

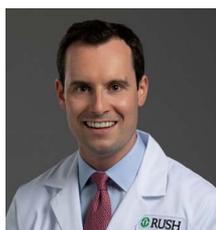
# A healthier today Rush Generations

## and a vital tomorrow



→ Your Health

## Four Facts About Atrial Fibrillation



Jeremiah  
Wasserlauf, MD  
Electrophysiologist

A strong, healthy heart beats in a steady rhythm. But when our hearts beat too quickly, too slowly or in an irregular pattern, that's a potentially serious condition called an arrhythmia.

The most common arrhythmia is atrial fibrillation, or AFib. This fast and irregular heart rhythm, left untreated, can lead to blood clots, stroke and heart failure. RUSH electrophysiologist **Jeremiah Wasserlauf, MD**, who specializes in treating heart rhythm disorders, shared the following facts about AFib.

### 1. Some people with AFib don't experience symptoms.

Symptoms of AFib can include palpitations, lightheadedness, shortness of breath, extreme fatigue and chest pain. But some AFib episodes cause no symptoms at all. That's why Wasserlauf stresses the importance of regular visits with your primary care provider, and seeing a specialist if you're diagnosed with heart issues.

### 2. You can help prevent AFib by managing risk factors.

While age is the biggest risk factor for AFib, many other risks are manageable, including high blood pressure, obesity, moderate to heavy alcohol use, smoking, kidney disease, diabetes and heart disease.

To help manage your risk factors, Wasserlauf suggests maintaining a healthy weight through diet and regular exercise, avoiding tobacco and excessive alcohol, and partnering with your primary care provider to keep chronic medical problems under control.

### 3. AFib is related to strokes.

AFib can cause blood to pool in the heart's upper chambers and form clots that can travel to the brain, block blood flow and cause a stroke.

The risk of AFib-related stroke increases with age, Wasserlauf says. "We find that strokes caused by AFib tend to be more severe than strokes from other causes," he adds. "But fortunately, these strokes are preventable in most people, so it's important to work closely with your doctor to make sure you're on the right treatments.

### 4. Treatment options are more effective than ever.

Treatments for AFib have become safer and more effective. "The treatment options we have today allow people with AFib to live normal lives and not be limited or restricted by the condition," Wasserlauf says.

Catheter ablation, for example, is a minimally invasive outpatient procedure that restores a normal heart rhythm. Medications such as blood thinners (to prevent strokes) have become more effective and manageable. And if you can't take blood thinners, there's now an alternative: A WATCHMAN or Amulet implant, placed with a minimally invasive procedure, closes off a small pouch connected to the upper left chamber of the heart where clots form.

"The treatment options for AFib continue to progress forward, and as a provider, it's rewarding to see how much better people can feel," Wasserlauf says.

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Join us on Feb. 1 for a discussion on heart health. [See the calendar insert for details.](#)

## Rush Generations

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# Healthy Sexuality: How to Start the Conversation



Jay Behel, PhD  
Psychologist

Sexual health can have a big impact on physical and emotional health as we age, but an AARP/University of Michigan survey revealed that we don't talk much about the topic with our health care providers. Just 17% of older adults who responded said that they had talked with their provider about sexual health in the past two years.

But “most people, including older adults, really want to talk about sexuality with their providers,” says **Jay Behel, PhD**, director of geriatric and rehabilitation psychology at RUSH.

“Sexuality is an inherent part of the human experience, and it's hard-wired as part of our being. It should be part of every provider visit, and it's good practice for people to be ready to bring it up themselves.”

Sexual issues aren't necessarily an inevitable part of aging, Behel says, and they're often treatable — but first, you have to start the conversation.

Some of the common issues that your provider can help with include:

- Erectile dysfunction
- Pain with intercourse
- Lack of interest in sex
- Partners' differing levels of sexual desire or function in a relationship
- Fear of having sex after a medical event like a stroke or heart attack

## Tips for talking with your provider

Behel suggests trying the following to get the conversation started with your provider:

- Write down your questions ahead of time.
- Be ready to talk specifically about what's happening, how long it's been an issue and its impact on you.
- It's OK not to use medical language to describe your issue — use the words you're comfortable with.
- Remember that your provider is there to help, not to judge.

