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Staying Healthy: Helping Arkansans Maintain Mental and Physical Health

Part of a series exploring issues from
The Community Foundation's
Aspire Arkansas report.

November 2020

ENGAGE

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Take Actions to Stay Healthy



According to 2018 *AspireArkansas.org* data, the rate of adult Arkansans who were getting routine checkups had been improving. In 2018, 87% of adults reported having a checkup in the past two years, up 10 points from 2013. Routine checkups and screenings help people to stay healthy, prevent illnesses and identify and treat medical problems early. This can lead to a higher quality of life and lower long-term health costs at both the individual and community level.

Unfortunately, despite having made progress, Arkansas remains close to last in the nation on many important health measures. Through the COVID-19 pandemic, routine vaccinations and annual checkups are all trending down by roughly 30%, according to Arkansas Children’s Hospital.

These are a few of the things we learned as the Community Foundation examined how our neighbors and communities can stay healthy during the pandemic. We spoke to Arkansas families about how they are staying healthy, to physicians and other healthcare providers, to farmers who explained the benefits of eating locally and to experts who shared the importance of mindfulness for mental health in this stressful time.

Join me in exploring the ways Arkansas families can stay healthy in this issue of *ENGAGE*.

Be well and take care,

Heather Larkin
President and CEO

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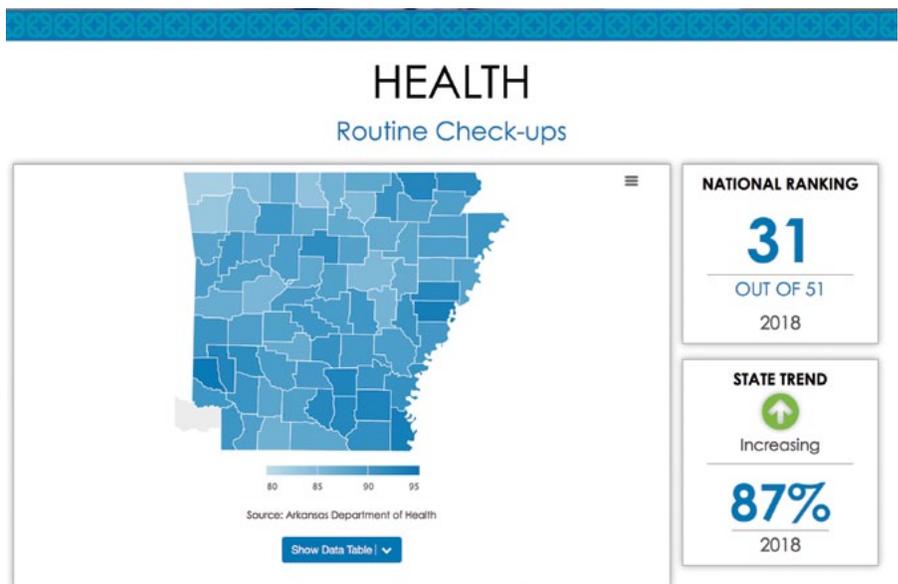
A Publication of Arkansas Community Foundation

President and CEO — Heather Larkin

Chief Communications Officer and Editor — Jessica Hughes Ford

Contributor — Jessica Szenher

Designer — Lesley Cooper



Aspire Arkansas data shows that in 2018 Arkansans were making progress on getting routine checkups. That progress has been turned around because of COVID-19.

On the cover: Waylon and Jennifer Corley of Glenwood enjoy exploring the outdoors with their children, Beau, 5 and Alexandria, 3.



Hiking, Camping and Gardening are Healthy Opportunities for Family Fun

By Kimberly Dishongh



Waylon and Jennifer Corley recently began a nature-based preschool program at home for Beau and Alexandria, which gives them the chance to add extra activities like identifying plants and animals and painting sunsets and landscapes.

Festive parties, trips to the gym and indoor concerts might be on the risky list during the COVID-19 pandemic, but Arkansans of all ages are discovering new ways — or rediscovering forgotten ones — to stay happy and healthy.

Waylon and Jennifer Corley of Glen Rose would normally be going to pumpkin patches, a county fair, the zoo, children's museums and soccer practice this time of year with their two young children, Beau, 5, and Alexandria, 3. Jennifer did take the kids to the zoo earlier in the summer, but the fair has been cancelled and the family hasn't yet decided about the pumpkin patch this fall.

They have, however, taken several hikes, started a nature-based preschool program and gone on their first overnight camping trip as a family. The Corleys enjoyed camping before they became parents but shied away from taking their small children until this spring.

"The kids absolutely loved it," said Jennifer. "I wasn't sure

how they would do away from home and in a tent, kind of in a different place."

The Corleys led the kids on scavenger hunts and explored the outside, identifying bugs and flowers and trees, cooked over a campfire and looked at the stars.

