

# HealthSmarts



WHERE  
HEALING  
FEELS  
LIKE  
HOME

Banner MD Anderson's  
Home Away from Home offers  
more than lodging—it's a lifeline for  
cancer patients and their families.

STEPS TO  
STRONGER  
KNEES  
5 ways to stay  
strong, steady  
and pain-free

# Welcome



This season brings cooler days and opportunities to focus on comfort, connection and self-care. We hope the stories in this fall issue of Health Smarts will encourage you to take simple steps toward better health and well-being.

In our cover story, we're proud to mark the one-year anniversary of our Home Away from Home housing community at Banner MD Anderson Cancer Center in Gilbert. Built through a partnership with Taylor Morrison and made possible by generous donors, this special neighborhood gives patients and their care partners a safe and supportive place to stay during treatment. Nearly 80 families have already benefited from this unique program, which alleviates the stress of travel and enables individuals to focus on their healing.

As we head into cooler months, it's a good time to prepare your home—and your health—for fall and winter. In this issue, we share tips to get your living space ready for the season and help you stay safe and well indoors.

Inside, you'll find advice on protecting your knees and keeping your bones strong as you age. We also offer

guidance on how to manage asthma flare-ups, which can become more common in colder weather, and we highlight the many health benefits of golf—a fun and simple way to stay active, social and strong at any age.

Plus, don't miss our seasonal recipe, an easy and flavorful dish to enjoy as the temperatures drop.

You're receiving Health Smarts because your doctor participates in the Medicare Shared Savings Program through Banner Health Network. There's no need to enroll, and your Medicare benefits remain the same. This magazine is simply an added benefit to help you stay informed and supported.

As always, we're here for you. If you have questions about your health or where to get care, call our 24-hour Nurse On-Call line at 602-747-7990 or toll-free at 888-747-7990.

To your health,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ed Clarke".

Ed Clarke, MD  
Chief Medical Officer  
Banner Plans and Networks

**COVER STORY****08 A Place to Heal, a Place to Hope**

Banner MD Anderson's Home Away from Home is a lifeline for cancer patients and their families

**04 Get Your Home Ready for Fall and Winter**

Tips to clean, prep and protect your home and health this season

**06 Steps to Stronger Knees**

Simple ways to support your knees, reduce pain and stay active as you age

**11 Breathe Easy: Help Keep Asthma at Bay**

How to live well with asthma after 60

**12 Don't Let Bone Loss Catch You by Surprise**

Learn signs, risks and treatments for osteoporosis to keep your bones strong

**13 Reader Survey**

Let us know what you think of Health Smarts. Take our brief survey

**14 Swing Into Wellness**

Why golf is a great low-impact sport for people of all ages

**TAKE THE SURVEY**

Take our reader survey...  
details on page 13

**13**



**08**



**06**

**NEED TO CONTACT MEDICARE?**  
800-MEDICARE (800-633-4227)  
[www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov)

**NOTICE OF NONDISCRIMINATION**

Discrimination is Against the Law: Banner Health complies with applicable federal civil rights laws and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, or sex. Banner Health does not exclude people or treat them differently because of race, color, national origin, age, disability, or sex.

Banner Health provides free aids and services to people with disabilities to communicate effectively with us, such as:

- Qualified sign language interpreters
- Written information in other formats (large print, audio, accessible electronic formats, other formats)

Banner Health provides free language services to people whose primary language is not English, such as:

- Qualified interpreters
- Information written in other languages

If you need these services, contact Banner staff.

If you believe that Banner Health has failed to provide these services or discriminated in another way on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, or sex, you can file a grievance with the Banner Patient Relations Services Center Director, P.O. Box 16423, Mesa, AZ 85211-6423, or call 602-747-6880, fax 480-684-6325 or email [bannerhealthpatientrelations@bannerhealth.com](mailto:bannerhealthpatientrelations@bannerhealth.com). You can file a grievance in person, or by mail, fax, or email.

If you need help filing a grievance, the Banner Patient Relations Services Center Director is available to help you. You can also file a civil rights complaint with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office for Civil Rights, electronically through the Office for Civil Rights Complaint Portal, available at [ocrportal.hhs.gov](http://ocrportal.hhs.gov), or by mail or phone at: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 200 Independence Avenue SW, Room 509F, HHH Building, Washington, D.C. 20201 800-868-1019, 800-537-7697 (TDD). Complaint forms are available at [hhs.gov/ocr/office/file](http://hhs.gov/ocr/office/file).

