

# Healthy

Spring 2025

COMMUNITY

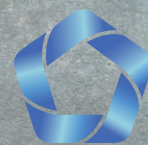


**Lessons from  
a rock legend:**

*Gene  
Simmons*

**gets real  
about health**

**This Issue:  
Focus  
on Heart  
Health**



**Powers**  
HEALTH<sup>SM</sup>

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# Lessons from a Rock Legend

## Gene Simmons Gets Real About Health

GENE SIMMONS, the iconic bassist and co-founder of KISS, has spent decades commanding arenas worldwide. Known for his larger-than-life persona, Simmons is also an advocate for prioritizing health, something he learned the hard way. In this exclusive interview, Simmons shares his journey with atrial fibrillation (AFib), his kidney stone scare and his surprising daily routine. He recently spoke to Healthy Community about his 2006 AFib diagnosis. His story is a wake-up call for everyone to take their health seriously—even if you think you're invincible.

### **Can you tell us what happened?**

I never heard of AFib before. Like most people, I thought my exhaustion and irregular heartbeat were just part of the hectic KISS touring lifestyle. But one night, I noticed my heart speeding up and slowing down. It was tough to breathe, and I'd wake up in the middle of the night for no reason. Eventually, a specialist diagnosed me with AFib, and I realized how serious it could get.

### **Tell us about your treatment.**

The procedure they did was fascinating. They monitored my heart remotely while I was asleep. They caught the irregularities and fixed them. Since then, I haven't had any issues, but it taught me an important lesson —don't wait for things to get bad before seeing a doctor.

### **How has being sober impacted your health?**

I've never been high or drunk in my life. People often think that's odd for a rock star, but I just never saw the appeal. Alcohol smells bad, and drugs? They ruin your health, drain your wallet, and don't make you smarter, richer, or better-looking. I'd rather focus on staying sharp and enjoying my life.

### **What's your daily routine like today?**

I'm not a gym guy, but I keep moving throughout the day. I eat sweets occasionally but in moderation. Sleep is a priority—six to eight hours, plus power naps when needed. I believe in balance. It's not about running marathons; it's about staying consistent and listening to your body.

### **What's your biggest takeaway from these experiences?**

We all think we're invincible, especially when we're young. I was no different. I didn't take aspirin until my late 30s because I never got headaches or colds. But as I got older, I ignored warning signs, like red urine from kidney stones. By the time I saw a doctor, I needed surgery to remove 15 stones. The same goes for AFib. You wouldn't wait for your car to break down before taking it in for maintenance, right? Your body deserves that same care. Regular checkups can save your life—and your quality of life.

Get your butt off the couch. The life you save might be your own.

### **Gene's advice?**

- **Don't Wait Until You Feel Sick.**
- **Know Your Risks:** Learn about your family history and potential genetic predispositions.
- **Stay Active:** Movement is key, but it doesn't have to be extreme.