"We have some nature guides on constellations and the other Arkansas wildflowers and then Arkansas wildlife," said Jennifer. "We looked at all those ahead of time, which we actually use around the house a lot anyway because we do nature walks here. We took those with us and kind of talked about what all we were going to see and what all we were going to do."

The family uses a nature-based preschool program, and recently led their children in studying a Monet painting and recreating a sunrise with tempera paint. Their new relaxed schedule means there is more time for getting dirty.

"It's messy but we clean them up afterward and it's great," said Jennifer. "It's the perfect time for stuff like this."

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The kids also loved getting dirty as they dug up their favorite kind of vegetable — the sweet potato — from the garden the family started in the spring. This year there were purple hull peas, tomatoes, peppers and corn, and the Corleys plan to expand their garden even more next year.

Jennifer talks via Zoom with her best friend but still misses the deeper human connection of in-person socialization. “I think that being outside helps that. Nature helps us with any depression or anxiety because it helps us to feel a little bit more connected to something,” she said. “It’s just really good to be outside right now.”

The Corleys have taken lazy scenic drives, too, ambling around backroads teeming with wildlife while chatting amongst themselves, said Waylon.

Early in the pandemic, Waylon caught strep throat, and it spread to the rest of his family. Their pediatrician was able to quickly diagnose the children via telehealth and prescribe medicine that made them feel better.

Before COVID-19, Waylon worked out in a gym several times a week. When gyms closed in the spring, he sourced some gym equipment from friends and family and bought a few things online, like grappling dummies, a punching bag and a floor mat, to set up a home workout area near the space he’s been working from remotely.

“I got like a Bowflex that was collecting dust, a Total Gym and some old dumbbells, just whatever I could piece together that people had spare they weren’t using. Now I work out twice a day,” said Waylon. “In the mornings, I do rounds of boxing and grappling drills with my grappling dummy stuff on my own. In the afternoons, I have a strength training program that I created based around the equipment I have available. And despite my lack of fancy gym equipment and training partners, I’ve continued to improve my health. I’m literally in the best shape of my life now at 39 years old because I’m able to focus more on my workouts. I’m working from home, so I can even get some reps in between doing work.”

Jennifer and the kids kick the soccer ball or run around in the sunlight to get their daily dose of Vitamin D, and she sometimes does yoga workouts at home to stay in shape.

Susan Holick of Hot Springs Village swam laps and took exercise classes at a fitness center, but these days she, too, does yoga workouts at home, following a Silver & Fit exercise program available through Medicare Advantage and Medicare Supplement plans.

“They have exercise workouts, and they can fit your needs. They have them with bands or with weights and they have intermediate or advanced or just beginning kind of classes,” says Susan, a retired teacher, who substitute taught in a local elementary school before COVID-19, but doesn’t feel comfortable being in a school building this year.

She has had back surgery and her husband, James, has had a hip replacement, but both make efforts to stay active.



The Corleys took their children camping for the first time this fall. They have enjoyed spending time hiking and playing outside since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Holicks’ pharmacy has someone bring their medications out to them in the parking lot when they arrive to pick them up, and James has used telehealth services for some things, though he has had to make office visits to his physician for others.

“I have just plain old arthritis pretty bad. I have bad bones. My philosophy is just ‘a body in motion stays in motion,’” Susan said. “You’ve got to keep moving, and we both do — we both move a lot.”

She walks three miles or hikes with a girlfriend on one of the walking trails in the area. James, a retired teacher and coach, says his wife is a “better walker” than he is. “I’m pretty cautious about what’s out there and who I associate with, but I do a lot of things in and around the house. I try to stay busy. We were both runners all our lives, and as we got older, we developed into some pretty good walkers,” he said. “The deal is that I’m so active in my mind and how I think and feel is that my hip is still in pretty good shape and, to me, that’s just outstanding.”

Their home in Hot Springs Village borders a golf course. “I have a little triangle out here on the golf course that’s between like hole 11, 12 and 13, and I do that real regular with my walks and, and I’m big on 10,000 steps a day,” says James.

The Holicks have invited a few people from their church, Village United Methodist, to join them on the edge of the golf course.



“...Nature helps us with any depression or anxiety because it helps us to feel a little bit more connected to something.”

— Jennifer Corley

“We were all couples, and we sat distanced apart,” Susan said. “We really were able to get far apart and talk loud. We wore our masks and we talked about what we wanted to do as the next project with our Shepherd group. We only stayed together for about an hour and then everybody took up their lawn chair and their refreshments, if they brought something, and left.”

Susan took a solo, rejuvenating trip to Mount Nebo State Park over the summer. “It’s a precious, precious place,” she said. “I had a two-night stay at a sweet cabin that the CCC built but they’ve refreshed it, and, oh my goodness, it’s really clean and perfect. It had a back porch and it rained a little bit. I sat out on the back porch and read and watched the weather and took pictures and hiked in the rain and hiked without the rain. It was really a fun time for me.”

