

# COMMUNITY HEALTH TRANSMITTER

LEADING  
THROUGH THE

UNPRECEDENTED

➤ See page 2



*Pictured:  
Amy Person, MD  
Benton Franklin Health District*

March / April 2022

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- Amy Person, MD leads the way
- Pediatric Autism & ADHD Presentation
- I Was Told I Have Heart Failure Presentation

**K**

*Kadlec Community Health  
(509) 943-8455*



## Leading through the Unprecedented | By Mary Lynn Merriman

### *Who is Dr. Amy Person and what is the role of the Benton-Franklin County Health District?*

Ensuring, improving, and promoting the health and well-being of the community has long been the mission of the Benton-Franklin Health District. From making sure the tap water we drink and the restaurant food we eat are safe, to providing immunization services to infants, children, and adults as well as educating the community about health issues, helping set health-related policy and so much more, the health district has worked tirelessly to make this a healthier community, often out of the public's eye.

That changed when COVID-19 came on the scene. The Benton-Franklin Health District, like such agencies across the country, found itself at the forefront of navigating the community through this unprecedented, and frequently changing, time. Helping lead the district is its Health Officer Amy Person, MD. In her role, she provides the legal authority and medical oversight for preserving the health of the community, including during a public health emergency such as a pandemic. The role has put her front and center of the health district's COVID efforts.

### **From Pediatrics to Public Health**

Dr. Person has been with BFHD since 2011 when a desire to be closer to her parents drew her to the Tri-Cities. She is board-certified in pediatrics and provided clinical pediatric care in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, for 18 years, primarily addressing the health care needs of under-served adolescents and children.

It may seem the jump from pediatrics to public health is a long one. Not so according to Dr. Person.

"From my standpoint, I don't think public health is that different from pediatrics; it's just on a different scale," she said. "When you are in pediatrics, you don't spend a lot of

your time treating existing problems, because, fortunately, most kids do not have them. You spend a lot of time on making sure kids and families are prepared and doing everything they can to ensure a child is going to be healthy through their entire life. When kids are sick, you are often dealing with communicable diseases. Those are the things we do in public health, as well. We are trying to help the community use the resources they have or to get resources, so people can continue to be healthy. Instead of talking to families, we are talking about communities."

**“When public health is working at its best, you don't know we are keeping food and water safe, or when we are preventing outbreaks, you just may not recognize it.”**

The skill sets required in both are similar, she said, except that she "had to become a lot more comfortable with public speaking in this role."

This has been particularly true since the onset of COVID.

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"When public health is working at its best, you don't know we are keeping food and water safe, or when we are preventing outbreaks, you just may not recognize it. But we have needed to be much more public with our role since the pandemic. I have done more talking in general in the last couple of years than I have done in my whole life," she said with a chuckle. "I'm more of a thinker and a watcher so it has been a little bit of a challenge for me to be more visible and more vocal to meet the needs of the community during this time."

Like much of the community, Dr. Person is also weary of the pandemic and its impact. "Most of the time, when big disasters happen, they tend to be much shorter; you get into that recovery phase sooner. Now two years in, this is pushing a lot of people to their limits. Even before the pandemic, there were people whose every day was wearying because they are always facing challenges whether that is they can't get a job, don't have a stable place to live, or they are worried about enough food for their families. COVID has given us a personal insight into how exhausting it must be if your whole life looks like that. It renews my sense of wanting to see how we, as public health, can help the community do a little better, so that fewer people have to have this as their daily way of going through during this time."

## Coming together

For Dr. Person, these times have revealed some of our community's strengths.

"Before the pandemic, a lot of people did not know about public health; people didn't really have a need to be engaged in it. COVID forced us all to have conversations about what are we going to do to help the community through this. That's been a plus to have those much closer

working relationships, and that's something that I hope post-COVID we can continue to use to tackle other issues within our community. For public health to work best, you need to have that connection and interaction with many sectors whether its elected leaders, schools, non-profit organizations, or hospitals."