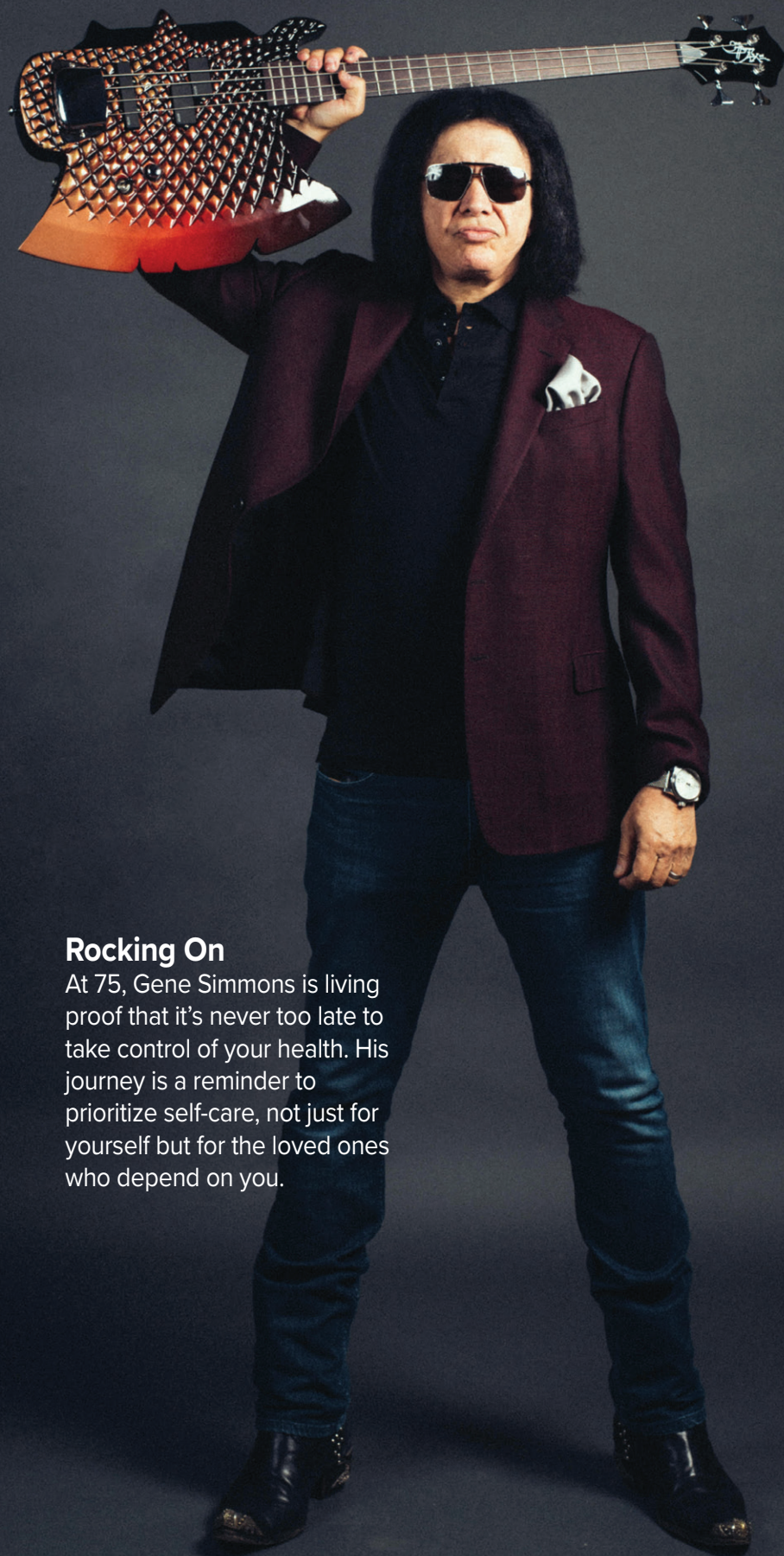
### **Quick Facts About AFib**

**What is AFib?** Atrial fibrillation is an irregular and often rapid heart rhythm that can lead to blood clots, stroke or heart failure.

**Symptoms:** Fatigue, shortness of breath and irregular heartbeat.

**Risk Factors:** Age, high blood pressure and lifestyle choices.

**Takeaway:** Early diagnosis is key. If you notice irregularities, consult your doctor.



## Rocking On

At 75, Gene Simmons is living proof that it's never too late to take control of your health. His journey is a reminder to prioritize self-care, not just for yourself but for the loved ones who depend on you.

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# Heart Health Matters

**T**here's something critical to each of us: heart health. Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death globally, but with the right habits, many risks are manageable.

At Powers Health, we're dedicated to providing resources to support heart health in our community. Understanding key factors—like a balanced diet, regular exercise, stress management and quality sleep—is vital. Following heart-healthy diets like DASH or Mediterranean, getting 150 minutes of activity weekly, managing stress, and prioritizing sleep all contribute to a stronger heart.

Knowing your health numbers, like blood pressure and cholesterol, is essential. We offer screenings to help you monitor these levels and address risks early. Small changes make a big impact, and we're here to support every step of your journey to a healthier heart. Visit us online or call for more information—because a healthy heart benefits us all.

### **Powers Health Coronary Scan —**

This screening uses the most advanced CT imaging to take X-ray pictures of your heart that can detect calcium deposits. These deposits are a sign of heart disease. A doctor's order is not required. **COST: \$49**

**Call 877-999-SCAN to schedule an appointment.**

Sources: CDC, NIH, American Heart Association, Cleveland Clinic, Mayo Clinic, Johns Hopkins





## Understanding Blood Pressure

# What Is Blood Pressure and Why Does It Matter?



**B**lood pressure is the force of blood pushing against the walls of your arteries as your heart pumps. It's measured with two numbers: systolic (top), the pressure when your heart beats, and diastolic (bottom), the pressure when it rests. A normal blood pressure reading is about 120/80 mm Hg.

High blood pressure, or hypertension, occurs when blood flows through your arteries at a consistently higher-than-normal pressure. This condition affects about one in three adults and significantly increases the risk of heart disease, stroke, kidney damage, and more. Known as the “silent killer,” hypertension often shows no symptoms until severe complications arise, highlighting the importance of regular monitoring.

## Why High Blood Pressure Matters

Hypertension can lead to hardened and narrowed arteries (atherosclerosis), raising the risk of heart attack and stroke. It also forces the heart to work harder, potentially leading to heart failure. Other possible complications include kidney damage, eye problems and reduced quality of life.

