

PA

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HEALTH

YOUR GUIDE TO FITNESS & WELL-BEING



FACING DOWN TWO CANCERS WITHOUT FEAR



MEET FOREST, THE
50TH BIRTH AT
SCRANTON'S NEW
CHILDBIRTH CENTER

GROW YOUR
OWN MEDICINE



Springtime in Pennsylvania is something to celebrate. Days get longer, the ground begins to thaw, and we start seeing new growth everywhere. Now is the time to plan — and plant — your summer garden. In this edition of *PA Health*, you'll read about healthy vegetables that are easy to grow and discover a simple recipe for them once they're ready to harvest. Packed with nutrition and flavor, the produce you plant today will help keep your family healthy and happy for months to come.

And while you're enjoying the weather, why not volunteer your time at a local community organization? We have suggestions on ways to help. Whether you're clearing trails at a local park or signing up for a 5K in support of a good cause, you'll be outside getting some exercise.

And you'll have a lot to feel good about.

In these pages, you'll also meet Hunter Jones. She was diagnosed with both colon and brain cancer

when she was a 17-year-old high school senior. Today, she's a college graduate ready to take on the world.

Our second patient story is a celebration of new beginnings. Forest Compton was the 50th baby born at Geisinger's new Childbirth Center in Scranton. Meet him and his mother, Jackie, as she tells the story of his birth and thanks the midwives who helped welcome him into the world.

Happy first spring, Forest!

As we begin our second year of *PA Health*, I'd like to thank you for being one of our readers. As always, we welcome your feedback, comments and suggestions. And check out our brand-new website for videos, more patient stories and recipes. It's all at geisinger.org/PAhealth.

Wishing you and your loved ones the best of health this season,

Don Stanziano
Executive Editor



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:
Hunter Jones overcame brain and colon cancer with the help of her doctors and an optimistic attitude. (Photo by Mark Dastrup)

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HEALTH EVENTS NEAR YOU

Yearning to do yoga? Searching for a support group to manage diabetes? Want to quit smoking? A wealth of wellness events awaits you — including classes, lectures, support groups, screenings and more! Just visit events.geisinger.org and browse by category, date or location.

FACING DOWN TWO CANCERS *without fear*

Diagnosed with colon and brain cancer, Hunter Jones gave herself time to cry. But not for long.

BY BETH KASZUBA

There came a moment, just after her diagnosis of two cancers — in her colon and brain — that Hunter Jones rejected fear in favor of optimism and a fighting spirit.

Today, the 21-year-old, who received the dual diagnosis while in high school, credits her positive attitude, her family and friends, and her care team at Geisinger with her full recovery and a cancer-free life.

“I was mentally prepared to deal with colon cancer when they found the brain tumor, too,” recalls Ms. Jones, of Dallas. “I thought, ‘I’m going to fight. I’m going to face this head on.’”

Ms. Jones’ journey began in 2015, when routine screening before a blood donation revealed that she was severely anemic. Too anemic to donate.

Her low hemoglobin levels didn’t make sense to Ms. Jones or her mother, a registered nurse, who was concerned and requested more bloodwork. This confirmed

the diagnosis of anemia — a surprise, since Ms. Jones wasn’t exhibiting any signs or symptoms.

The discovery prompted Ms. Jones to finally admit that she’d had stomach issues for about a year — something she’d avoided sharing with her mother. “It’s embarrassing, as a 17-year-old girl,” she says, adding that she was also afraid her physician would order a colonoscopy.

Ms. Jones was referred to Geisinger Pediatric Gastroenterology, where an endoscopy led to a diagnosis of stage IIIC colon cancer. That meant she didn’t just have cancer, but it had spread into the outermost layer of her colon and possibly nearby lymph nodes, too.

A frightening diagnosis, on its own. Especially for someone so young.

Then, when Ms. Jones was being prepped for surgery, a discussion with her anesthesiologist raised new concerns about numbness in Ms. Jones’ legs after sedation used during the endoscopies.