## Reflecting on the past two years

When it is eventually behind us, how does Dr. Person expect to view her role as the Health Official for Benton and Franklin counties during this unprecedented time?

"When I look back at our experience with COVID, I think it will be rewarding. Now, two years into it, I'm exhausted like everyone else," she said. "But just to look at what our own staff at the Health Department has done, it's amazing. There have also been so many people who have supported us, and the community has worked hard to come together to face this challenge."

"I have grown to recognize that no matter how hard it is going to be, I will always be doing things to keep the community safe and healthy, and help our kids grow up to a better world. I always want to be part of the solution."

Karen Hayes, Kadlec Community Health Investment Manager shared "Kadlec is grateful for the strong collaboration with the health district and the Benton-Franklin Community Health Alliance through the Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) process. The CHNA provides important data and information that we can use together to develop and prioritize meaningful action and plans to further health in our community."

Thank you, Dr. Person, for what you and your staff do every day. The community is better and safer. ■

## Getting to know the Benton-Franklin Health District

By Mary Lynn Merriman

The Benton-Franklin Health District has been serving Benton and Franklin counties for over 70 years. It has over 66 active programs funded through various levels of government contracts, grants, fees for service, and county money. In addition to providing many services directly, BFHD works collaboratively with dozens of community partners and organizations to address health needs of people living, working, and visiting the bi-county region.

When first founded, topics of significant importance to the health district were fallout from a local flood,

influenza, and polio, which was seeing record high numbers.

Over the years, the health district has had different names, merged with other agencies, moved buildings, and changed governing members on the Board of Health. The one constant, however, has been its continued mission to promote and ensure the health and well-being of the community it serves.

For more information about the Benton-Franklin Health District, visit its website at [bfhd.wa.gov](http://bfhd.wa.gov). ■

## Community health needs beyond COVID | By Mary Lynn Merriman

While COVID may be grabbing all the headlines, it is not the only public health issue in our community. But what are those needs, and how do we go about solving them?

Every three years, as a non-profit hospital, Kadlec Regional Medical Center is required to prepare a Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA). The Benton-Franklin Health District is required to prepare a similar report every five years. Through collaboration, Kadlec and the health district, along with the Benton-Franklin Community Health Alliance, combined efforts to create one report every three years.

"We adjust our timeline to work with Kadlec because our goal is to address how we move the community farther along so that everyone has the opportunity to achieve their highest level of health," said BFHD's Health Officer Amy Person, MD. "This is not something that any one person, organization, or sector is going to be able to do. It does require collaboration with hospitals, schools, community organizations, cities, individuals, and churches."

The assessment looks at what are the area's biggest health needs, opportunities, and the community's priorities to improve health. During the 2019 assessment, the top three health-related needs identified were behavioral health challenges, access and cost of all health care, and social determinants of health which includes housing, education, income, public safety, and food access.

The next step is creating a Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) to identify how to strategically and collaboratively address community priority areas to improve the health and well-being of the community.

### Changing needs, long-term solutions

According to Dr. Person, 100 years ago, what made people unhealthy was some sort of acute illness such as infection from contaminated water or a now-preventable disease before vaccines. These were the concerns addressed in the early days of public health. The issues now are bigger problems that go on for longer periods of time; it could be what someone is exposed to as a child, the toxins in the air, violence within the community, teen suicide, or even personal health habits. These are not problems that can be fixed easily, but require a long-range, community approach.

"Through the CHNA process, we gather lots of information, whether its data or stories and insights from many different people. From there, we develop the priorities, and determine where we can have the biggest impact and create the plan to focus on these priorities," she said.

Work on the new CHNA is under way and will take over a year.

"We are not all the same in this community, so we want this assessment to reflect the entire community. What some may see as health issues may look very different to someone else. We want to hear all those voices. It's a long process. Then we will sift through it and create a plan on how we, as a community, can address these concerns," she said. "It will be interesting to see how COVID impacts this report; some of the things we did to support the community through COVID may be things we can use to address other health issues in our community."