## Tips for Managing Blood Pressure

The good news is that many strategies for lowering blood pressure involve simple lifestyle changes:

- 1 Exercise Regularly:** Engage in at least 150 minutes of moderate activity per week, such as brisk walking or swimming, to strengthen your heart and lower arterial pressure.
- 2 Eat a Balanced Diet:** Follow a heart-healthy diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains and lean proteins. Consider the DASH diet, which reduces sodium and emphasizes potassium-rich foods.
- 3 Limit Sodium:** Keep daily sodium intake under 2,300 milligrams, or ideally below 1,500 milligrams.
- 4 Reduce Stress:** Practice stress management techniques like yoga, meditation or deep breathing.
- 5 Avoid Smoking and Limit Alcohol:** Both can spike blood pressure and harm blood vessels.

## Take Charge of Your Heart Health

Monitor your blood pressure regularly and consult a healthcare provider if levels are elevated. By making manageable lifestyle changes, you can lower your risk and protect your health.

Sources: CDC, NIH, Cleveland Clinic, Mayo Clinic, Johns Hopkins



# March is NATIONAL COLORECTAL CANCER AWARENESS MONTH

Colorectal cancer, affecting the colon and rectum, is a leading cause of cancer-related deaths—but it's also highly preventable with early detection. Risks increase with age and certain lifestyle factors, but taking proactive steps can help.

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## ► What Is Colorectal Cancer?

Colorectal cancer often begins as small growths called polyps in the colon or rectum. While not all polyps become cancerous, certain types carry higher risks. Early detection through screenings can remove these polyps and prevent cancer from developing.

## ► Key Risk Factors

Common risk factors include:

- **Age:** Most cases are diagnosed in people over 50, but screenings now start at 45 due to rising rates in younger adults.
- **Family History:** A family history of colorectal cancer or genetic conditions like Lynch syndrome can elevate risk.
- **Lifestyle:** Diets high in red and processed meats, smoking, heavy alcohol use and lack of exercise increase risk.
- **Inflammatory Bowel Disease:** Conditions like Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis heighten risk.

**Sources:** CDC, NIH, American Cancer Society, Cleveland Clinic, Mayo Clinic, and Johns Hopkins

## ► Screening Saves Lives

Screenings are crucial for early detection. Options include:

- **Colonoscopy:** A comprehensive exam that can detect and remove polyps.
- **Stool-Based Tests:** Detect cancer markers in stool samples.
- **Flexible Sigmoidoscopy:** Examines the lower colon.

Talk to your healthcare provider to find the right screening for you.

## ► Prevention Through Lifestyle Choices

Lower your risk by:

- **Eating a High-fiber Diet** rich in fruits, vegetables and whole grains.
- **Exercising Regularly.**
- **Avoiding Smoking** and limiting alcohol consumption.
- **Maintaining a Healthy Weight.**

## ► Take Action

This March, prioritize your health. If you're 45 or older, discuss screenings with your doctor. Awareness and early action are key to preventing colorectal cancer.



# The Mind-Heart

## How Stress, Sleep and Exercise Impact Your Heart

When we think about heart health, we often focus on metrics like cholesterol, blood pressure, and BMI. While these numbers are important, the connection between the mind and heart also plays a crucial role in cardiovascular wellness. Stress levels, sleep quality, and physical activity significantly influence the heart. Understanding this connection can empower you to make holistic changes for a healthier, stronger heart.

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### **Stress:** The Hidden Threat to Your Heart

Stress is unavoidable, stemming from work, relationships, finances or life's challenges. In the short term, stress hormones like adrenaline and cortisol prepare the body for "fight or flight," temporarily raising heart rate and blood pressure. However, chronic stress keeps these hormones elevated, placing ongoing strain on the cardiovascular system.

Persistent stress can also trigger inflammation, which damages blood vessels and encourages plaque buildup in arteries. This can lead to atherosclerosis, where narrowed arteries restrict blood flow, increasing the risk of heart attack or stroke. Stress often fuels unhealthy habits like smoking, overeating or excessive alcohol use, compounding the strain on the heart.

Managing stress is key to heart health. Practices like mindfulness meditation, deep breathing, yoga, and tai chi help regulate the body's stress response. These activities reduce blood pressure and inflammation while promoting relaxation. Incorporating stress-relief habits into your daily routine can offer significant, lasting benefits for your heart.

**Sources:** CDC, NIH, AHA, Cleveland Clinic, Mayo Clinic, Johns Hopkins



# Connection

## **Sleep: A Vital Reset for the Heart**

Sleep isn't just a luxury—it's a necessity for good cardiovascular health. During deep sleep, heart rate and blood pressure drop, giving the cardiovascular system a chance to recover. Poor or insufficient sleep, on the other hand, keeps the heart working overtime, raising the risk of hypertension, heart disease, and stroke.