**Shown on cover:** Banner's Jill Green inside the Home Away from Home wellness center on the campus of Banner MD Anderson Cancer Center in Gilbert, AZ.



*If you no longer wish to receive this magazine:  
Please notify us at [BHNMSPPSupport@Bannerhealth.com](mailto:BHNMSPPSupport@Bannerhealth.com). Be sure to include your full name, address, city and zip code as it appears on the mailing label of the publication.*

# Get Your House (and Health) Ready for Fall and Winter

5 tips for a cleaner, healthier and cozier space this season

By Regan Olsson

**W**hen the weather cools down, we naturally spend more time indoors. That makes fall the perfect time to give your home a little attention, before cold and flu season and winter settle in.

A few simple steps can make your home more comfortable and help keep you healthier during the months ahead. Here are five smart ways to get your space winter-ready.

## 1 Start with a deep clean

Fall cleaning may not be as famous as spring cleaning, but it can be just as important. The colder months bring colds, flu and other respiratory illnesses.

"Respiratory illness can be spread through contaminated surfaces, making regular cleaning an important preventive measure," said Scott Olson, MD, a pediatric infectious diseases specialist with Banner Children's. "This is particularly useful during periods of community outbreaks or if you have vulnerable people, like the elderly or those with chronic health conditions, at home."

Focus on high-touch areas like doorknobs, light switches, remote controls and countertops. Wipe down and disinfect these spots regularly.

Instead of tackling everything at once, try cleaning one area at a time:

- **Kitchen:** Clean out the fridge, wipe down appliances and scrub sinks and counters.
- **Bathrooms:** Disinfect tile, toss expired medications and replace old toothbrushes.
- **Bedrooms:** Wash pillows and mattress covers, clean under the bed and flip your mattress.

■ **Closets:** Swap out summer clothes and donate what you no longer wear.

■ **Floors and furniture:** Vacuum rugs, steam clean carpets and dust baseboards.

## 2 Improve indoor air quality

With doors and windows closed, indoor air can become stale and dry. Have your home's air systems checked before winter sets in.

"Changing HVAC air filters before the winter season helps remove infectious agents, including respiratory viruses, from the air," Dr. Olson said.

Aim to replace filters every one to three months. And consider these upgrades to breathe easier:

- **Air purifiers:** Helpful for people with allergies or asthma
- **Humidifiers:** Add moisture to dry indoor air

## 3 Prepare for cold and flu season

It's not just your home that needs a refresh. Your immune system can benefit too. Take care of your health now to avoid sick days later.

- **Eat vitamin-rich foods** like citrus, leafy greens and nuts.
- **Get regular physical activity** and aim for quality sleep each night.
- **Wash your hands often**, especially after being in public places.
- **Cover your coughs and sneezes** and wear a mask when you're not feeling well to protect others.
- **Stay current on vaccines**, including your annual flu shot and any other recommended immunizations based on your age and health status.



## 4 Make your space cozy and comfortable

When it's chilly outside, your home should feel like a safe, soothing retreat. A few seasonal touches can go a long way in lifting your mood and keeping you comfortable.

- **Maximize natural light** during the day by opening blinds or rearranging furniture near windows. In the evening, use soft, warm lighting to create a cozy feel.
- **Seal up drafts** with weather stripping around windows and door sweeps on the bottom of doors.
- **Decorate for the season** with throw blankets, pillows and scents like cinnamon or vanilla.

## 5 Be ready for winter surprises

When in mild climates, winter can bring sudden storms, power outages and other surprises. A few safety checks now can prevent problems later.

- **Schedule an inspection of your furnace, boiler or heat pump** to make sure your heating system is working safely and efficiently.
- **Have your fireplace cleaned** and inspected before lighting that first fire.
- **Test your smoke and carbon monoxide detectors** and replace batteries if needed.

■ **Build a simple emergency kit** with items such as flashlights, extra batteries, blankets, a battery-powered phone charger, non-perishable food, water and a first-aid kit.