To view the 2019 CHNA and CHIP, visit [kadlec.org/community/community-health-needs-assessment](http://kadlec.org/community/community-health-needs-assessment). For more information about the Benton-Franklin Community Health Alliance, visit [bfcha.org](http://bfcha.org).

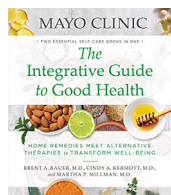
## Check it Out! *Materials available in library*

Aging Wisely: Strategies for Baby Boomers and Seniors

*Robert A. Levine*

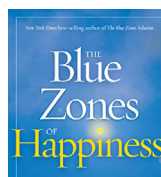
Change Your Perspective and Change Your Life: Lower Your Stress and Improve Your health

*Keith Witt*



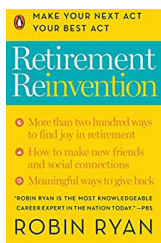
Mayo Clinic The Integrative Guide to Good Health: Home Remedies Meet Alternative Therapies to Transform Well-Being

*Cindy Kermott, Martha Millman, and Karen Wallevand*



The Blue Zones of Happiness: Lessons from the World's Happiest People

*Dan Buettner*



Purposeful Retirement: How to Bring Happiness and Meaning to Your Retirement

*Hyrum W. Smith*

Retirement Reinvention: Make Your Next Act Your Best Act

*Robin Ryan*

## Upcoming Mental Health Classes

Register for programs at <https://bit.ly/COMMUNITYHEALTH>

### Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHA)

Speaker: Kristi Haynes, ESD#123

April 20, 2022 | 8:00AM – 4:30PM | IN-PERSON

SPACE LIMITED - REGISTER EARLY

In this in-person class, you will learn an action plan to help. It is likely a young person you know could be experiencing a mental health or substance use problem. This course will be held at ESD#123 in Pasco.

Kadlec Community Health provides Mental Health First Aid classes, valued at \$175.00 FREE of charge.

Mental Health programs are supported by

Kadlec Auxiliary and other donors through  
**KADLEC**  
FOUNDATION



### Understanding Grief & Compassion Fatigue

Speaker: Isabel Islas, Chaplaincy Health Care

April 6, 2022 | 3:00PM – 5:00PM | VIRTUAL

#### Session One:

**Understanding Grief** raises awareness of issues related to loss, grief and mourning at different development stages. Also presented are a variety of barriers to helping grieving people and the necessary tools to overcome those barriers.

April 13, 2022 | 3:00PM – 5:00PM | VIRTUAL

#### Session Two:

**Compassion Fatigue** provides effective communication techniques helpful for facilitating the expressions of grief. This session also explores the definition and impact of compassion fatigue along with the necessity of restorative self-care.



### Preserving the Brain

Speaker: Neil Rawlins, MD

April 27, 2022

5:00PM – 6:30PM | VIRTUAL

This presentation will address depression, memory loss, nerve pain and improved healing.

## MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES



Alone Together: Love, Grief, and Comfort in the Time of COVID-19  
*Jennifer Haupt*



Trudy's Healing Stone  
*Trudy Spiller*

We Dream Medicine Dreams  
*Lisa Boivin*

Finding Meaning: The Sixth Stage of Grief  
*David Kessler*

I Am Stronger Than Anger: Picture Book About Anger Management and Dealing with Kids Emotions and Feelings  
*Elizabeth Cole*



What Happened to You?: Conversations on Trauma, Resilience, and Healing  
*Bruce Duncan Perry*



Browse the library catalog online for other topics:  
<http://bit.ly/kadleclibrary>  
(link is case sensitive)

# ATTEND & LEARN



For additional information on KNRC or Community Health programs, call (509) 943-8455 or register online at <https://bit.ly/COMMUNITYHEALTH> (link is case sensitive). All classes are virtual and require pre-registration. A link to the program will be sent prior to presentation.



## Alzheimer's Program: Legal & Financial

Speaker: Alzheimer's Association

March 8, 2022 | 1:00PM – 2:00PM | VIRTUAL

Learn about important legal and financial issues to consider, how to put plans in place, and how to access legal and financial resources near you.

