

Doctor's Advice: Leap into February

This year is a leap year. Instead of the usual 365 days we see every year, we get an extra 24 hours in 2024. How will you use your extra 24 hours? We had some snow in January (yay!) and maybe we will have some more this month. Will the Groundhog see his shadow on February 2nd? As the weather gets warmer, some of us may find it hard to be as happy as others. This could be due to Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) which is a type of depression that's related to seasonal changes. It can begin in the fall and continue into the winter months. It may make you feel tired and even grumpy. If you are feeling down for an extended period of time, contact your healthcare professional. Some of my patients are experiencing SAD this time of year. They tend to feel better as Spring is arriving. If you know someone who is experiencing SAD, here are some suggestions: don't be critical of them, be sensitive to their concerns, let them know that you are there for them, and ask them what helps them feel better.

During Black History Month in February we celebrate the contributions of African Americans from all periods of U.S. history. We validate and honor the sacrifices, experiences, and struggles of those racially marginalized in this country and hope to ensure social justice for all.

According to the CDC, as of January 22, 2024, COVID-19 continues to cause more hospitalizations than influenza and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). There are effective vaccines and treatments, as well as other preventive actions that can reduce your risk of getting sick. This season's flu and COVID-19 vaccines are well-matched to the viruses that are most common and should offer good protection from severe illness. The flu season started earlier than usual in 2023 and peak respiratory virus season will likely continue throughout January and February. It should then begin to fade as the weather warms up, allowing

for outdoor activities, better ventilation, and higher humidity. My family and I were recently sick with a (non-Covid) respiratory ailment which lasted a few days and then was gone. Unpleasant but not too serious (We're vaccinated).

February is American Heart Month, a time when everyone is encouraged to focus on their cardiovascular health. This month, the CDC's Division of Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention (<https://www.cdc.gov/dhds/index.htm>) is encouraging women to listen to their hearts and speak up for their health. Women in the United States are experiencing avoidable heart-related illnesses and death. Nearly half of U.S. women do not recognize that heart disease is the leading cause of death for women. Some signs and symptoms of heart disease include chest pain, breathlessness after activity or at rest, feeling tired most of the time, feeling lightheaded or fainting, and/or swollen ankles and legs. Contact your healthcare professional if you have any of these symptoms.

Protect yourself and your family this winter, wear masks when appropriate and talk to your healthcare professional about getting vaccinated for Covid-19, RSV and the Flu. No matter how you spend the winter months, be healthy, happy, and safe. Happy Valentine's Day!

The natural healing force within each one of us is the greatest force in getting well.

– Hippocrates

James McGuinness, M.D., is a Family Physician in Middletown, and is the Medical Director Emeritus of the Parker Family Health Center in Red Bank