques has been a boon, Dr. Fracchia said. The goal is to get patients up and walking

the same day, reducing hospital stays and shortening rehabilitation. Although most patients spend the night and go home the next day, some do end up leaving in the evening, depending on their post-surgery progress.

With physical therapy, hip replacement patients can often expect to be back to their everyday activities within just a few weeks.

Joint replacement surgeries such as hip and knee procedures really do change lives, said Dr. Fracchia. Implant design improvement often means they will last a lifetime.

Getting mobile again

For Mr. Ryan, the surgery and rehabilitation process was smooth. He offers high praise for Dr. Fracchia as well as the physical therapists and nurses who made that day and the ones following much easier.

"I can't say enough about everyone who helped me and was involved with this, they were all so tremendous," he said. "I actually have arthritis in my other hip, so I'll be having this done on the other side at some point, but now I have zero concerns that it will be a success."

In the meantime, Mr. Ryan is more active than he has been in years. All the walking he's done has led to a 40-pound weight loss, and his boat is getting a lot of time on the water, which means plenty of quality time with his wife.

Now, he seeks out chances to be active and can't believe he ever thought being resigned to life in an easy chair was just an inevitable part of aging.

And that boat he passed up as the one that got away? It went back up for sale. This time, he said yes.

To learn more about joint replacement surgery at Mather Hospital, visit matherhospital.org/orthopedics.



Bringing the community together in the fight against breast cancer

October is breast cancer awareness month. Join us for Paint Port Pink, a month-long outreach by Mather Hospital's Fortunato Breast Health Center with the mission of raising awareness about breast cancer, sharing information and education and fostering solidarity in the community.

Visit **paintportpink.org** to become a community partner or for more information on:

- Free HealthyU breast cancer webinar series
- Free breast cancer screening program for underinsured
- Ladies Night In virtual gathering
- Mask-querade contest
- Pink Your Pumpkin contest



The 26th Annual Families Walk for Hope is going virtual!

This year the Walk will benefit both the Fortunato Breast Health Center and Mather's Covid-19 Emergency Fund.

You can impact health care in our community. All you have to do is sign up and get out there. You decide where, when and how far you go.

Go to familieswalkforhope.org to register today!





Breast cancer in younger women

Under age 50? What you need to know about your risk

Any diagnosis of breast cancer is difficult, but when you're under age 50, you can add surprise and shock to the list of reactions. While breast cancer is rare in younger women, the disease can and sometimes does strike early.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that 11 percent of new cases of breast cancer occur in women 45 and under. Even women in their twenties can develop breast cancer, though the odds are relatively low (about one in 1,500, according to the American Cancer Society).

Are you at risk?

Certain factors increase the likelihood of a breast cancer diagnosis before you're 45.

- Family history of breast or ovarian cancer before 45 in first-degree relatives (mother, sister).
- Genetics. Mutations in the breastcancer genes BRCA1 and/or BRCA2.
- Heritage, including women of Ashkenazi Jewish descent.
- Radiation exposure in childhood or adolescence.

Treating breast cancer at a young age

Younger women with breast cancer tend to develop more aggressive types, such as triple-negative and HER-2 positive. The good news is that certain targeted treatments, including oral chemotherapies, kinase inhibitors and immunotherapies, have proven to be effective at fighting these cancers.

Reducing breast cancer risk

Talk to your doctor if you're young and concerned about a heightened risk of breast cancer. Your doctor may recommend seeing a genetic counselor to learn more about screening for breast cancer gene mutations. In some cases, it might be smart to start getting mammograms earlier.

You can lower breast cancer risk by:

- Maintaining a healthy weight
- Staying physically active
- Limiting alcohol to no more than one drink per day
- Not using hormonal birth control or hormone replacement therapy unless medically necessary
- Breastfeeding your babies, if possible

When should you get screened?

Different medical organizations differ in their recommendations of when to start screening, according to Michelle Price, MD, a radiologist at Fortunato Breast Health Center at Mather Hospital.

"We follow the guidelines of the American College of Radiologists, which is to have annual mammograms starting at age 40," she said. "If you are higher risk, then you'd likely be a candidate for breast MRI."

Risk goes up with family history, said Dr. Price, but there are other factors as well, like whether you've had children or if you've ever had a biopsy. At Mather, your doctor will automatically calculate your risk based on all factors and give you a screening recommendation based on that information. One more big screening tip, Dr. Price added, is to actually schedule it.

"Women are so used to taking care of other people and putting themselves last on the list," she said. "This is important, and it could be life-saving. All of us are at risk, not just those with family history. The national average for breast cancer is 1 in 8. Give yourself and your family the gift of breast cancer screenings."

For more information about breast cancer screenings, visit matherhospital.org/breasthealth or call (631) 250-3997.



Here are four common myths that prevent people from signing up to be an organ donor, and the real story.

Myth No. 1: Doctors won't try as hard to save my life.

Truth: Physicians take their oath very seriously, and in the event of a tragic accident or health crisis, they will do everything in their power to save your life or that of your loved one. Organ donation is not even considered until there is nothing more that can be done medically.