## Alzheimer's Program: Understanding & Responding to Dementia-Related Behavior

Speaker: Alzheimer's Association

April 12, 2022 | 1:00PM – 2:00PM | VIRTUAL

Learn about some of the common triggers for behaviors associated with dementia, how to assess the person's needs, and how to intervene effectively.

## Pediatric Autism & ADHD

Speaker: Elizabeth (Liz) Vossenkemper, MSN, ARNP, CPNP-PC (She/Her)

March 28, 2022 | 3:00PM – 4:00PM  
VIRTUAL

Liz has been practicing as a pediatric nurse practitioner with Tri-Cities Community Health for 4 years. In 2018, she became certified as an Autism Center of Excellence (COE) through the Health Care Authority and began an autism clinic within her practice. Liz regularly participates in opportunities to further her ADHD and autism knowledge and understanding. Liz is now a third-year member of Project ECHO Autism, a learning collaborative led by University of Washington Autism Center and Seattle Children's Autism Center.



## I was told I have Heart Failure

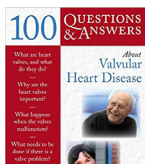
Speaker: Iyad Jamali, MD

April 13, 2022 | 4:00PM – 5:00PM  
IN-PERSON

Richland Public Library  
Doris Roberts Gallery

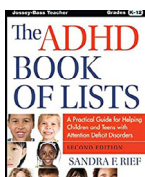
Heart failure happens when the heart cannot pump enough blood and oxygen to support other organs in your body.

## Resource Spotlight (available in Library)



100 Questions & Answers About Valvular Heart Disease

Ramdas G. Pai and Padmini Varadarajan



The ADHD Book of Lists: a Practical Guide for Helping Children and Teens with Attention Deficit Disorders

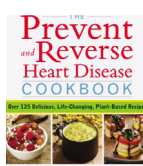
Sandra F. Rief

Communication Alternatives in Autism: Perspectives on Typing and Spelling Approaches for the Nonspeaking  
Edlyn Vallejo Peña



Self-Regulation Interventions and Strategies: Keeping the Body, Mind & Emotions on Task in Children with Autism, ADHD or Sensory Disorders

Teresa Garland



The Prevent and Reverse Heart Disease Cookbook

Ann Crile Esselstyn and Jane Esselstyn

Understanding Behavior in Dementia That Challenges: a Guide to Assessment and Treatment

Ian Andrew James

## Join Healthy Ages

Healthy Ages is a FREE membership program expressing Kadlec's commitment to the health care needs, safety and concerns of the older adult. Your membership includes the Community Health Transmitter, monthly invitations to wellness programs, connections to community resources, and an invitation to the annual Holiday party.

To join Healthy Ages, visit our website at [www.kadlec.org/healthyages](http://www.kadlec.org/healthyages) or call Cathy Manderbach at (509) 942-2700. Cathy can also register you for Healthy Ages Wellness Programs, Medicare classes or review your prescription drug plan.



## Healthy Ages

Funded by Kadlec Auxiliary  
Healthy Ages programs are made possible through generous donations by Kadlec Auxiliary.



## Join Mall Walkers

Walking is a great way to increase physical activity. It requires no special skills, costly equipment, or special clothing beyond comfortable walking shoes.

There are still opportunities to track your steps, even with limited mall hours and safety concerns to walk in the mall or in public spaces. Take a peaceful walk in the wee hours along the river on the paved path. Or in your own home, you can walk on a treadmill or in place.

Be sure to keep a log of your steps and submit to Cathy Manderbach the last Monday of each month or by email at [catherine.manderbach@kadlec.org](mailto:catherine.manderbach@kadlec.org) to earn incentive prizes such as patches, t-shirts, fanny packs or socks. Walk at your own pace. Stay safe and keep moving.