“The first time you have the conversation will be the most awkward,” Behel says, “but if you wade in, your provider will likely respond enthusiastically. Even if you're not having concerns, bring sexual health into the conversation. That way it will become a regular topic at every visit.”

## More tips for building and maintaining sexual health

Talking with your provider is a key step toward improving your sexual health. Other steps you could take include:

### Connecting with your partner

- Be open about relationship issues, intimacy and body image.
- Understand and adapt to normal age-related changes together (e.g., needing longer to orgasm).
- Work together to explore and value nonsexual ways to be intimate: plan dates, try new activities, express affection often through words and touch.

### Tending to your overall health

- Exercise to improve your physical condition and endurance.
- Control conditions like blood pressure/diabetes/high cholesterol, and know the side effects of your medications.
- Talk to your provider about treating depression and/or anxiety.

### Practicing safe sex

- Know your partner's sexual background.
- Use condoms.
- Get tested annually for HIV and STDs,

## “What Matters?” Instead of “What's the Matter?”

In 2012, a doctor and physician assistant in Boston sparked a revolution in health care: They proposed that providers start asking their patients “What matters to you?” in addition to asking “What's the matter?” This focus ensures that people's values and preferences help shape their care plans. An added bonus: Thinking about what matters helps clarify how we spend our time and how we tell our loved ones what's important to us.

The Schaalman Senior Voices program, offered through the RUSH Center for Excellence in Aging (CEA), aims to strengthen the well-being of older adults by listening to what matters. When you lend your voice to the conversation, you contribute to CEA's work to make sure that RUSH is an age-friendly health system — engaging older adults and training students and health professionals to provide age-friendly care.

If you participate in RUSH Generations workshops or classes, we invite you to record a 30-second video describing how participating has helped you focus on what matters most to you.

**To record your video, or to see other community members discussing what matters most to them, please visit [aging.rush.edu/schaalman/collaborate-and-connect/](https://aging.rush.edu/schaalman/collaborate-and-connect/).**

**Join us on Jan. 4 for a conversation about what matters most to you in the new year. See the calendar insert for details.**

especially when you have a new sexual partner or if you have more than one partner.

- Ask your provider about PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis), a medication HIV-negative people can take to prevent HIV infection.

**Join us on Feb. 15 for a discussion on sexual health and aging. See the calendar insert for details.**

# Are You Getting Enough Vitamins?



Kristin Gustashaw, RDN  
Dietitian

Vitamins are essential to almost every process in the body — and the recommended intake of each vitamin changes as we age. We asked **Kristin Gustashaw, RDN**, an advanced clinical dietitian at RUSH, to talk about when older adults need to boost vitamin intake.

## After age 50

At this time in your life, your body needs more vitamin D. Vitamin D aids in the absorption of calcium; a lack of this essential vitamin can contribute to osteoporosis. Because it can be difficult to get enough from food, Gustashaw recommends a vitamin D supplement of at least 600 IUs daily for those under 70 and 800 IUs daily if you're over 70. (And, she adds, make sure the label carries the USP-verified mark.)

Dairy products can be good sources of both vitamin D and calcium, but some people lose their ability to digest the lactose (sugar) in milk as they age. If you're not able to get calcium from dairy, Gustashaw says, supplements are OK — “but it's important to not get too much, as it's associated with hardening of soft tissue like the tissue in your arteries and heart. Try not to exceed the recommended 1000 milligrams per day.”

You may also need more vitamin B12 once you turn 50 — but that's also the age when many people lose the ability to extract B12 from food. B12 is critical to the formation of red blood cells and maintenance of the central nervous system.

If you're 50 or older, it's critical to have your B12 checked annually. Ask your physician to consider measuring your serum B12 to see if you need to take supplements or consume more B12-rich foods. Liver, beef, chicken, pork, ham, fish, whole eggs, milk, cheese and yogurt are all excellent sources of this crucial vitamin.