Back home, she occasionally grabs a snack and a lawn chair and meets some girlfriends at Balboa Beach in Hot Springs Village to watch the sun set.

“We big time social distance, we wear our masks and we just enjoy each others’ company for just a little while, no dilly dallying after the sun goes down,” Susan said. “We just touch base and find out what each other’s been doing, and that’s fun.”

She and James are planning a vacation on the Buffalo River this fall, and she’s looking forward to hiking two of her favorite trails while there.

“It doesn’t take a whole lot to make me happy,” said Susan. “I would like to travel. We had to cancel a trip that we had planned to the Grand Canyon. I know lots of people have had to cancel trips. We just haven’t taken a chance of leaving the state because of what’s going on right now.”

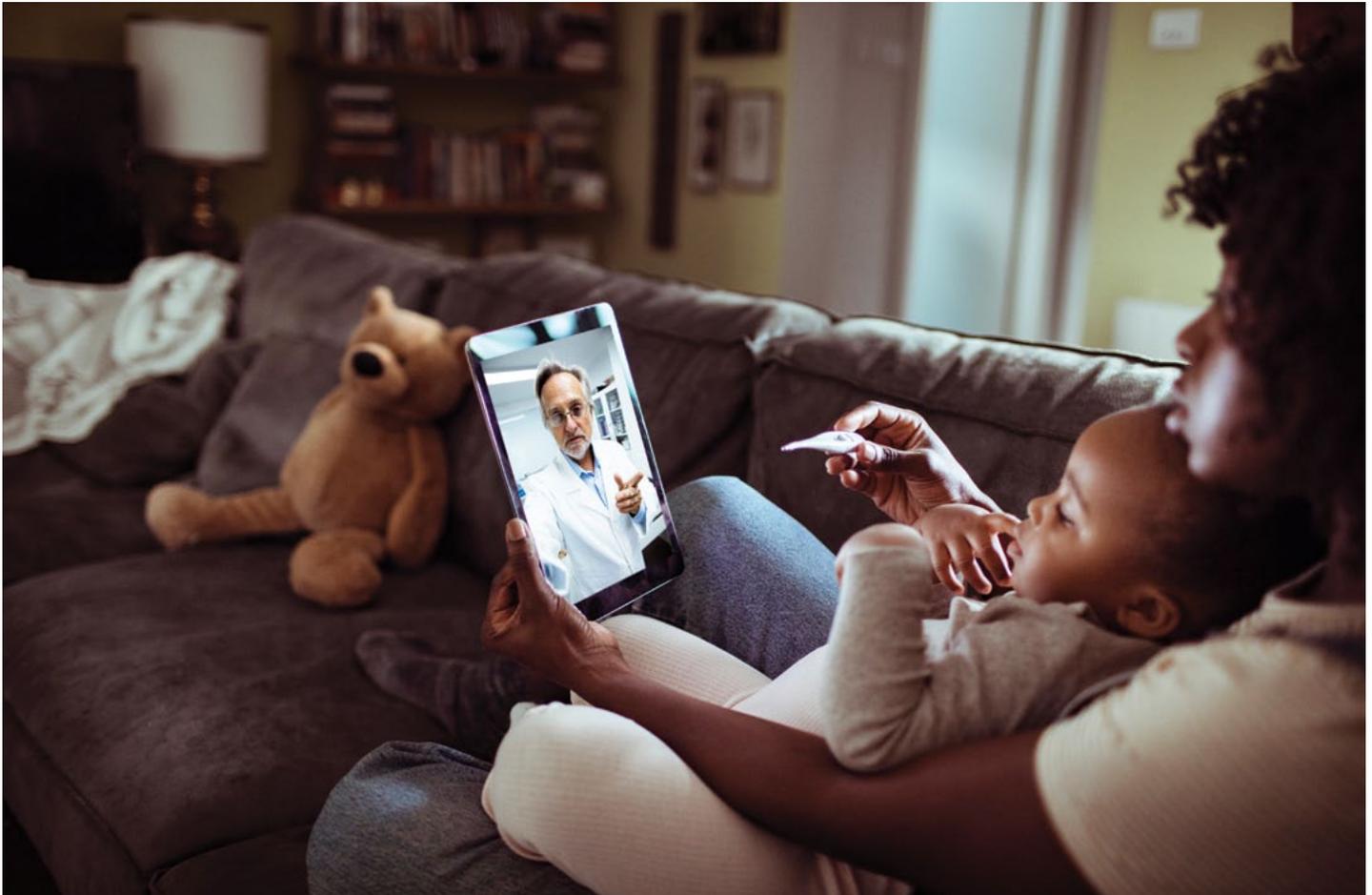
The Holicks look forward to the time when they can branch out a bit more, see their extended family and live life to the fullest, but they say things aren’t so bad.

The Corleys are finding that the lifestyle forced upon them by Covid-19 might be the best fit for them after all.