■ **Keep important medications handy** and know where to locate them quickly in the event of an outage.



### A CLICK AWAY

Have questions about your health or how to stay well this season? Connect with a Banner Health provider to build a plan that helps you stay well, no matter what the weather brings.

Visit [bannerhealth.com/getcarenow](https://bannerhealth.com/getcarenow).

# Steps to Stronger Knees

## 5 ways to stay strong, steady and pain-free

By Regan Olsson

Have you noticed a slight twinge in your knee while walking down the stairs? Maybe your knees feel stiffer than they used to when you get up from a chair. These small changes can be signs that your knees need more support.

Knee problems become more common over time. As you get older, you may be more likely to have knee problems like osteoarthritis, meniscus tears and ligament injuries.

While you can't always avoid knee pain, there are steps you can take to support your knees and still remain active.

### Keep your body moving

Exercise can improve knee function by keeping the muscles around the joint strong and flexible.

"It's important to participate in a variety of different exercises, including mobility exercises like walking, cycling, swimming and resistance-band exercises with body weight or weights," said Jeff Willenbrecht, a physical therapist with Banner Physical Therapy.





Exercises such as leg lifts, hamstring curls and hip extensions can help strengthen key muscle groups. Stretching your thighs, calves, hamstrings and hips can help reduce stiffness and improve movement.

### Maintain a healthy weight

Even a small amount of extra weight adds pressure to your joints. In fact, for every pound of body weight, about four pounds of force are placed on the knees with each step. This extra weight can wear down your knees more quickly and increase your risk of osteoarthritis.

"It's just physics," Willenbrecht said. "The bigger you are, the more gravity is pulling on you and that means the more compression on all of your joints, not just your knees."

Eating a balanced diet and staying active can help maintain a healthy weight range. If you need help managing your weight or diet, talk to a registered dietitian or your primary care provider (PCP).

### Choose supportive shoes

Flip-flops and worn-out sneakers may not offer enough support as you age. The right shoes help cushion your steps and spread pressure more evenly across your joints. Look for shoes with good arch support and shock absorption.

Willenbrecht advises a practical approach. "I look at footwear as a tool, and it's important to have the right tools for the job. You wouldn't wear high heels to do gardening, unless you plan on aerating your lawn."

### Use safe body mechanics

How you move matters. Bending, lifting and twisting the wrong way can wear out your knees faster.

"Your body was designed to operate under certain parameters," Willenbrecht said.

"Improper posture alters those parameters and makes your muscles and joints work harder."

### To reduce stress on your knees:

- Bend at your hips and knees, not the waist.
- Keep your back straight when lifting.
- Avoid twisting your knees while carrying objects.

### Manage knee pain early

It's easier to support your knees than to recover from damage.

"When it comes to knee pain, motion is lotion," Willenbrecht said. "Staying active helps reduce the impact of arthritis and tendon problems. It's easier to maintain the knee than to have to repair it."

### If your knees hurt, try:

- Over-the-counter medications like ibuprofen or acetaminophen
- Gentle stretching or walking
- Physical therapy to strengthen muscles and reduce pain

### Know when to ask for help

If knee pain doesn't go away or gets worse, talk to your PCP or a Banner Health specialist.

### You may need medical support if you have:

- Chronic or increasing pain
- Sudden swelling or warmth around the knee
- Trouble walking, standing or bending your knee

"Reaching out doesn't mean committing to shots, surgery or even therapy," Willenbrecht said. "It just means getting more information and making an informed decision about your care."



# Where Healing Feels Like Home

Banner MD Anderson's Home Away from Home offers more than lodging—it's a lifeline for cancer patients and their families

By Regan Olsson



**Left:** A family unwinds in one of the Home Away from Home kitchens.

**W**hen Cecilia Cortes was diagnosed with leukemia, she and her family had difficult decisions to make. Hope came in the form of her daughter, Gissel, who turned out to be a perfect stem cell match.

But the transplant meant both mother and daughter would need to stay within 30 miles of Banner MD Anderson Cancer Center in Gilbert for several weeks. This was a challenge for a family living more than 100 miles away in Tucson.

Thanks to the Home Away from Home program, they didn't have to face it alone. The program provided them with a comfortable place to stay just steps from the hospital, making a stressful time a little more manageable.