Myth No. 2: I won't be able to have a proper funeral.

Truth: Recovering organs is done with the utmost care and respect, specifically so that the person's family can have an open casket if they choose. Furthermore, all major religions support and encourage organ donation.

Myth No. 3: I'm not healthy enough to be an organ donor.

Truth: Neither advancing age nor some chronic conditions, from high blood pressure and diabetes to HIV or hepatitis C, are organ-donation deal-breakers. The oldest-ever donor in metro New York was a 93-year-old woman whose liver saved someone else's life. If you register as a donor, you never know how many people you can help.

Myth No. 4: Registering is complicated.

Truth: This used to be true, but these days you can register online. In November 2017, the New York State Department of Health launched Donatelife.ny.gov. Once you register, share your decision with your loved ones, so they'll support your wishes — and perhaps also sign up themselves.

Fast forward

Can regular fasting really be *good* for you?

People have fasted for millennia, but intermittent fasting gives the practice a new spin

Unlike traditional fasts — not eating for extended periods — intermittent fasting (IF) limits food intake within shorter blocks of time.

According to a 2015 review of 40 clinical trials published in *The Journal of Molecular and Cellular Endocrinology*, some individuals have found IF effective for weight loss. IF increases the body's response to insulin, a hormone that regulates blood sugar, according to a recent study published in *Cell Metabolism*. A pilot study in *The Journal of Immunology* indicated that intermittent fasting can alleviate mild asthma symptoms in adults.

IF works with healthy eating plans and is adaptable to vegetarian, vegan or gluten-free menus. Proponents like that flexibility.

The safest format restricts all food intake to within a daily window of eight, six or four hours. You don't eat for the balance of the day, but can still drink calorie-free beverages. Other IF formats restrict calories severely for two or three nonconsecutive days. Though the early research is promising, we don't recommend jumping into such a drastic change in diet without consulting a registered dietitian, nutritionist or physician.

Many intermittent fasters avoid refined carbs and alcohol. If you try IF, be sure to drink water and other calorie-free beverages to help reduce hunger levels. The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition published data suggesting that increased water consumption helped people lose weight.

More studies need to be completed to determine IF's effectiveness in the long term. One ongoing clinical trial is studying how IF calorie restriction affects insulin-resistant women between 55 and 70 years old. Furthermore, researchers at Intermountain Medical Center in Utah have been studying how IF may reduce the risk of developing Type 2 diabetes and heart disease, and help reduce cholesterol levels in people who are prediabetic.

IF is not recommended for pregnant women, children, teens, seniors or those with a history of eating disorders or Type 1 diabetes. Please check with your doctor before starting intermittent fasting or any other new eating plan.

For more information on nutrition and weight loss contact Mather's Medical Weight Management Program at (631) 686-2513.





Aitezaz Ahmed, MD

Living with rheumatoid arthritis during Covid-19

Don't let the pandemic stop you from getting the care you need

The Covid-19 pandemic put a lot of our lives on hold, including some healthcare needs. But if you have a chronic condition like rheumatoid arthritis (RA), you shouldn't put your care on the back burner. RA is a chronic autoimmune disorder that primarily affects joints, but can cause issues throughout the body, including nerves, vision, the respiratory

system, skin, and function related to the heart and kidneys. Symptoms can vary in intensity and often flare up and then subside, making it difficult to predict and sometimes challenging to treat.

Because of the nature of RA, patients may need to check in with their doctors more often, and many are concerned about how to weigh getting



their condition under control while staying protected from Covid-19, said Aitezaz Ahmed, MD, a rheumatologist at Mather Rheumatology, a practice of Harbor View Medical Services, PC. "The biggest concerns I see are around medications and infection prevention."

Here's a look at what you need to know, along with Dr. Ahmed's suggestions for how to manage your condition and still stay safe.

Access to medications

The drug hydroxychloroquine, brand name Plaquenil, was originally developed to treat malaria, but is commonly used to treat conditions like RA and lupus, another autoimmune disorder. Despite some claims that it's a promising

treatment for Covid-19, there's currently no conclusive medical evidence to support its use for the virus, or for any virus, said Dr. Ahmed.

Unfortunately, the claims have led to shortages of the medication for RA patients; the Food and Drug Administration is working with drug manufacturers to increase supply. In the meantime, Dr. Ahmed suggests some steps you can take to ensure you have access to the medications you need:

- Call your rheumatologist for a refill before you run out.
- Ask for a 90-day supply instead of 30 days.
- Ask your doctor to write your diagnosis on the prescription, since some pharmacies will prioritize prescriptions for patients with a rheumatoid arthritis diagnosis.
- Remember that the beneficial effects of hydroxychloroquine can persist for up to three months after your last dose, so even if you miss a few days of treatment it is unlikely to result in long-term harm.

Immunosuppressants

Many patients who have RA take immunosuppressive medications such as methotrexate and injectable biologics. These drugs have been shown to have profound benefits, easing symptoms like joint pain, fatigue and swelling. Methotrexate is now the most-prescribed drug in the world for RA. But because these medications work by lowering your immune response, you may worry that you are more susceptible to Covid-19, said Dr. Ahmed.