## After age 70

After age 70, your body requires even more vitamin D, and most people require supplements.

Your skin can make vitamin D from sunlight, but there are some caveats. In North America, only the far southern states provide enough year-round sunlight to provide the vitamin D you need. Aging skin and dark-complexed skin produce less vitamin D from sunlight. Sunscreen, though essential to protect against sun damage, also affects how much sunlight your skin absorbs and how much vitamin D it can generate.

“Although 5 to 10 daily minutes of sunlight without sunscreen will help you reach your goals, the vitamin D you get from the sun should be considered as a bonus and not your sole source of the vitamin,” Gustashaw says. Talk to your doctor about having your serum vitamin D checked annually once you celebrate your 70th birthday.

## Vitamin dos and don'ts

Ideally, most vitamins should come from a healthy, varied and balanced diet. “A well-balanced diet is the best place to get your vitamins because of the natural synergy that exists when nutrients are metabolized from their natural form,” Gustashaw says.

She encourages people to eat at least five servings of fruits and vegetables each day and “vary your fruits and veggies” to make sure you're consuming a broad range of vitamins.



When taking vitamin supplements, remember: More is not better. “There is a misconception that if something is good for us, more should be better,” Gustashaw explains. “However, taking mega doses of some nutrients can result in severe complications.”

If you aren't sure about whether you're getting enough of certain nutrients or how to address a deficiency, talk to your primary care provider or a dietitian. They can help you find the right balance for optimal health.

**Join us on March 8 for a discussion on nutrition. See the calendar insert for details.**

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PLEASE NOTE: All physicians featured in this publication are on the medical staff of Rush. Some of the physicians are in private practice and, as independent practitioners, are not employees or agents of Rush. Rush is an academic health system comprising Rush University Medical Center, Rush Copley Medical Center and Rush Oak Park Hospital.

# Four Health Benefits of Giving

You don't need a doctor to tell you that giving feels good — but research has pinpointed some measurable health benefits.

- 1. Greater self-esteem and satisfaction with life.**  
Volunteering for organizations or informally helping loved ones can lead to greater self-esteem and satisfaction — especially if your volunteer work is in an area that's particularly meaningful to you.
- 2. Lower risk of depression.**  
One study of older adults found that those who helped their loved ones experienced greater feelings of personal control over their lives. This feeling, in turn, decreased the likelihood that they would experience depressive symptoms.

- 3. Better physical health.**  
Depression and lack of self-esteem have both been linked with heart disease and other health conditions; this link may partially explain why volunteering can lead to better physical health. For example, older adults who volunteer are less likely to have high blood pressure.
- 4. A longer life.**  
Researchers at RUSH have linked having a sense of purpose to lower mortality among older adults. "Volunteering provides many older people with a deep sense of meaning," says **Patricia Boyle, PhD**, a neuropsychologist at the RUSH Alzheimer's Disease Center. "Working toward a goal and feeling like you're making a contribution to society likely increases your sense of purpose in life, which we have found contributes to both psychological and physical health."

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## Winter 2023 Free Health and Aging Events

The following lectures will be held virtually.  
You can view them online or listen to them via phone.

For updates on Rush Generations programs, sign up  
for our emails at [bit.ly/RushGenerations](https://bit.ly/RushGenerations).



### To join these lectures online,

visit the Rush Generations  
YouTube page at the time  
of the event:  
[cutt.ly/RushGenYouTube](https://cutt.ly/RushGenYouTube).



### To dial in via phone (audio only):

Call **(312) 626-6799** at the  
time of the event and enter  
**meeting ID 413 655 0125#**.

### January

#### What Matters in the New Year

**Wednesday, Jan. 4, 1 to 2:30 p.m.**

It's a great time to set a new goal! Join us for a conversation about ways to begin the new year with a resolution. You'll learn strategies for making long-lasting changes to improve your health — and in addition to insights about exercise and nutrition, you'll hear about ways to reduce stress and improve emotional health through mindfulness.