## End-of-Life Seminar

Speakers: Experts in the field

April 20, 2022 | 1:00PM - 3:30PM | VIRTUAL

Local professionals discuss end-of-life documents, including estate planning, asset protection, financial planning and funeral arrangements.

## March Wellness

### Hospice & Palliative Care

Speaker: Monica Thielen, RN, Clinical Educator

March 24, 2022 | 1:00PM - 2:00PM | VIRTUAL

<https://bit.ly/MARCHWELLNESS2022>

Heartlinks provides compassionate and comprehensive medical and emotional care for children and adults who are facing life-altering or life-threatening illnesses.



## CATHY CAN HELP!

Healthy Ages offers FREE Medicare classes, which include information on Medicare, Medigap Plans, Medicare Part D Drug Plans and Medicare Advantage Plans. The class information will help you make well-informed choices on a complicated topic.



## April Wellness

### Aging & Sleep

Speaker: Julie Holgado, RN, Kadlec

April 21, 2022 | 1:00PM - 2:00PM | VIRTUAL

<https://bit.ly/APRILWELLNESS2022>

It's common for older adults to experience changes in the quality and duration of their sleep. Many of these changes occur due to changes in the body's internal clock.



For End-of-Life or Wellness Programs, Medicare classes, or to join Mall Walkers, please call Cathy Manderbach at (509) 942-2700 to reserve your spot.

## OFFICE & LIBRARY HOURS

MON - FRI

9:00AM-2:00PM

See calendar for occasional KNRC and Library closures.

Visit the library at  
1268 Lee Blvd.,  
Richland, WA



**Pictured:**  
Jay Hungerford  
Resource Specialist

## CANCER

The Metabolic Approach to Cancer: Integrating Deep Nutrition, the Ketogenic Diet, and Nontoxic Bio-Individualized Therapies

*Nasha Winters*

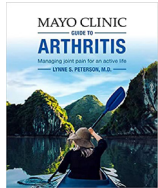
What to Eat During Cancer Treatment

*American Cancer Society*

## CHRONIC PAIN

Back and Neck Health: Mayo Clinic Guide to Treating and Preventing Back and Neck Pain

*Mohamad Bydon, MD*



Mayo Clinic Guide to Arthritis: Managing Joint Pain for an Active Life

*Lynne S. Peterson, MD*

Mayo Clinic Guide to Fibromyalgia: Strategies to Take Back Your Life

*Andy Abril, MD*

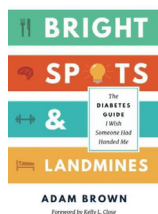
## COOKBOOKS



American Heart Association Quick & Easy Cookbook: More Than 200 Healthy Recipes You Can Make in Minutes

*American Heart Association*

The New American Heart Association Cookbook, 9th Edition: Revised and Updated with More Than 100 All-New Recipes, *American Heart Association*



## DIABETES

Bright Spots & Landmines: The Diabetes Guide I Wish Someone Had Handed Me

*Adam Brown*

## GASTROPARESIS

Gastroparesis Diet: Reduce Your Symptoms and Feel Great with Step-by-step Guide to Recovery Diet, 70 Easy and Delicious Recipes with Tips and Tricks

*Archibald Johansson, MD*

Wisdom by Nature: The New Approach to Healing Gastroparesis and Digestive Challenges

*Chalyce Macoskey, CHH*

The Gastroparesis Cookbook: 102 Delicious, Nutritious Recipes for Gastroparesis Relief

*Karen Frazier*

## MENTAL HEALTH & STRESS



The Unapologetic Guide to Black Mental Health: Navigate an Unequal System, Learn Tools for Emotional Wellness, and Get the Help you Deserve

*Rheedra Walker, PhD*

Everyday Stress Relief: Essential Techniques to Boost Emotional Resiliency and Improve Your Health

*Ruth C. White, PhD, MPH, MSW*

## OSTEOPOROSIS & OSTEOARTHRITIS

Non-Surgical Treatment Options for Knee Osteoarthritis: An Informative Guide for Patients

*Ryan C. Koonce, MD*

Osteoporosis: A Guide to Prevention and Treatment

*David M. Slovik, MD*

Facing Osteoporosis: A Guide for Patients and Their Families, *Marcy B. Bolster, MD*

Mayo Clinic on Osteoporosis: Keep Your Bones Strong and Reduce Your Risk of Fractures

*Ann E. Kearns, MD, PhD*

Health-related materials are added to the library throughout the year, and we welcome your recommendations.