Sleep disorders like sleep apnea disrupt the body's rest cycles. In sleep apnea, pauses in breathing reduce oxygen levels, prompting stress responses that elevate blood pressure and inflammation. Left untreated, this condition can significantly increase the risk of heart attacks and heart failure.

Experts recommend seven to nine hours of quality sleep per night. Creating a consistent bedtime, avoiding heavy meals or caffeine late in the day, and limiting screen time before bed can improve sleep quality. Restful sleep also helps regulate weight, reducing risk factors like obesity, high blood pressure, and diabetes that place strain on the heart.

## **Exercise: Strengthening Both Heart and Mind**

Exercise does more than tone muscles—it supports both physical and mental health. Regular physical activity strengthens the heart, improves circulation, lowers blood pressure and helps manage cholesterol. It also reduces stress and boosts mood by releasing endorphins, sometimes called the “feel-good” hormones.

Aerobic activities like walking, running, swimming or cycling are particularly effective for heart health. These exercises improve cardiovascular endurance, helping the heart pump blood more efficiently. Strength training also plays a role by building lean muscle, which supports metabolism and healthy weight management. Keeping a healthy weight reduces strain on the heart, as obesity is a major risk factor for cardiovascular disease.

Exercise even helps with sleep. Regular physical activity promotes deeper, more restful sleep by regulating the body's circadian rhythm. For the best results, finish exercising a few hours before bedtime to avoid overstimulation.

## **Building a Balanced Lifestyle for a Healthy Heart**

A heart-healthy lifestyle integrates stress management, quality sleep and regular exercise. These elements work together, reinforcing one another. For example, exercise not only strengthens the heart but also reduces stress and promotes better sleep. Similarly, good sleep improves energy levels and motivation, making it easier to stay active and manage stress effectively.

Making these changes doesn't have to be overwhelming. Start small with achievable steps. Deep breathing for a few minutes each day, setting a regular bedtime or incorporating short walks into your routine can create a foundation for lasting habits. Over time, these small actions add up to significant improvements in heart health.

## **Practical Tips to Improve Your Mind-Heart Connection**

- 1 Carve Out Time:** Spend 10 minutes daily on stress-reducing activities like mindfulness or meditation.
- 2 Eat Heart-Healthy Foods:** Focus on fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins to fuel your body and heart.
- 3 Move Consistently:** Find a physical activity you enjoy and commit to it regularly.
- 4 Prioritize Sleep Hygiene:** Develop a calming bedtime routine, such as reading or listening to soothing music, to promote better sleep.
- 5 Stay Socially Connected:** Strong relationships and social interactions reduce stress and improve mental and heart health.

## **Embrace the Mind-Heart Connection**

By addressing stress, sleep and exercise, you can strengthen both your heart and mind. Each small, consistent effort—whether a deep breath, a brisk walk or a good night's sleep—contributes to a healthier, more resilient heart. Your journey toward holistic heart health begins with recognizing the power of the mind-heart connection.

To find a Powers Health physician, visit [PowersHealth.org/find-a-doctor-HC-spring25](https://PowersHealth.org/find-a-doctor-HC-spring25).



# Taking Baby Steps

ICU nurse's son 'graduates' from NICU after 124 days

by Vanessa Negrete

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**S**HORTLY AFTER NOON on Thursday, Nov. 14, healthcare workers lined the walls near the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit entrance on the fifth floor of Community Hospital.

They chatted as they grasped ribbons tethered to brightly colored star- and heart-shaped balloons, occasionally peering down the hall as they awaited their little honoree.

The NICU doors opened. A stroller came into view, followed by a nurse and proud parents Taylor and Andrew White. The familiar notes of "Pomp and Circumstance" played from a nearby speaker. Then came the applause.

It was graduation day.

Hudson White, accessorized in denim suspenders and a green plaid bow tie, was nestled in his stroller with a stuffed animal that was about Hudson's size at birth. Hudson was born at 1.7 pounds, 124 days earlier, and had had spent every moment inside the Munster hospital.

"We opened the door, and I heard the music playing, and then the waterworks started," said his mother, Taylor White.

The 28-year-old is a nurse and clinical team lead in the Intensive Care Unit at St. Mary Medical Center in Hobart. Aside from morning sickness, her pregnancy had been progressing well.

"Everything was going perfect, until it wasn't," she said.

At her 20-week scan, her growing baby looked healthy.

"They couldn't get all the pictures they needed because of how he was positioned, so they had me go back three weeks later," White recalled.