A series of neurological tests revealed a brain tumor.

Ms. Jones allowed herself a half hour to cry about the latest setback — then she came back even more determined to fight both cancers. And, in spite of undergoing two surgeries and other draining cancer treatments, she also insisted on finishing her senior year of high school.

“My goal was to make it to prom and graduation,” Ms. Jones says. “I tried to stay as active as possible. I didn’t want cancer to take over my life.”

Not only did her team of physicians work



*“I’m going to fight.
I’m going to face
this head on.”*

– Hunter Jones

together to make sure she attended prom, she also went on to Marywood University and earned a dual degree in information security and computer science.

Today, Ms. Jones is completing a data analytics internship with Geisinger — and remains under the care of pediatric gastroenterologist Dean Focht, MD, and pediatric hematologist/oncologist Jagadeesh Ramdas, MD.

“They definitely care about their patients,” she says. “When I was an inpatient, Dr. Focht and his wife made dinner for my mother and me and brought it to the hospital. And when I developed blisters on my feet — a side effect of my chemotherapy — Dr. Ramdas worked hard to adjust my dosage and eliminate the blisters, just so I could wear my heels for prom.”

Dr. Focht says he’s grateful for the opportunity to care for such a “remarkable young lady.”

“Nothing can hold Hunter back,” he says. “I’m a better physician because I had the privilege of helping to care for her.”

Dr. Focht adds that, despite tackling cancer twice, Ms. Jones is “always looking to give back to others.”

Ms. Jones has started a nonprofit, the Hope for Hunter Fund, which provides “chemo cozy” jackets for pediatric patients and young adult oncology. The fleece jackets have hidden access points for implanted ports used to deliver chemotherapy drugs, so the patient doesn’t have to undress to receive treatment. “It makes a terrible situation a little better,” she says, adding, “It helps to keep a good outlook. I’ve learned to find a positive in the obstacles I’ve faced, regardless of how small the positive might be.”



“Nothing can hold Hunter back. I’m a better physician because I had the privilege of helping to care for her.”

– Dean Focht, MD

Do good. Get healthy.

There's no reason you shouldn't benefit from doing good for our communities. And if you want to improve your health while having a positive impact, too, our region offers plenty of opportunities to get up and get moving while you volunteer.

BY BETH KASZUBA



Step up at a state park

If you already enjoy Pennsylvania's vast network of state parks, why not help maintain them — and get some exercise, too?

The state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources is always looking for volunteers to do everything from clear trails and improve wildlife habitats to conduct guided walks and perform light maintenance for visitors to campgrounds.

Depending on your interests and availability, you can join a one-time effort, like a park clean-up, or become a Conservation Volunteer, which involves a more serious commitment of time and energy.

For more information, including a searchable schedule of upcoming events, visit dcnr.pa.gov/GetInvolved.



Run for fun, fitness and charity

Joining one of our region's many foot races, which range from fun runs to marathons, is a great way to motivate yourself to train, get moving outdoors on race day — and support deserving charities, too.

Maybe you want to support a local cause, like raising money for a neighbor facing an illness. Or maybe you want to put feet to pavement in support of an international effort, like the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure.

Either way, you'll be a winner even if you don't cross the finish line first.

Search for local races — sorted by location, date and distance — at **RoadRaceRunner.com**.

Make some furry friends

We've all heard about the benefits of enlisting a buddy to keep our fitness goals on track.

What if you had a furry fitness pal waiting for you to walk or run on a regular basis?

Lots of animal shelters and rescue organizations invite volunteers to play with or walk pets waiting for their forever homes. Lace up, leash up — and maybe even find a lifelong workout partner. Start at **HumaneSociety.org/volunteer** or search "animal rescue near me."



Put me in, coach

Even if you weren't a high school or college sports star, you could still have something to offer others as a volunteer coach.