# March 2022

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
	1 MS SUPPORT GROUP 2:00 PM	2 TBI SUPPORT GROUP 3:00 PM	3 PULMONARY SUPPORT GROUP 10:00 AM	4
7	8 ALZHEIMER'S EDUCATION SEE PAGE 6	9	10	11 CHRONIC PAIN SUPPORT GROUP 1:00 PM
14 FTD SUPPORT GROUP 1:00 PM	15 CAREGIVERS SUPPORT GROUP 1:00 PM	16 STROKE SUPPORT GROUP 2:00 PM	17	18
21	22 *CAREGIVERS SUPPORT GROUP ALZ/DEM 5:30 PM	23	24 HEALTHY AGES WELLNESS PROGRAM SEE PAGE 7	25
28 CAREGIVERS SUPPORT GROUP (MEN ONLY) 12:30 PM  PEDIATRIC AUTISM & ADHD SEE PAGE 6	29	30	31	

# April 2022

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
				1
4	5 MS SUPPORT GROUP 2:00 PM	6 TBI SUPPORT GROUP 3:00 PM  UNDERSTANDING GRIEF SEE PAGE 5	7 PULMONARY SUPPORT GROUP 10:00 AM	8 CHRONIC PAIN SUPPORT GROUP 1:00 PM
11 FTD SUPPORT GROUP 1:00 PM	12 ALZHEIMER'S EDUCATION SEE PAGE 6	13 COMPASSION FATIGUE SEE PAGE 5  HEART FAILURE SEE PAGE 6	14	15
18 PARKINSON'S SUPPORT GROUP 1:30 PM	19 CAREGIVERS SUPPORT GROUP 1:00 PM	20 STROKE SUPPORT GROUP 2:00 PM  YMHFA SEE PAGE 5  END-OF-LIFE SEE PAGE 7	21 HEALTHY AGES WELLNESS PROGRAM SEE PAGE 7	22
25 CAREGIVERS SUPPORT GROUP (MEN ONLY) 12:30 PM	26 *CAREGIVERS SUPPORT GROUP ALZ/DEM 5:30 PM	27 PRESERVING THE BRAIN SEE PAGE 5	28	29

## CALENDAR ABBREVIATIONS:

### ALZ/DEM

Alzheimer's & Dementia

### AMHFA

Adult Mental Health First Aid

### FTD

FrontoTemporal Dementia

### MS

Multiple Sclerosis

### MTHFR

Methyl/Tetra/Hydro/Folate/Reductase

### QPR

Question, Persuade, Refer

### TBI

Traumatic Brain Injury

### YMHFA

Youth Mental Health First Aid

### \*PLEASE NOTE:

During COVID, the Thursday night ALZ/DEM support group and the Tuesday ALZ/DEM will meet together on the 4th Tuesday of the month.



**Please call (509) 943-8455** if you would like to participate in a virtual/call-in support group. Regular in-person support groups will resume when allowed.



You can also reach us by email at [knrc@kadlec.org](mailto:knrc@kadlec.org)



Register for programs at <https://bit.ly/COMMUNITYHEALTH> (link is case sensitive)



## Why Your Out-Breath is Connected to Your Well-Being

By Caren Osten Greszberg

*What is the vagus nerve, and how does it connect to our breathing and emotions? Learn the science around this key messenger of the nervous system.*

Toward the end of a yoga class or during a guided meditation, it's likely you've heard some version of: "Let's take a few slow, deep breaths, allowing the body to relax as you gently exhale." These are simple instructions intended to slow down your heart rate. But what you may not realize is that these slow, deep breaths—and exhalations, in particular—are stimulating your vagus nerve, which signals to the body that it is in a state of calm. It can now rest and digest, tend and befriend.