### **A Program Built on Compassion**

The Home Away from Home program started in 2019 with one goal: to ensure patients who needed long-term care at Banner MD Anderson didn't have to choose between treatment and housing.

While many patients can afford a few nights in a hotel, long stays—especially after surgery or during weeks of daily therapy—can add up quickly. On average, out-of-town patients face more than \$5,500 in hotel costs, even with discounted rates.

"For many patients, lodging is the barrier that keeps them from getting lifesaving care," said Jill Green, the patient financial advocate at Banner MD Anderson. "We knew we had to change that."

In her role, Jill helps assess patients' needs and connect them with

support. She's walked alongside dozens of families navigating both cancer treatment and the stress of temporary relocation.

"Patients are overwhelmed. They're worried about their health and how they'll afford it all," Jill said. "Being able to say, 'We've got a place for you to stay,' you can see the relief instantly."

### **Homes That Heal**

In June 2024, that vision came to life when eight beautiful, fully furnished homes opened on a quiet cul-de-sac just steps from Banner MD Anderson. Each house has two bedrooms, two bathrooms, a private backyard and a cozy layout that helps patients feel at ease during their stay.

The homes are part of a thoughtfully designed community made possible through the generosity of Taylor Morrison, trade partners, and the Home Away from Home fundraising committee. National brands, including The Home Edit, contributed their expertise to ensure organized, calming spaces that ease stress and support wellness.

"What began as a conversation turned into an incredible gift," said Loren Bouchard, chief development officer for the Banner Health Foundation. "These homes represent the best of what can happen when people come together for a cause."

Much of this progress was made possible through the leadership of Sheryl Palmer, president and CEO of Taylor Morrison, who had her own personal connection to cancer care. Under her guidance, the

company donated time, talent and resources to make the residential community a reality.

"As a homebuilder, there's no greater gift we could give than to build a community of homes that will eliminate undue stressors like hotel costs alongside rent or mortgage payments, and allow patients to focus on their treatment," Sheryl said. "It was deeply important to us that what we were building was a true community."

"This is more than housing—it's a healing environment," Green added. "Families tell us it helps them feel safe and cared for during a very hard time."

And in the heart of the neighborhood stands a new wellness center, which was featured in a recent episode of the award-winning show *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*. This 2,000-square-foot building features a kitchen, craft area, lounge and gathering space where patients and caregivers can rest, connect and recharge.

## A Model of Holistic Cancer Care

Cancer care at Banner MD Anderson is built on a model that addresses the whole person—body, mind and spirit. The Home Away from Home program reflects that philosophy in action.

"When patients have stable housing, their outcomes improve," said Darren McCollem, chief operating officer at Banner MD Anderson and Banner Gateway Medical Center. "They're less anxious, more engaged in their treatment, and better able to focus on healing."

And it's not just patients who benefit. Caregivers, often spouses, siblings or adult children, say the program gives them a chance to breathe. Living in a quiet neighborhood, rather than a hotel, helps restore a sense of normalcy and reduces stress during an already difficult time.

"This program gives dignity and comfort to families in the hardest moments of their lives," said Bouchard. "It's a powerful reminder of what community support can achieve."

## Expanding the Impact

Today, the Home Away from Home program serves patients with all types of cancer—prioritizing those with the longest and most intensive treatment protocols. While the eight homes support roughly 80 families per year, demand remains high, with many patients also staying in partner hotels supported by the program's endowment fund.

Thanks to the generosity of donors, the Banner Health Foundation has raised more than \$2.4 million toward its \$5 million goal to ensure permanent funding for housing and hotel stays.

Donors include businesses, families, and foundations such as Leslie's, McCarthy Building Companies, Thunderbirds Charities and the American Cancer Society.

"When you give to this endowment, you're removing a major obstacle for someone facing cancer," Jill said. "You're giving them the chance to focus on healing and not logistics."

**Right:** Cecilia Cortes and her daughter Gissel in their Home Away From Home unit

## Finding peace in the storm

For Cecilia and Gissel, their stay at Home Away from Home was a turning point. Today, Cortes is in remission, a testament to the power of comprehensive care and the support provided by the Home Away from Home program.

"It gave me more peace of mind," Cortes said. "I was able to focus on healing more because there was less pressure and less worry."