When she returned, her cervix did not look quite right, and she began bleeding. A Powers Health obstetrician/gynecologist assessed White and her baby and knew they needed the high-level care provided at Community Hospital's NICU.

**"I can't imagine us being anywhere else. You trust everyone and you get to know everyone."**

"I was at 23 weeks, 5 days gestation the day I was admitted to Community Hospital," White said.

Because of her condition, an exact dilation measurement was not possible, but her care team estimated she was dilated 5 or 6 centimeters.

"I was completely effaced," she said.

Those signs indicated White was close to delivering the baby. She was put on bedrest and positioned in a tipped angle to delay labor as long as possible.

"We hoped it would be months, but I made it only



a week before I went into full-blown labor,” she said.

A neonatologist conferred with the couple and asked if they would want their baby intubated after birth to increase his chance of survival.

“We said ‘yes’ because we wanted to give him a shot,” White said.

She delivered Hudson at 24 weeks and 5 days gestation. He was intubated and moved to the NICU, where he stayed for four months. He made progress and faced setbacks, including a partially collapsed lung.

Powers Health also sponsors a neonatal transport team that allows the healthcare system to care for premature and critically ill babies from local hospitals at Community Hospital’s NICU or transport them to a children’s hospital for further care or surgery.

“All of the NICU nurses, therapists and providers were great,” White said. “I can’t imagine us being anywhere else. You trust everyone and you get to know everyone.”

Tracy Sharp, nurse manager of Neonatology and Pediatrics at Community Hospital, said the NICU team has specialized training to care for the tiniest patients.

“We know this is an anxious time for parents. We want to assure them that we have an exceptional medical team and advanced equipment to give their babies the best chance at a healthy future,” Sharp said.

White spent all but two nights at the hospital with Hudson.

“I didn’t care about anything else,” she said. “Fortunately, we have a close family who stepped in to help at home and with our dogs.”

Her co-workers at St. Mary Medical Center, whom she refers to as her “work family” and “ICU crew,” visited and brought gifts to keep her mind and hands occupied at the hospital.

Looking back, she is grateful for their support. Looking ahead, she sees good things on the horizon for Hudson. Just a couple of months after graduating from the NICU, Hudson could roll over from his belly onto his back.

“He’s sleeping and eating great,” White said. “He makes cute noises. He’s very smiley now.”

His prognosis is good. Once hooked to monitors and under constant medical care, he now only needs a daily multivitamin. ■



**Above:** Taylor and Andrew White, center, pose for a photo with their baby, Hudson, and some of their care team at Community Hospital in Munster.

**Right:** Hudson White is dressed as a construction worker for Halloween while in the NICU at Community Hospital in Munster.



“They say it’s a roller coaster,” she said. “The beginning was, for sure.”

To stay in a positive frame of mind, White avoided researching survival rates for her micropreemie and the meaning behind every test result. Having a medical background, she understood a lot of it anyway.

“Sometimes you know too much, like which numbers are good or bad,” she said.

She also knew Hudson was right where he needed to be.

“I’m glad that’s where we ended up,” she said.

“Community Hospital has the best NICU in our area.”

Community Hospital is home to a Level III NICU, with Northwest Indiana’s most experienced team of neonatal specialists, physician assistants and nurse practitioners who are available around the clock.

For more information about Maternal and Neonatal Care at Powers Health, visit [PowersHealth.org/baby-HC-spring25](https://PowersHealth.org/baby-HC-spring25).

# Triumphing *over* Tricuspid Troubles

Undergoing new heart procedure was 'no big deal' for local woman

by Vanessa Negrete

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**A** Crown Point woman can breathe and walk more easily after cardiac specialists

at Community Hospital in Munster took a new, less invasive approach to treating her heart condition.

In fall 2024, 80-year-old mother and grandmother Gladys Schliemann was the first patient in Indiana to undergo transcatheter tricuspid valve replacement (TTVR).

"I was walking with a cane, but I don't need to do that anymore," Gladys said. "I'm not at all tired like I was. I'm not short of breath. The cold air would take my breath away and make my heart race, but now it doesn't."

TTVR treats tricuspid regurgitation, a life-threatening heart condition that affects about 1.6 million Americans, according to the Journal of American College of Cardiology. It occurs when the tricuspid valve on the right side of the heart does not



**Above:** Gladys Schliemann, of Crown Point, was the first patient in Indiana to undergo TTVR.

close properly, and blood flows backward from the ventricle to the atrium. This causes a patient's heart to work harder to move blood through the valve.

Left untreated, tricuspid regurgitation may lead to heart failure. Treatment options include medication or surgery to repair the valve, depending on the severity. Patients often do not notice symptoms – such as abnormal heart rhythms, fatigue and swelling in the abdomen, legs and neck veins – until their condition worsens.