In Latin, the word "vagus" means wandering, a fitting description for this meandering nerve that stretches from the brain stem down to the colon, connecting to the middle ear, vocal cords, heart, lungs, and intestines along the way. The longest and most complicated of the body's 12 cranial nerves—each connects the brain to other parts of the body—the vagus nerve plays many roles, affecting our emotional states, heart rate, inflammation levels, blood pressure, and digestion. It interacts with our autonomic nervous system (or ANS—a part of the nervous system that has three branches responsible for unconscious processes, such as digestion and breathing). In particular, it's an advocate for the parasympathetic nervous system—the branch of the ANS that stimulates the body to "rest and digest." The vagus nerve thus has a profound impact on our sense of safety and connection.

### What's the Message?

"The vagus nerve is like the highway of information for the parasympathetic nervous system," says Dr. Brendan Kelley, professor and clinical vice-chair in the Department of Neurology at UT Southwestern Medical Center. The vagus nerve carries signals—neurotransmitters—between the

emotional center of the brain and organs like the heart, lungs, and stomach. These signals instruct specific organs to respond and function according to three states: safe and social, fight and flight, or freeze and immobilize. As deep breaths slow your heart rate, for example, your vagus nerve recognizes the cues of safety and sends that information to parts of the body so they can turn off their defenses, such as those that arise from a sense of anxiety or threat.

"The brain is reading and regulating your body through this nerve," says Dr. Stephen Porges, a Distinguished University Scientist at Indiana University and creator of the polyvagal theory, an understanding of the nervous system and how the tone (that is, the activity) of the vagus nerve directly affects our well-being. "The body won't function optimally," he adds, "unless it picks up cues of safety."

Working with mind-body tools, especially the breath, helps to moderate the communication between the sympathetic (another branch of the ANS that stimulates the fight-or-flight response) and parasympathetic nervous systems. "The breath can be used as a gas pedal and as our brakes," says Arielle Schwartz, PhD, a clinical psychologist and certified yoga instructor. "If I'm feeling shut down and need more alertness, I can bring in some breath of fire; or if I'm feeling anxious and panicky and I want to tap the brakes, I'll emphasize long, slow exhales and deep belly breathing."

### Safe and Social

In social interactions, we tend to focus on behavior—both ours and the person with whom we're interacting. But

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Porges' theory suggests that sociability is not only about voluntary behavior, but rather is rooted in neurobiology. The vagus nerve is involved in how we respond to people around us, notes Kelley, whether it's a loving, caring interaction, or one involving fear and anxiety. How the vagus nerve will respond—whether it activates or deactivates—comes down to what the particular situation calls for.

Porges offers the example of a mother's role to calm a child with a facial expression, a touch, a soothing voice—which activates the vagus nerve—and how the resulting state of calm allows the child's body to regulate, and if necessary, to heal. "When you get rid of the threat reaction, you become calm and more present," says Porges. "The body can then solve problems on a neurophysiological level, optimizing how the visceral organs function."

Sometimes, your vagus nerve needs to deactivate to allow you to access your threat (fight-or-flight) response. For example, hearing sounds such as a dog barking aggressively or a loud clap of thunder will cue the vagus nerve to deactivate, so you can react accordingly and protect yourself. "If we get anxious, we can't breathe correctly and we turn off the mechanism through which the vagus nerve will calm us down," says Porges.

This deactivating response can also arise through nonthreatening and even enjoyable situations, Kelley explains. Picture players in a soccer game: When the body needs blood to run fast, it can't also direct resources to a task like digesting our last meal. According to Kelley, "The sympathetic nervous system really narrows our attention to focus on the matter at hand"—a side benefit of the fight-or-flight response.

## A Signal for Compassion

In social settings, the vagus nerve encourages what Porges calls the "compassionate witness," a physiological state where a person is not throwing out cues of anger, threat, or hurt, but is there as a peaceful and supportive observer. "The co-regulation helps the nervous system of the person who's been hurt to feel safe enough without being defensive, to feel calm and validated," says Porges.