“I think we’re going to keep most of these habits. I don’t see us falling back into the life that we had before. I think we were doing a lot of things because it was just the social norm, it was the cultural norm. You know, everybody did it. It was the digital age. You know, you kind of have a way that you live life,” said Waylon. “But now that we see that we don’t have to do all those things and we can be more home-centric, and enjoy being with each other more and enjoy getting out into nature more instead of going to town and doing stuff. I think we’re going to stick with that.”

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Telehealth Demand Grows to Serve Patients Throughout Arkansas



When the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences opened the UAMS HealthNow virtual care program in January 2020, the expectation was for gradual adoption of the telehealth program offering 24-hour, convenient access to real-time care for Arkansas patients using the Internet through mobile devices or computers. Then in mid-March, COVID-19 safety measures began.

“Demand for digital health exploded in Arkansas and in the nation,” said Joseph Sanford, M.D., interim director of the UAMS Institute for Digital Health & Innovation. “We leaped years ahead in adoption of digital health tools during the pandemic. National data shows primary care telehealth visits went from less than 1% of medical visits to about 40%. UAMS has experienced 36 times more digital visits during the pandemic than previously.”

Dr. Sanford said that in addition to HealthNow visits for illness and minor injuries, social distancing and the need to take care of patients caused an increase in telehealth visits

for every program and every specialty at UAMS. Though seeing patients in person is essential for some types of visits, healthcare providers have learned to select correct modalities, manage audiovisual quality and make telehealth visits seamless so that patients trust the conversations and the care being delivered.

“Digital medicine helps us reach patients where they are,” said Dr. Sanford. “As the pandemic has demonstrated, we can use it to bring tertiary care — high levels of expertise — to rural parts of the state and improve continuity of care in partnership with providers and hospitals throughout Arkansas.”

Mark T. Jansen, M.D., vice president and chief medical officer for Arkansas Blue Cross and Blue Shield, said medical office visits for Blue Cross members fell 60% between March 8 and March 22. Physicians and other providers needed to treat their patients, but face-to-face visits were down because of social distancing guidelines and fear of contracting COVID-19 in doctors’ offices.

Dr. Jansen, who practiced medicine for 29 years in Arkadelphia and taught medicine for six years at UAMS, recognized that patients and providers needed an alternative



that would protect patients along with providers and their staff members. Blue Cross decided to encourage its members and providers to utilize telemedicine, even though few providers had experience with the technology and implementation of digital health visits.

“Behavioral health was the lowest hanging fruit because of the prevalence of talk therapy and more use of telehealth prior to the pandemic,” Dr. Jansen said. Additional early adopters were nursing homes where telehealth facilitators acted as intermediaries to obtain vital signs and assist in getting medication lists that allowed physicians to treat patients virtually.

Patients with diabetes and hypertension were able to check glucose levels and blood pressure themselves, then report to physicians through telemedicine visits. Using devices like pulse oximeters that measure oxygen in the blood and even scales, patients with chronic conditions could collect data and have conversations with physicians during virtual visits.

“For instance, when there is a 3% pound weight gain within two days and increased respiratory distress, it suggests a congestive heart failure patient might need adjustments on medications,” Dr. Jansen said. “Patients could have a telemedicine visit to report their condition and their doctor could prescribe new medications.”

Physicians had to determine the best way to schedule telehealth visits. They had to learn how to manage virtual waiting rooms and determine whether patients had the bandwidth necessary for computer visits or if a telephone was the best technology to use in some circumstances.

“There was also an issue of privacy,” said Dr. Jansen. “Some people didn’t want to talk to their doctor from their home or office where others could hear them and were hesitant to have virtual visits.”

Since March, Arkansas Blue Cross and Blue Shield has seen a more than ten-fold increase in telehealth services. For its fully insured business, mental health telemedicine makes up more than 40% of the telemedicine claims.

One factor in the increased utilization of telehealth was the March 13 Executive Order by Gov. Asa Hutchinson that allowed Arkansas healthcare professionals to establish a professional relationship using any technology deemed appropriate by the provider to treat patients and prescribe some medications. The same order expanded the ability of behavioral healthcare providers to deliver mental health treatment using technology including the telephone.

Arisa Health, Inc., an integrated behavioral health system with 67 clinical locations in 41 counties in the northern two-thirds of Arkansas, is one example of the significant increase of telehealth visits in 2020. Before the pandemic, less than 2% of Arisa Health appointments were virtual.

“The onset of COVID-19 totally transformed our care delivery,” said Laura H. Tyler, PhD, LPC, CEO of Arisa Health. “At the peak, we were doing 65% of care delivery remotely, and in September there was still a 55% virtual

delivery of behavioral health services. Clinical and administrative staff worked tirelessly to make this transformational change for clients.”

Virtual visits make it easier for clients to schedule and receive behavioral health treatment, especially for those who previously had to schedule transportation through Medicaid and those in rural areas who live miles from the nearest facility.