Gladys began noticing the impact of the heart condition when everyday tasks became increasingly difficult.

"First, you can't vacuum and then you can't sweep," she said. "It's aggravating not to be able to do anything. I'm not someone who sits around."



Gladys, who had a heart murmur for some time, delayed treatment for the murmur because she feared undergoing open-heart surgery. Her pulmonologist in June 2024 told her about the TTVR procedure at Powers Health. After considering it for a couple of months, Gladys made an appointment to learn more.

Using the EVOQUE tricuspid valve device offered by Edwards Lifesciences, the TTVR procedure is beneficial in treating patients who have severe tricuspid regurgitation without having to undergo conventional open-heart surgery. The device is implanted using a catheter threaded through the femoral vein to the heart.

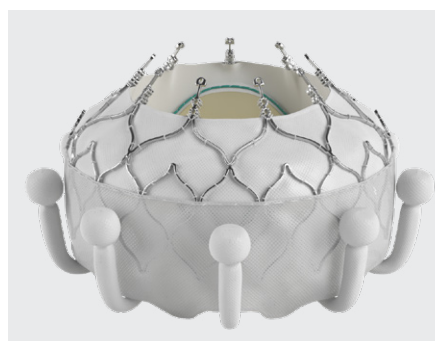
“The tricuspid valve is complex anatomically,” said Samer Abbas, MD, co-medical director of Cardiovascular Services for Powers Health and medical director of the Structural Heart and Valve Clinic of Powers Health. “This innovative procedure allows us to treat our patients who have severe tricuspid regurgitation through transcatheter intervention. Because of that, patients will typically experience a faster recovery time and an improved quality of life.”

Gladys met with members of the Structural Heart team at Community Hospital, including Dr. Abbas and cardiothoracic and cardiovascular surgeon Michael Eng, MD, the two doctors who are trained to perform this delicate procedure. They explained TTVR and how it could greatly improve her life.

She then underwent a full work-up of tests to ensure she was a good candidate for the procedure. One of the tests is an advanced echocardiogram, which was performed by cardiologist Omar Hussein, MD, Powers Health Advanced Echo Imager.

After a bout with COVID-19 briefly delayed the date of her surgery, Gladys arrived at the hospital the morning of Oct. 14 and became the first patient to undergo TTVR at Powers Health and in Indiana.

“It was no big deal,” she said. “I was out of bed and moving around later that night and in the hospital for three days altogether.”



**Above:** The Structural Heart and Valve Team stands in a Cardiac Catheterization Lab at Community Hospital after performing the first transcatheter tricuspid valve replacement (TTVR) procedure in Indiana.

**Left:** The EVOQUE tricuspid valve device is shown.

To calm her children’s fears leading up to the surgery, Gladys had referred to TTVR only as “a procedure.”

“I was quite relaxed,” she said. “I didn’t worry. I just went in and let them do what they had to do. I put my faith in God.”

Gladys’ follow-up appointments have shown her body is responding well to the procedure, and cardiac rehabilitation has supported her progress. She even returned to working part time at a quick-service restaurant to keep busy.

The EVOQUE system leads to fewer symptoms and significant improvements in quality of life for our patients, said Dale O’Donnell, vice president of Cardiology Services for Powers Health.

“Powers Health is proud to be among the first to offer this procedure,” he said. ■

For more information about cardiac care at Powers Health, visit [PowersHealth.org/heart-HC-spring25](https://PowersHealth.org/heart-HC-spring25).

# Shouldering the pain

Orthopedic surgeon uses minimally invasive techniques for joint repair

by Karin Saltanovitz

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**A**FTER TUMBLING DOWN the stairs and injuring her shoulder last year, Angela Szymaszek is on the mend thanks to Orthopedic Specialist Michael Knesek, MD. Szymaszek dealt with the pain for a year before turning to Powers Health in the hope of finding relief.

“When I couldn’t take care of my home like I have for the past 30 years, I knew something wasn’t right,” she said. “I thought my shoulder would heal itself, but I didn’t know the damage that had been done.”

She soon made an appointment with Dr. Knesek, and that’s when she learned she had a torn rotator cuff and a bicep tendon tear.

“Unfortunately, she had a rotator cuff injury that failed conservative measures. We ultimately elected to proceed with arthroscopic surgery,” said Dr. Knesek, who is a sports medicine fellowship-trained orthopedic surgeon. “Angela has done very well with her post-operative rehabilitation. I love working with my patients to help them get back to the activities they enjoy!” said Dr. Knesek.



Each year, more than 2 million people in the U.S. have a shoulder injury that leads to a torn rotator cuff, according to the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons.