And for Green, it's moments like that that keep her going.

"This program shows what's possible when people come together," she said. "It's not just about buildings. It's about dignity, compassion and giving families the support they need when they need it most."

## Want to Help?

You can make a difference in the lives of patients at Banner MD Anderson Cancer Center.

Donate, volunteer or host an event to support the Home Away from Home program through the Banner Health Foundation. Visit [bannerhealthfoundation.org](http://bannerhealthfoundation.org) to learn more.



# Breathe Easy: Help Keep Asthma at Bay

By Regan Olsson

Asthma might seem like something only children deal with. But that's far from the whole story. Many people first develop asthma later in life, and those who had it as kids often find that it sticks around—or even worsens—with age.

"About 4% to 8% of adults over age 65 are living with asthma," said James Knepler, MD, an interventional pulmonologist with Banner—University Medicine. "And for seniors, it can be more serious and harder to manage."

## Why asthma feels different as you age

Asthma causes inflammation and narrowing of your airways, making it harder to breathe. It's a chronic condition, meaning it doesn't go away. You might notice:

- Shortness of breath
- Wheezing (a whistling sound when you breathe)
- Coughing, especially at night or in the morning
- Chest tightness

As you age, your lung function naturally declines. That means asthma symptoms can hit harder than they did when you were younger. You may also have other conditions, like heart disease, arthritis or diabetes, which can make asthma harder to manage.

## Could it be something else?

Asthma symptoms can often look a lot like other health issues. Conditions like COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease), chronic bronchitis or even heart problems can cause coughing and shortness of breath.

It's easy to think you're just "getting older" or "out of shape," but don't ignore new or changing symptoms.

Talk to your primary care provider (PCP) or a Banner Health lung specialist.

Providers may use a combination of physical exams, breathing tests, allergy testing, and imaging to confirm asthma. They'll also ask about your symptoms, triggers and how you've responded to medications in the past.

In some cases, asthma can occur together with other conditions, like COPD. "Asthma and COPD are separate diseases that can affect the lungs," Dr. Knepler said. "They can occur together—and if they do, treatment can be different."

## What can trigger asthma?

Your symptoms may flare up around certain triggers. These can include:

- Dust mites, pet dander and mold
- Cold or humid weather
- Smoke or strong odors
- Respiratory infections like colds or the flu
- Emotional stress or physical activity

If you spend more time indoors, you may also be exposed to more indoor allergens. Keeping your living space clean and well-ventilated can help.

## Treatment that fits your life

There's no cure for asthma, but you can manage it with the right plan.

Many people use a daily controller inhaler to keep inflammation down and a rescue inhaler for quick relief during flare-ups. Your doctor may also recommend a spacer—a small device that attaches to your inhaler and helps deliver the medicine more easily into your lungs.

Keeping track of multiple medications can be a challenge. These tips can help:

- Use a pill organizer or app
- Take your medicine at the same time every day
- Keep a list of your medications to share with your provider
- Refill prescriptions before you run out

## Healthy habits make a difference

Lifestyle changes can go a long way in supporting your lung health. Consider these tips:

- Stay active—but ask your doctor what exercises are right for you
- Avoid smoking and secondhand smoke
- Keep your home clean and dust-free
- Use an air purifier if needed
- Drink plenty of water
- Reduce stress with breathing exercises or meditation
- Stay up to date on vaccines like the flu and pneumonia shots

## When to get help

Even with treatment, asthma can become an emergency. Call 911 or seek immediate care if you:

- Can't catch your breath
- Feel dizzy or confused
- Have blue lips or fingernails
- Use your inhaler and don't feel better

## Noticing changes in your breathing?

Don't wait. Talk with your provider or a Banner Health lung specialist.



# Don't Let Bone Loss Catch You by Surprise

Keep your bones strong for life

By Regan Olsson



**A**s we get older, it's natural to notice changes in how our bodies feel and move. Perhaps you're not as flexible, or you feel a bit off-balance. But there's one change that often happens without any signs—your bones may be getting weaker.

This is what happens with osteoporosis, a condition that causes bones to become thinner, more fragile, and more likely to break. You might not feel anything at first, but over time, it can lead to serious injuries.