Take to the field by helping out with a local soccer team. Sign up to become a coach or running buddy for girls training for Girls on the Run. Or help an athlete train for a Special Olympics competition. You'll be helping promote healthy lifestyles for others and yourself, and probably boosting someone else's self-esteem and confidence, too.

To learn more about opportunities, visit **ayso.org/get-involved/volunteer**, **GirlsOnTheRun.org** and **SpecialOlympics.org/get-involved/volunteer**.



**SHE HAD A
BIRTH PLAN.**

HE HAD OTHER IDEAS.

Everyone worked together to make sure Forest and his mother had the best possible birth experience.

BY PAULA FRANKEN

Jackie Compton laughs as she cuddles 7-week old Forest, the 50th baby born at Geisinger's new Childbirth Center in Scranton. "I'd done a ton of research and knew what I wanted: a natural birth — no medication," she explains. "But 43 hours of labor? I hadn't planned for that."

Forest's birth story began on Dec. 5, 2019, at 1 a.m. when his mother's water broke even though she wasn't having contractions. "I decided to go back to bed and monitor myself for contractions," she says. "I called my midwife at 6:30 and she said we could take our time.

We checked into the birthing center at 9:30. Still no contractions."

Ms. Compton, her husband, Chance, and both sets of grandparents-to-be made themselves at home in the room where she would go through labor and delivery and stay after the baby's birth. "The rooms are very comfortable and spacious," she says. "There was plenty of room for all of us and the nurses and midwife. And I was free to move around as much as I wanted."

Since labor wasn't progressing, Ms. Compton was given medication to soften her cervix.

This 12-hour treatment brought on irregular contractions — still not true labor. So she got a second dose. Same results. Four hours later, she was given Pitocin®, a synthetic version of oxytocin, the hormone your body naturally produces to induce contractions.

That's when active labor finally began.

Ms. Compton had planned on a natural birth — no epidural, minimal drug intervention and nitrous oxide to help manage pain. By this time, she was pretty worn out. But she was determined to stick to the plan. "I used the birthing ball to open my pelvis and get the contractions moving," she says. She also took a long, hot shower and had her husband apply pressure to ease her back pain. But after hours of active labor, she was only dilated 2 centimeters. When she heard that, her heart sank.

"That's when my labor nurse asked me if I'd like to reconsider having an epidural," Ms. Compton explains. "She was very sweet about it and the choice was completely mine. I'm very glad I had the option to switch my plan, and I like that the midwives and the OB-GYN were communicating closely at this point."

Ms. Compton had to control her contractions while the needle was inserted for the epidural and she began to second-guess her choice. "Then I asked myself if I'd be able to control myself in two hours and the answer was no," she says. "I was exhausted. My body was crying out for help and I needed to do what was best for my baby."

"I think some people may have a misconception about what it means to deliver by midwife," says Heather Mecone, Geisinger certified nurse-midwife. "Yes, we encourage natural births with as little intervention as possible, but pain medication is always an option if requested, and if an OB-GYN needs to step in, there's always one on hand. The bottom line is, we all want what's best for a safe delivery."

After the epidural, Ms. Compton's pain ceased, labor progressed smoothly, and she could relax and enjoy her family's company. Six hours later, she was ready to start pushing. Two hours later, at 8:04 p.m. on Dec. 6, Forest Robert Compton arrived.

"They put him on my abdomen right away

and we began bonding immediately. It was an amazing experience," says Ms. Compton. "It had been 43 hours since my water broke. I was so happy to be done."

But the Comptons weren't done. Forest developed jaundice, a common condition that occurs when a baby's system contains a high level of bilirubin. Jaundice is easily treated with light therapy, so a special incubator was brought into the birthing room. After nearly a week, Forest was given a "bili blanket" to help stabilize his bilirubin levels and got to go home.