The rotator cuff is a group of four muscles and tendons that surround the shoulder joint. It is responsible for stabilizing the shoulder and allowing for a wide range of motion.

While a common injury, a tear cannot heal on its

**“I look forward to getting back to my small business and getting outside to take care of my yard and garden.”**

own. However, there are things that can be done to lessen the pain, including physical therapy. If that doesn't help, surgery may be necessary.

Dr. Knesek specializes in minimally invasive joint procedures, focusing on shoulders and knees. He first treated Szymaszek for meniscal issues in both knees about five years ago.

“Dr. Knesek is an outstanding physician who patiently listens to every concern and explains everything in detail,” she said. “I trust him whenever he tells me I need surgery because he knows what he's talking about.”

Recovery from rotator cuff surgery typically involves wearing a sling for several weeks, followed by physical therapy to regain strength and range of motion. Most patients see significant improvement within four to six months.

Szymaszek is excited to return to the everyday tasks that bring her joy.

“I look forward to getting back to my small business and getting outside to take care of my yard and garden,” she said. “You don't realize how much you take that for granted until you physically can't do it.” ■



## **Powers Health and Orthopedic Specialists of Northwest Indiana partner to bring advanced joint care and spine care to Northwest Indiana**

Powers Health and Orthopedic Specialists of Northwest Indiana (OSNI) are pleased to announce their collaboration on a new, state-of-the-art orthopedic ambulatory surgery center in Crown Point.

The Joint and Spine Center at Powers Health, set to open in spring 2025, will serve as a regional destination for patients seeking exceptional orthopedic and spine care. Conveniently located at 201 101st Ave., the 11,000-square-foot facility will offer a range of orthopedic procedures in a modern, comfortable environment. Services will include hip and knee replacements, minimally invasive spine procedures and robotic-assisted surgery, as well as shoulder, elbow, wrist, hand, foot and ankle care.

The Joint and Spine Center is located on the same campus as Powers Health Rehabilitation Center and the soon-to-open Cancer Care Center, creating a medical hub for the community.

“Our partnership will leverage and strengthen the resources of both Powers Health and OSNI to continue to provide exceptional orthopedic care and spine surgery,” said Donald P. Fesko, president and CEO of Powers Health.

Nitin Khanna, MD, an orthopedic spine surgeon with OSNI, echoed those sentiments.

“Uniting two established organizations bolsters fellowship-trained orthopedic and spine surgery services in our communities to benefit our patients,” Dr. Khanna said.

Visit [PowersHealth.org/services/orthopedics](https://PowersHealth.org/services/orthopedics) for information about orthopedic care at Community Hospital in Munster; St. Mary Medical Center in Hobart; St. Catherine Hospital in East Chicago; and Powers Health Rehabilitation Center in Crown Point. For more information about Orthopedic Specialists of Northwest Indiana, visit [osni.org](https://osni.org). ■

## **Orthopedics Symposium**

**Thursday, April 17 • 2-7 pm**

**Powers Health Rehabilitation Center  
10215 Broadway, Crown Point**

Join orthopedic surgeons from Powers Health and Orthopedic Specialists of Northwest Indiana as they discuss signs and symptoms, risk factors and treatment options for various orthopedic and spine conditions.

**Free. Register: 219-836-3477.**

**For more information about orthopedic care at Powers Health, visit [PowersHealth.org/services/orthopedics-HC-spring25](https://PowersHealth.org/services/orthopedics-HC-spring25).**

# Not blowing smoke



Powers Health takes on heightened stroke risk caused by e-cigarettes

by Kerry Erickson

**T**HE USE OF E-CIGARETTES, also known as vapes, among American youths has skyrocketed over the past 10 years. In 2024, 1.6 million middle school and high school students used vapes more than any other tobacco product, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

These battery-operated devices heat a liquid and produce an aerosol, which some people refer to as “vapor.” E-cigarette aerosol is harmful. It can contain dangerous substances, including nicotine, a highly addictive chemical that can impair adolescent brain development, according to the CDC.

There is a misconception that vaping is safer than smoking traditional cigarettes, said Jill Conner, executive director of Neuroscience Services for Powers Health.

“No tobacco product is safe, and smoking of any kind increases the risk of heart disease and stroke. But as the popularity of vaping has grown over the past decade, we are seeing a spike in the number of strokes among younger adults,” she said. “Our average stroke age is currently 62. It was 68 just five years ago. We are seeing younger people sustaining devastating strokes, and we have seen a 22% increase in stroke volume in the 45-60-year-old age group.

“A stroke happens when the blood supply to the brain is

blocked or when a blood vessel in the brain bursts, causing parts of the brain to become damaged or die, Conner said. Stroke can cause paralysis, memory loss, compromised speaking ability, muscle weakness or death.