#### Honoring the Life and Legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr.

**Wednesday, Jan. 18, 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.**

Join RUSH Generations and the RUSH Office of Community Health Equity and Engagement for our annual Martin Luther King, Jr., celebration. This panel will discuss King's vision of racial justice along with his legacy of hope to reclaim justice, equity and liberty.

### February

#### Heart Health

**Wednesday, Feb. 1, 1 to 2:30 p.m.**

RUSH Generations wants to help you keep your heart healthy! Come hear from experts in the field of cardiology as they discuss common heart issues, how to prevent them and ways to improve your quality of life if you have heart issues.

#### Sexuality and Intimacy in Older Adults

**Wednesday, Feb. 15, 1 to 2:30 p.m.**

What do sexuality and intimacy mean to you as you age? Life transitions can create opportunities to redefine what sexuality and intimacy mean to us. At this lecture, you'll learn about common challenges, opportunities and approaches related to sexuality and intimacy in older adults.

### March

#### Nutrition 101

**Wednesday, March 8, 1 to 2:30 p.m.**

Join us for this National Nutrition Month lecture on nutrition and healthy eating. You'll hear about ways to incorporate healthy eating into your everyday life, and learn about programs at RUSH and in the community that can help you reach your nutrition goals.

#### Healthy Bodies and Bones

**Wednesday, March 22, 1 to 2:30 p.m.**

Healthy bones are essential for good overall health — and for letting you continue to enjoy the physical activities you love. At this lecture, you'll learn about healthy, safe ways to maintain optimal bone health and strategies for returning to physical activity after an injury.

# Classes and Workshops

These classes and workshops will be held virtually. To participate, you'll need access to the Zoom app through a computer, tablet or smartphone with a webcam and internet.

To reserve your place and receive a Zoom link to your event, please call **(800) 757-0202** and be ready to provide a valid phone number and email address. If you don't have access to Zoom technology but would like to join a self-guided version of the workshop with a weekly conference call check-in, please call **(800) 757-0202**.

Some in-person workshops may be available near you. To inquire and to pre-register, please call **(800) 757-0202**. Pre-registration is required for all in-person workshops.

For updates from RUSH Generations, sign up for our emails at [bit.ly/RushGenerations](https://bit.ly/RushGenerations).

## Classes

### Gentle Chair Yoga

**Thursdays, Jan. 19 to March 9 and  
Thursdays, March 23 to May 11  
11 a.m. to noon  
\$40 for each eight-class session**

### Embracing Aging

**Mondays, Jan. 23 to March 13 and  
Mondays, March 27 to May 15  
1 to 2 p.m.  
\$40 for each eight-class session**

## Workshops

### Learning to Live Well with Chronic Pain

**Wednesdays, Jan. 11 to Feb. 22  
4 to 6:30 p.m.**

### Cancer: Thriving and Surviving

**Fridays, Feb. 3 to March 17  
10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.**

### Take Charge of Your Health

**Tuesdays, Jan. 17 to Feb. 28  
10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.**

### Tomando Control de su Salud

**Los jueves, el 16 de febrero hasta  
el 30 de marzo  
1 a 3:30 p.m.**

### A Matter of Balance

**Tuesdays and Thursdays,  
Jan. 19 to Feb. 16  
1 to 3 p.m.**

### Take Charge of Your Health

**Tuesdays, March 7 to April 18  
1 to 3:30 p.m.**

**Both Rush University Medical Center and Rush Oak Park Hospital comply with applicable federal civil rights laws and do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability or sex.**

#### Español (Spanish)

ATENCIÓN: si habla español, tiene a su disposición servicios gratuitos de asistencia lingüística. Llame al 1-312-563-2987 (TTY: 1-312-563-2987).

#### Polski (Polish)

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#### 繁體中文 (Chinese)

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#### ગુજરાતી (Gujarati)

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#### وُردُا (Urdu)

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