His best advice: don't stop taking these medications for fear of contracting the virus. Doing so may increase your risk of an arthritis flare, significant pain, and even joint damage and potential disability. "It is very important that you discuss treatment options with your rheumatologist, since each patient is unique. However, most experts advise continued immunosuppressive therapy for rheumatoid arthritis unless there is an actual infection," he said.

Covid-19 prevention

Whether or not you are taking immunosuppressants, it's crucial to take steps to protect yourself from Covid-19 exposure and possible infection. By now, the preventative steps are well known — it comes down to the basics of infection prevention.

"Nothing beats regular hand washing, wearing a mask when out in public places and maintaining social distancing," he said. "For rheumatology patients, it is especially important to be up-to-date on your vaccines. Make sure you get a flu shot this upcoming flu season and ask your doctor if you should have the pneumonia and shingles vaccines, as those depend on your age and medication profile."

Another way to limit risk is to consider telemedicine appointments instead of traveling into a clinic or hospital. That can be especially vital if you take immunosuppressants.

"It's easier than ever to stay in touch with your health care providers," said Dr. Ahmed. "Don't put your health on hold. Take care of yourself."

At Harbor View Medical Services, we make it safe to be seen. Don't delay your care. To schedule a telemedicine or in-person appointment in our safe offices visit harborviewmedicalservices.com/safe or call (631) 545-1010.

This is your brain on...

Let's clear up some misconceptions about your grey matter.

Scientists have made remarkable progress in understanding how the brain works. Yet their research has also led to the popularity of "neuromyths" — or fictions about brain science.

As with most myths, there's often a grain of truth to them, said Ashesh Mehta, MD, PhD, a neurosurgeon at Northwell Health's Neuroscience Institute at Great Neck. Most brain myths are rooted in fact, but, "they have been distorted or overblown." It's often the most outlandish aspects that turn into the most persistent myths.

Keeping your brain healthy

The brain is more active and capable than you may realize — even if some cognitive function and flexibility decline as we get older. We asked Dr. Mehta for tips to keep your brain as healthy as possible.

Top brain myths, debunked:



You only use 10 percent of your brain.

The notion that humans only use a tiny fraction of their brain — but that, with the right stimulation, we can unleash superhuman abilities — is a common plot device in movies and books. While certain critical areas of the brain, such as those involved with movement and language, only occupy about 10 percent of grey matter, "that's a far cry from saying we only use 10 percent of our brain." said Dr. Mehta.

In fact, most brain cells are firing signals all the time, no matter what you are doing. "The hardware is very active," he said. "But different areas of the brain are doing different things. If you have a stroke that affects a tiny area in one part of the brain, you may experience little to no effect on function." But if the stroke affects the critical areas that govern movement or language, you may see a profound neurological deficit. That may be where the myth came from — but the truth is that we still don't know how much is actually possible with the human brain.



"Left-brain" vs. "right-brain"

For decades, people have used the terms "left-brained" and "right-brained" to describe visual and verbal learning styles as well as personality types. The myth: left-brainers are analytical and math-oriented; right-brainers are creative and artistic.

Research indicates that there are hemispheric differences, said Dr. Mehta, but popular culture has taken that idea too far

"The most striking difference between the left brain and right brain is that the left brain has a very obvious expressive language function that the right brain does not have," he said. "In other words, a person can have his or her entire right brain compromised during a stroke and still be able to speak.

"There are definite differences in the right brain and the left brain," he said. "But the two sides actually have to work together to make us analytical, or expressive, or creative."



You can't teach an old dog new tricks.

As the myth goes, an aging brain becomes less and less able to learn new things. The grain of truth here, said Dr. Mehta, is that aging does slow the brain down. But it's never impossible to gain new skills or knowledge; it just may take a bit more work. "There are areas of the brain involved with memory, attention and controlling impulses that can degenerate with age," he said. "But research shows that we can continue to learn, even as those skills diminish."

So go ahead and take that Spanish class or learn how to ballroom dance. You — and your brain — can do it.



EAT RIGHT AND EXERCISE.

It's true that what's good for the heart is good for the brain. In the same way a nutritious diet and regular exercise boost your cardiovascular health, they keep your brain humming, too. "There's increasing evidence that exercise improves not only the blood supply to your brain, but also brain activity," said

Dr. Mehta. "As for diet, we know there is a lot of interaction between the gut and the mind. Eating well will help make sure you are having the right kind of [biological] interactions that will help the brain stay strong."

USE IT OR LOSE IT.

Probably the most important thing you can do to keep the brain in fighting shape is to simply use it. "Challenge yourself. Pay attention. Be mindful of the world around you. Be social," he said. "Pushing yourself to learn new things, I think that's what keeps people young."

Look North

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Northwell Health is more than your local hospital. We're a world-class health system with all the services your family needs. Our care ranges from checkups to transplants and everything in between. We're also changing the future of medicine with biomedical research, and educating the next generation of clinicians.



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