“One of our goals as a healthcare system is to educate the public so we can prevent any life-threatening condition before it becomes a problem,” she said.

**“Our reach is huge. We are thankful we have the ability to make a difference in the lives of stroke patients who turn to us in an unstable time in their life.”**

Other lifestyle choices that can increase your risk for stroke include eating a diet high in saturated fats, trans fat and cholesterol, not getting enough physical activity and drinking too much alcohol.

There are many reasons why young people might vape. E-cigarette advertising, the availability of appealing flavors, social influences and the effects of nicotine play a role.

The increase in strokes among vape users has contributed to the rise in patient transfers from hospitals



**From Left:** Jill Conner, executive director of Neuroscience Services for Powers Health; Aamir Badruddin, MD; and Randy Neiswonger, CEO of Community Hospital, hold an award from Healthgrades. The agency named Powers Health's Community Hospital one of America's 100 Best Hospitals for Stroke Care.



throughout northern Indiana to Powers Health's Comprehensive Stroke Center at Community Hospital. The number of transfers to the center rose from 244 in 2019 to more than 1,000 in 2024, Conner said.

"No matter what hospital or facility stroke patients land at in northern Indiana, they can still get advanced treatment at our Comprehensive Stroke Center in Munster," Conner said. "Our reach is huge. We are thankful we have the ability to make a difference in the lives of stroke patients who turn to us in an unstable time in their life."

The center has earned recertification and the Gold Seal of Approval from The Joint Commission. The Gold Seal is a symbol of quality that reflects an organization's commitment to providing exceptional care to patients who experience the most severe types of strokes.

As part of the recertification process, Community Hospital underwent a rigorous onsite review by the Joint Commission. During the visit, reviewers conducted observations, interviews and evaluations of Community Hospital's compliance with Joint Commission certification standards.

The hospital is home to the only accredited Comprehensive Stroke Center in Northwest Indiana, and it

is supported by the certified Primary Stroke Centers at St. Catherine Hospital in East Chicago and St. Mary Medical Center in Hobart. The teams are prepared to act within moments of a patient's arrival for the most advanced neuro-interventional services.

"Every second counts when someone has a stroke," Conner said. "Time is brain."

As a certified Comprehensive Stroke Center, Community Hospital has demonstrated the ability to deliver advanced, high-quality care for patients by providing:

- 24/7 access to minimally invasive catheter procedures to treat stroke
- A dedicated Neuroscience Intensive Care Unit
- On-site neurosurgical availability 24/7 with the ability to perform complex neuroendovascular procedures
- Treatment for large ischemic, hemorrhagic and other complex strokes
- Access to research through participation in national stroke trials ■

**For more information on stroke care at Powers Health, visit [powershealth.org/services/stroke-care-HC-spring25](https://powershealth.org/services/stroke-care-HC-spring25).**

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Eating

# Eating for Heart Health

EATING FOR HEART HEALTH is one of the most effective ways to support your long-term well-being. A diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins and healthy fats can lower cholesterol, reduce inflammation, stabilize blood sugar and regulate blood pressure—all vital for a strong heart.

## The Power of Heart-Healthy Foods

Heart-healthy eating doesn't mean cutting out enjoyment—it's about choosing foods that nourish and protect.

- ▶ **Fiber-Rich Foods:** Beans, lentils, oats, fruits and vegetables reduce bad cholesterol (LDL) and help prevent plaque buildup in arteries.
- ▶ **Healthy Fats:** Unsaturated fats, like those in avocados, nuts and olive oil, support good cholesterol, reduce inflammation and help absorb vitamins that benefit cardiovascular health.
- ▶ **Antioxidant-Rich Foods:** Colorful fruits and vegetables offer antioxidants that combat inflammation and improve blood flow.
- ▶ **Potassium and Magnesium:** Found in bananas, spinach, nuts and sweet potatoes, these minerals balance sodium levels, relax blood vessels, and support healthy blood pressure.

For information, visit [PowersHealth.org](https://PowersHealth.org).



## Simple Lifestyle Changes

Heart-healthy eating doesn't have to be restrictive. Start by adding more vegetables to meals, swapping refined grains for whole ones or incorporating plant-based proteins. These small adjustments can boost energy, enhance sleep and improve mood over time.

## Recipe Idea: Sweet Potato Nachos

Try sweet potato nachos by swapping chips for sweet potato slices topped with black beans, tomatoes and avocado. This nutrient-packed dish is delicious, satisfying and heart-smart.



<https://recipes.heart.org/en/recipes/sweet-potato-nachos>

Sources: AHA, Cleveland Clinic