While further research is needed to illuminate how specific emotions relate to vagal tone, a 2015 paper published in *The Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* found that feeling compassion, "when encountering the suffering of others, leads to markedly greater vagal activity compared with neutral or other emotional states," according to the researchers. Four studies compared undergraduate participants' RSA (respiratory sinus arrhythmia, a common measure of cardiac vagal function) during different positive emotional states. Results showed the participants' RSA was greater while they were feeling compassionate than while they were experiencing either pride or inspiration.

## Can You "Improve" Vagal Tone?

While the tone of the vagus nerve directly affects our well-being—specifically, our capacity to self-regulate and to connect with others—Kelley adds an important nuance: Although we can measure vagal tone, it's not a general indicator of how well a person manages stress. When we're relaxing, our vagal tone will naturally be higher; when we're active or under pressure, the nerve is not needed and effectively "shuts down." "Our ability to handle stress is tied up in our brain and emotional world. Vagal tone is just a reflection of that point in time," Kelley summarizes.

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## 4 Ways to Calm Your Whole Body

- 1** Breathe deeply. Deep, slow breathing stimulates the vagus nerve and lowers the heart rate, and this can be amplified through the rhythmic rising and falling of the belly during abdominal breathing. Try making your exhalations longer than your inhalations.
- 2** Smile and be kind. The vagus nerve, Kelley says, is like a two-way street: "Emotions can affect vagal tone, but there is also communication coming back." Prosocial behaviors, such as being friendly, compassionate, and grateful, can strengthen vagal tone.
- 3** Gently massage your face and neck. "All the vagal pathways in the face relate to how we connect with others—our eyes, smile, voice," says Schwartz. Gently massage tender spots around the eyes, ears, jaw, and neck to stimulate the vagus nerve. If you try self-massage, take care—Kelly notes it may cause your blood pressure to drop, potentially making you pass out.
- 4** Laugh it out. A good laugh stimulates diaphragmatic breathing, activating the vagus nerve. You don't even have to wait for a good joke to get the benefits: A 2016 study found "simulated laughter" (going through the motion of laughing, without a humorous cause for it) improved health outcomes among older adults.



## COMMUNITY HEALTH

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*(link is case sensitive)*

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## STAFF HIGHLIGHT

### Courtney Armstrong, MPA Program Specialist

**Courtney's focus with Kadlec Community Health:** *Suicide prevention. Mental health promotion. Youth substance use prevention. Community connections. Community health improvement.*

#### Background:

*Born and raised in rural Columbia Basin on a small family farm. Bachelor's degree in criminal justice and a Master's degree in public administration.*

#### Hobbies:

*Fishing. Kayaking. Camping. Traveling. Interior Design. Event Planning. Crafting. Family time.*

#### Fun Fact:

*In high school she spent two summers working for the National Park Service in Yellowstone and Alaska.*



### Alzheimer's Association Virtual Physical Fitness Class @ Home

*An online class presented for persons living with Early Stage Memory Loss and their care partners.*

**Tuesdays | 10:00AM – 10:30AM**

Call ALTC at (855) 567-0252 to pre-register.

### Meals on Wheels - Volunteer Drivers Needed

*Meals on Wheels offers hot meals at its daily drive-thru, and is eager to restore home delivery.*

*Those interested in driving shifts between 10:30AM -12:30PM on delivery days can call Kristi Thien at (509) 735-1911.*

### National Prescription Take Back Day April 30, 2022 – 10:00AM to 2:00PM

Find a convenient location:  
<https://bit.ly/DRUGTAKEBACKDAY2022>

**Northwest Parkinson's Foundation**  
*NW Parkinson Foundation offers online classes and presentations.*

*Watch Dr. Jason Aldred, MDS presentation "COVID-19 & the NW Parkinson's Community" here:*  
<https://bit.ly/PARKINSONSANDCOVID>