Christopher DeBernard, M.D., chief medical officer of Arisa Health, uses telemedicine’s audiovisual capabilities to draw pictures or diagrams that explain concepts, to demonstrate medication schedules and to discuss side effects. A COVID-19 Fund grant from Arkansas Community Foundation allowed more extensive use of telehealth technology through expanded Zoom and Lifesize licensures and increased broadband access.

“We serve behavioral health needs for 400 schools in the state, and our expanded capabilities allowed us to continue to serve kids when they were sent home last spring,” said Tyler. “We had to be creative since a lot of our kids had limited access to Wi-Fi and even limited access to cell phones.”

Dr. DeBernard believes it is important that telehealth visits continue to be utilized for behavioral health after the pandemic. “The ability to use telephone calls and two-way audio/video platforms like Zoom, Lifesize and Face Time has made it much easier for many of our patients to get the care they need. Patients can schedule a time to have visits in their cars, their homes or any quiet place they feel safe. They are often more relaxed in familiar settings, and this has led to interesting discussions,” he said.

Dr. Jansen expects that although the number of telehealth visits will level off after the pandemic, elderly patients and those with mobility issues will continue to use telehealth in large numbers. And chronic disease patients who formerly visited their doctors’ offices four times a year may have one or two of those visits virtually.

“Another place where I see telehealth continuing is for urgent care,” said Dr. Jansen. “Virtual urgent care will be an important tool to decrease the number of inappropriate ER visits.”

Dr. Sanford agrees digital health is an important healthcare tool that stretches beyond the pandemic. Arkansas Blue Cross and Blue Shield Foundation awarded a \$1 million grant to the UAMS Institute for Digital Health & Innovation in 2019 to help provide better outcomes and better patient satisfaction through digital medicine. Additional financial support is being sought to continue innovations in telehealth.

“I’m working hard with a fantastic team at the Institute to make sure increased acceptance of digital health continues beyond the pandemic,” Dr. Sanford said. “We are developing innovative ways to use technology to improve patient care and partnerships with providers and hospitals statewide.”

Free Health Clinics Meet Pandemic Challenges

Two free health clinics in Arkansas have adapted service delivery in 2020 to ensure their patients, many with chronic healthcare conditions, receive the care they depend upon.

Eureka Christian Health Outreach, Inc., (ECHO) in Eureka Springs and Cooperative Christian Ministries and Clinic (CCMC) in Hot Springs provide free care from physicians, pharmacists, optometrists, physical therapists, dentists, psychologists and nurses in their communities who donate their time and services to the clinics. But beginning in mid-March the clinics' ability to reach the underserved, uninsured populations they regularly treat was hampered by COVID-19.

"One action we took immediately was to have our director of nursing stay in touch with our patients who have chronic medical conditions like diabetes and hypertension," said Janet Arnett, clinic director for ECHO and herself a volunteer. "Diane Weems, D.O.N., our only paid employee, spent her time connecting by phone with the 250 current ECHO patients. For instance, she made sure those with diabetes had needed prescriptions and were staying on their testing and nutrition programs."

Many of the volunteers at both free clinics are over 65 and therefore at a higher risk for COVID-19 themselves. The clinics took extra precautions with personal protective equipment, following CDC and Arkansas Health Department recommendations for wearing masks and social distancing.

"We were closed for about a week when COVID-19 hit in March, then reopened the pharmacy because our patients needed their prescriptions," said Kim Carter, executive director for CCMC. "Our volunteer pharmacists did consults with patients sitting in their cars and delivered medication to patients in their cars."

ECHO made the difficult decision not to have monthly free clinics in April, May and June. But in May they started a drive-through pharmacy for current patients. In three days, 107 three-month prescriptions were filled for those who needed medications for chronic conditions. The drive-through pharmacy was opened again in June.

"Our medical director, Dr. Dan Bell, wanted to know what we could do to see some of our regular patients, so we decided to have a limited clinic one evening in July for only 12 patients who waited in their cars and were escorted by nurses into the clinic to see their physicians, then escorted back to their cars," Arnett said. The 12-patient clinics were repeated in August and September.

Operated since 2005, ECHO serves patients who are enrolled, have a patient ID and have an appointment. ECHO does not accept insurance, Medicaid or Medicare. The clinic is supported through the thrift store it operates, in addition to community donations and grants. "We've been fortunate to receive grants from the Arkansas Department of Health and Arkansas Community Foundation," said Arnett. "We consider our community to be a 50-mile radius of Eureka Springs. We are well-known here, and this community has been very gracious to us."



Volunteer pharmacists bring prescriptions to patients' cars.



Starting the first week of April, CCMC staff met with many patients outside on benches near the clinic. But that temporary fix was not sustainable. Carter applied for an Arkansas Community Foundation COVID-19 Adaptation Grant and received funding to remodel clinic interiors to respond to unique needs during the pandemic.