"I really can't say enough good things about the staff at the Childbirth Center," says Ms. Compton. "I'd met all the midwives during my prenatal visits, so I knew I'd be familiar with whoever was on call. Turns out, I got to work with four of the five of them. And the lactation consultant was amazing, too. Everyone was there to support me and make sure I had the best possible experience — which meant being flexible when things didn't go exactly as planned. Welcome to motherhood, right?"

"The bottom line is, we all want what's best for a safe delivery."

– Heather Mecone, Geisinger certified nurse-midwife



See a video of Jackie Compton and Forest at [geisinger.org/PAhealth](https://www.geisinger.org/PAhealth).

Grow your own medicine

BY PAULA FRANKEN

Spring's finally here and many of us are thinking about planting gardens — either in our own backyards or in community spaces. Growing your own food, free of chemicals and pesticides, is a great way to make sure you and your family are eating a healthy diet. Especially when you consider the fact that a diet full of fruits and vegetables is a proven way to lessen your risk of heart disease, Type 2 diabetes and high blood pressure.

What grows in Pennsylvania?

Luckily for us, our state is known for rich soil, abundant farmland and plentiful farmers' markets. But if you want to grow your own, here are a few garden goodies that are easy to grow and packed with nutrition.



Tomatoes:

An excellent source of vitamin C and other antioxidants, tomatoes help fight free radicals that are known to cause cancer. They also support heart health, protect muscles, reduce kidney stones, help fight diabetes and are great for your eyes and skin.



Kale:

This leafy member of the cabbage family is one of the most nutrient-dense foods on the planet. Kale is loaded with antioxidants and contains a wide range of vitamins. When steamed, it's especially good for lowering cholesterol levels, but it is also effective when juiced or eaten raw.



Bell peppers:

Whether you choose red, yellow, orange or green (which are unripe), peppers are an excellent source of vitamins and minerals. A single serving can provide 169% of your recommended daily intake (RDI) of vitamin C.



Basil:

Don't forget to add herbs to your garden plan. Basil is good for digestion and has strong anti-inflammatory properties. These guard against a variety of diseases and disorders including heart disease, rheumatoid arthritis and inflammatory bowel conditions.



Mint:

Peppermint and spearmint are known for dynamic flavor and can help relieve indigestion, improve irritable bowel syndrome and enhance brain function. Though it's usually eaten in small amounts, some salad recipes call for more mint — and make the most of its nutritional benefits.

Believe it or not, summer is right around the corner. Get planting — and get ready to enjoy nature's bounty!



A feast right from the garden

Living in Pennsylvania means enjoying fresh, locally grown produce throughout the summer. Although it probably doesn't feel like it now, those days are right around the corner.

Plant your garden soon so you'll have plenty of nutritious veggies to harvest. Geisinger registered dietitian nutritionist Lyndell Wright shares a recipe for a healthy salad that is as colorful as it is easy to prepare — and makes the most of foods you can grow yourself or find at local farmers' markets.

Tomato and Corn Salad with Basil

INGREDIENTS

- 2 large ears of corn, shucked, steamed and removed from cob
- 3 medium tomatoes, chopped
- ½ red bell pepper, chopped
- ⅓ cup green onions, thinly sliced
- ⅓ cup sweet onion, finely chopped
- 1 tablespoon lime juice
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- ¼ teaspoon mustard powder
- Pepper (to taste)
- 4 or 5 basil leaves, cut into thin strips
- 1 tablespoon fresh mint

DIRECTIONS

- 1.** In a large bowl, combine corn, tomatoes, red pepper, green onions and sweet onion.
- 2.** In a small bowl, whisk lime juice with salt, mustard powder and pepper. Pour over salad mixture and toss gently with a fork. Let sit for 15 minutes.
- 3.** Just before serving, add basil leaves and mint. Toss to combine herbs with salad and serve immediately.

“Eating home-grown local foods in season not only tastes great but is more nutritious and supports the local economy and the environment.”

– Lyndell Wright, RDN



Find another delicious straight-from-the-garden recipe at [geisinger.org/PAhealth](https://www.geisinger.org/PAhealth).

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