“We were able to make the clinic safer for CCMC patients and volunteers,” said Carter, who along with one nurse are the only two only full-time employees. A local construction company installed speakers in all check-in areas and other changes were made so that patients could be treated inside the clinic again.

Like ECHO, the majority of the CCMC patients have chronic conditions and neuropathy or kidney problems that come with those conditions. In 2019, 766 patients received medical treatment at CCMC. In addition to free clinic and pharmacy services, CCMC works with the two hospitals in Hot Springs to access treatment at charitable rates or pro bono healthcare. CCMC helps patients enroll in programs like Arkansas Works or the Healthcare Exchange.

“CCMC works with many marginalized people who are in crisis. Our people are not high profile, but they are the backbone of our community. Many have low paying, entry-level jobs,” Carter said. “COVID-19 has impacted those living on the edge because the edge got thinner for people in poverty. They were just hanging on before, and now there is no safety net.”

Both organizations provide services in addition to healthcare. Arnett said the requests to ECHO for assistance have increased, with more homeless families and more people who need help with clothing, household goods and rent assistance.

Carter said the challenge of obtaining nutritious food for families is even more difficult during the pandemic, and more families are losing their housing, which drives poverty in the community. CCMC worked with the Hot Springs Chamber of Commerce and the Hot Springs Area Community Foundation on the “Support Spa City” project, a joint effort to support local businesses, processing about 400 applications and distributing funds to families in need last spring.

“I hope by 2021 ECHO can get back on a full clinic schedule. Before COVID we were seeing 25-30 patients each month at our evening clinic, and that has been cut to 12,” Arnett said. “We’ve been adaptable and kept patient contact even when we could not see patients in person. We wanted them to know we still care about them and we will do all we can to keep them healthy.”

Charitable clinics are essential to the health of their communities. “Our services help keep Emergency Rooms unclogged and help patients maintain their health. We have a desire to take care of them,” said Carter.



The Best Time to Eat Locally is Now



Mike and Jessie Brust of Square One Farms, Redfield, Arkansas

Mother Nature giveth and taketh away. Throughout 2020, Mother Nature has seemed particularly active in the “taketh away” column with natural disasters and a global pandemic. However, she also gives back and provides us with tools to recover and replenish our bodies. In the “giveth” column, eating seasonal, fresh food is a gift that replenishes.

Mike Brust and his wife, Jessie, are local farmers and homesteaders. They operate Square One Farms in Redfield, Arkansas. Mike shares a popular Chinese proverb that he tries to live by, “The best time to plant a tree was seven years ago. The second-best time is now.” According to Mike, “The same can be said for eating healthy. If you want to eat better right now, know where your food comes from.”

Eating seasonal foods is one way to take good care of your health, but you can take it a step further by buying it from a local farmer. One benefit of buying local is that there is less impact on the environment because fewer fossil-fuels are needed to transport food long distances.

“The food doesn’t have to travel as far. Some fruits and vegetables travel to Arkansas from South America, Asia and then to the U.S. So the produce is fresher when purchased locally, and the fresher, the better for your health,” Mike said.

There are also economic benefits to supporting local farmers. Arkansas is a fertile state and growing food is typically easier here. Arkansans can play an active role in supporting their local economy by eating locally grown food.

According to Arkansas Farm Bureau, “Agriculture is Arkansas’ largest industry, adding around \$16 billion to the state’s economy annually. The Natural State’s diverse landscape and climate produce a wide variety of (Arkansas) agricultural products. There are 49,346 farms statewide and 97% of Arkansas’ farms are family-owned.”

“When the pandemic hit Arkansas, smallholder farmers took a huge hit. The value chain was disrupted, and meat processing was backed up by months. Demand shot up and the supply chain wasn’t ready. Some farms still haven’t fully recovered,” Jessie said.



This presents Arkansans with another opportunity right now to help each other while helping themselves stay healthy. The Natural State offers lots of choices for supporting local farms. A large network of local farmers markets, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs and pick-your-own farms exist statewide.

Not to mention, eating seasonal food is cheaper. When fruits and veggies are in season, they are abundant and, not surprisingly, available at a lower price. For example, apples are best picked in late fall; so they are typically cheaper this time of year. Summer is berry season; so, strawberries and other berries are cheaper during the summer.

“One of the good things about Arkansas is the heat. You can almost always run two full summer crops. Then by canning, you can make it last. If it’ll hold still, I’ll find a way to can it,” said Jessie, a Kingsland native.

Mike shares that there has been an increase in gardening, prepping and general interest in farming since the pandemic hit. “Our farm and other farmers in our network have seen an uptick in people wanting to get into farming and interest in the farm-to-table movement. Our subscriber counts on YouTube and social media channel followers have nearly quadrupled this year. People are seeking ways to take care of themselves.”

Jessie’s advice is to “Go visit a farmer. See who is growing your food. See how it is raised and how the food is being grown. Local, fresh food is the most nutrient-dense food you can consume. Not to mention, it tastes better.”

Making the choice to purchase local food is a win-win-win for Arkansas farmers, the health of Arkansans and the state’s economy.



According to traditional Ayurvedic practices, the foods best suited for humans during late autumn’s cold, wintry months are nutrient-dense and help preserve warmth. In addition to seasonal produce, foods like animal-based proteins and fats, salt and milk products are good for the body during this time.

A Holistic Approach: Mindfulness for Mental Health



Mindfulness is a term that gets shared often, but few know the deeper meaning, benefits and tools it can bring to their lives.

According to the UAMS Mindfulness Program's website, "Mindfulness is paying attention in a particular way: on purpose—with intention (as opposed to autopilot). It is paying attention to what is happening in the present moment (not dwelling on the past or the future) and doing so nonjudgmentally."

"Mindfulness is an easy concept but can be intimidating and sometimes challenging to practice or do," said Amber Teigen, Physician Assistant Studies associate program director and assistant professor at UAMS. "A simple definition? Paying attention to the present moment without judgement. So much can pull our minds away: past thoughts, future worries, anything. Practicing mindfulness can help anyone cultivate more awareness on the present moment and 'respond vs. react' to any given situation."

Mike Mueller, a practitioner in the Kwan Um School of Zen and author on mindfulness, shares, "When people feel anxious it is usually because they feel out of control. Especially now with so many changes and uncertainty. Our kids are doing more virtual learning, people are out of work

and the economy is uncertain. People are just feeling an overall sense of instability. Maybe before the pandemic, many felt a greater sense of control over our lives, but now we are coming to terms with what is really in our power to control and what is not."

"Mindfulness helps us know our minds. A mindfulness practice teaches us that we don't know the outcomes and helps us be okay with not knowing. Accepting the 'not knowing' of factors outside of our control is one step to greater mental health," Mueller said.

The health benefits of mindfulness, both psychological and biological, are well documented. "A regular mindfulness practice can help reduce chronic disease, high blood pressure and aid in chronic pain management," Teigen said.

"It is actually one of the most accessible ways to become healthier, especially for mental health," said Mueller. "It isn't just about sitting on a cushion or meditating for hours. It's way simpler. You can go for a walk, sit alone, turn off the cell phone and just give yourself a few minutes to be alone and reflect internally. You can be washing the dishes or doing any 'mindless' task and just take a moment to tune in to the present. It's a practice, but the effects can almost always be felt immediately."



New tools can help anyone starting or wanting to get better at practicing mindfulness. Apps like Insight Timer, Headspace and Calm are available on smartphones and tablets. Free online meditations are offered on Facebook through the Ecumenical Buddhist Society of Little Rock, and a search for 'free meditations' online yields scores of YouTube videos and guided meditations.

UAMS has seen a plethora of benefits from their Mindfulness Program. Established in January 2019, the UAMS Mindfulness Program was started by Puru Thapa, M.D., M.P.H., founding director. Dr. Thapa obtained a grant from the UAMS Chancellor's Circle of Excellence Fund to promote wellness in their students and residents.

"UAMS has had great feedback and encouragement from our student body and residents who utilize the mindfulness courses and resources. We plan to provide similar tools for the general public in 2021," said Teigen. One student remarked, "I didn't realize I needed this time as much as I did. As a result of this class, I will be able to take a step back and enjoy the present moment more fully."

"I wish more people knew just how beneficial mindfulness can be," Teigen said. "I know that there may be a little fear or taboos associated with the word 'mindfulness' and 'meditation' that scare some. But mindfulness is meant to complement any religious practice or wellness practice, not take the place of or inhibit it. It's simply about being. Some days it will be easier than others. Even longtime practitioners of mindfulness and meditation struggle. The thing to remember is that it is a practice. And to get better and realize the full benefits, you just have to keep practicing."



A Beginner's Guide to Mindfulness and Meditation

Meditation is an ancient wellness practice that focuses on training awareness, attention and compassion. Combining mindfulness with meditation can reduce stress and anxiety, improve focus and concentration, and increase feelings of calm and relaxation. To start your own meditation practice, try the following:

- Find a quiet place and find comfort sitting on cushion or chair, or lie down.
- Find a pose and posture that is both comfortable and keeps you upright or stable.
- Set a digital (non-ticking) timer; start with one to three minutes.
- Relax your arms, face and neck, and keep a long straight spine.
- Look slightly downward and close your eyes.
- Breathe normally, inhaling and exhaling through your nose.
- Bring all your attention and focus to your breath.
- Don't worry about whether you're thinking (or not thinking) about anything. When you feel your thoughts start to drift, bring them back to the breath.
- Be easy on yourself — when your thoughts start to wander, just bring them back to your breath.
- Start with short sessions and work your way to longer meditations.

ENGAGE

“What actions can Arkansans take to help stay healthy during the pandemic?”



Derek Lewis II
*President
Derek Lewis Foundation
Little Rock*

The novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) has been one of the most disruptive forces in our lifetime. The virus has demonstrated that power, wealth and status do not provide immunity. As COVID-19 reaches the highest positions in the world, Arkansans must continue to be good neighbors as we care for each other and ourselves.

Our state leaders and healthcare agencies have emphasized the importance of good neighbor practices like hand washing, wearing of masks and maintaining physical distance. Although these practices sometimes feel like they are in conflict with our tradition of Southern hospitality, most Arkansans have embraced such guidance as the best way to protect our friends and families.

In communities across the state, healthcare, education, faith and philanthropic communities have created strong partnerships to share trustworthy messages that reinforce our shared responsibility to keep individuals and communities healthy and safe. Arkansans embrace the importance of caring for each other as selfless acts.

We must continue to do such simple things as virtual tutoring and checking on the elderly and those exposed to COVID. In Arkansas, WE Care! Let's continue to “keep our faith, trust the science and do our part.” It's the neighborly thing to do.



Paige Partridge-Hix, M.D.
*Arkansas Community
Foundation Board
Member and OB/GYN at
Parkhill Clinic for Women
Fayetteville*

The COVID-19 pandemic has been the cause of one of the most difficult years any of us can remember; and as Arkansans, we have not been immune to its devastating effects. As we progress through 2020, we continue to learn about the virus and those who have been infected. We do our best to remain healthy as we gather information and experience.

It is imperative that we follow safety guidelines as closely as possible to decrease the cases in the state and lower the number of those who succumb to the disease. Arkansans have all been encouraged to wash hands often, physically distance six feet when able and wear a face covering when in public.

While physical health during this crisis is of utmost importance, mental health cannot be overlooked. The pandemic has created isolation, loneliness and depression as Arkansans are often working from home and unable to see loved ones. It is important that we continue to connect with others, share life experiences with those we love and spend time outdoors when able. Reach out for help if you are having symptoms (both physically and mentally), follow guidelines and stay healthy!

ARKANSAS VIEWPOINTS



8 Tips to Keep Young Families Healthy

What are the most important actions young families can take to stay healthy during the COVID-19 pandemic? Sarah Bone, M.D., Secretary of the Arkansas Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, offered these tips.

- 1 Get a flu shot for every family member this fall.** If you haven't already had a flu shot, go to a clinic or pharmacy where they are readily available.
- 2 Continue to follow masking and social distancing guidelines for COVID-19 safety.** Wash hands frequently, and keep hand sanitizer available when you cannot use soap and water. Avoid large or crowded events.
- 3 Catch up on all childhood immunizations.** Last spring, some families got behind on regular shots. Check with your doctor's office to see if your children are up-to-date. Immunizations are very important to ensuring childhood diseases don't spread or reappear.
- 4 Make sure you maintain a good routine for children, whether schooling is in person or virtual.** Kids thrive on routines like regular bedtime hours and sitting at the table for family dinners. Routines provide a sense of security at a time when feeling safe is super important.
- 5 Get outside, and make sure kids are moving.** Plenty of playtime out in the fresh air is essential for the whole family.
- 6 Limit screen time that is not related to schooling.** Even when online learning is required, monitor additional screen time spent on games, videos and TV. Set limits, then make sure kids stick to them.
- 7 Encourage a balanced diet with fruits and vegetables daily.** Drink lots of water, and limit junk food. Nutrition is important to overall wellbeing.
- 8 Keep up with regular wellness appointments.** Wellness checks give you an overall picture of health and emotional wellness. The visits can help uncover and address issues before they become more serious concerns.





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Small Things Matter

Help yourself and help those around you.

“The pandemic has been hard on all. It isn’t easy to lose your job, normalcy and sense of security. But we are an innovative society, and inherently, people are good. We can guide ourselves and each other to solutions for staying healthy,” said Dr. Omar Atiq, longtime fundholder with Arkansas Community Foundation. He and his wife Mehreen care deeply about the Pine Bluff community where he worked and where they lived for most of their lives.

One area he and Mehreen have focused on is education. According to Dr. Atiq, “Education is the best investment we can make to better our society, the earlier we start the better. The more we can help all children in our communities, the better we all are.”

When asked about staying healthy right now, Dr. Atiq believes that even small things can have a big impact. “We can make small choices every day to stay safe, healthy and to protect ourselves. By protecting yourself, you protect others. We still need to eat right, exercise, avoid tobacco... but now we should do a little more like frequent handwashing, wearing a mask and social distancing.”

“There are new tools for virtual connectivity that we need to utilize to stay connected to those we care about. We should never underestimate the value of saying ‘hi’ to strangers, doing random acts of kindness or just smiling behind our masks. These small things matter. They matter to the recipient on the other end, but they matter to us for our own emotional health and wellness.”



Dr. Omar Atiq and his wife, Mehreen Atiq