"About half of postmenopausal women and 1 in 5 men over age 50 will have a fracture in their lifetime," said Kristina Balangue, MD, an internist and geriatrician with Banner – University Medicine.

Broken bones, especially hip fractures, can cause long-term pain and make it hard to get around. That's why it's important to take care of your bones as you get older.

### What raises your risk for osteoporosis?

Simply getting older raises your risk, but other things can make it more likely, including:

- A family history of osteoporosis
- Health conditions like diabetes, arthritis, autoimmune diseases, thyroid problems, celiac disease, eating disorders or cancer
- Cancer treatments like hormone therapy
- Long-term use of medications like steroids, antidepressants or seizure drugs
- Having a small body frame or being female
- Low calcium or vitamin D levels
- Not getting enough exercise
- Smoking or drinking too much alcohol
- Low hormone levels (like estrogen in women and testosterone in men)

### How to keep your bones strong

Even if you're at higher risk, there's a lot you can do to protect your bones:

- **Stay active:** Walking, dancing or lifting light weights helps keep bones strong.
- **Improve balance:** Try yoga and tai chi to help prevent falls.
- **Eat for bone health:** Get enough calcium and vitamin D. Ask your primary care provider (PCP) if you should take a supplement.

- **Quit tobacco and limit alcohol:** Both can weaken your bones over time.
- **Make your home safer:** Get rid of loose rugs, add better lighting and use grab bars in the bathroom.

"When you're more active, your body stays in better shape," Dr. Balangue said. "That makes a big difference, because you're less likely to fall if you trip."

### How do I know if I have osteoporosis?

Most people don't know they have it until they break a bone. That's why getting checked is so important—especially if you're 65 or older or have risk factors.

Your provider may recommend a DXA scan (also called a DEXA scan or bone density test), which is a simple, low-dose X-ray that looks at the strength of your bones, usually in your hips, spine or wrist.

### You may need a DXA scan if:

- You're a woman 65 and older
- You're a man 70 and older
- You're younger but have risk factors or already had a fracture

"Some people think they don't need a scan if they've never broken a bone," Dr. Balangue said. "But you want to find out before something serious like a hip fracture happens."

### What if I have osteoporosis?

If you're diagnosed with osteoporosis, there are treatments that can help slow or even reverse bone loss:

- Antiresorptive medicines like Fosamax®, Actonel®, Boniva®, Reclast® or Prolia® help slow bone loss.

- Anabolic medications like Forteo®, Tymlos® or Evenity® help your body build new bone.

Your PCP or a Banner Health specialist can help you choose the best treatment based on your bone health and medical history.

Osteoporosis may not show signs at first, but you're not powerless. By staying active, eating right and getting screened, you can keep your bones stronger and lower your risk of fractures.

## Can we ask a favor?

Tell us what you think

We want to know your opinion of this magazine, Health Smarts. Can we ask for your participation in a brief survey? Your opinions matter and we want to know.

Scan the QR code below with your mobile device, or visit [www.bannerhealth.com/healthsmartsfeedback](http://www.bannerhealth.com/healthsmartsfeedback).

We appreciate your time and input - thank you.



# Swing Into Wellness

Why golf is a smart way to stay active, social and strong after 60

By Regan Olsson

In a world where health trends come and go, golf stands as a classic that never goes out of style. Whether you're 6 or 96, the game offers something for everyone. It's easy to see why it's become a favorite among older adults.

In 2024, more than 47 million Americans played some form of golf—from scenic courses and driving ranges to indoor simulators and entertainment spots like Topgolf. It's no longer just a sport for pros or the young at heart.

Because golf is a low-impact and highly adaptable activity, it's an ideal way for seniors to stay active, enjoy the outdoors and spend time with friends.

## Why golf works for older adults: It improves balance, strength and movement

As we age, our muscles naturally lose strength and coordination, especially if we're not actively working to maintain them. That's where golf can help.

"Research shows that the static and dynamic balance of golfers aged 65 to 79 years is significantly better than that of non-golfers," said Amy Alexander, a physical therapist with Banner Sports Medicine Scottsdale. "This is important, considering balance, gait instability and muscle weakness are known risk factors for falls in older adults."

Golf encourages flexibility, mobility and power—all of which are needed for a smooth, effective swing.

"When it comes to golf, we need plenty of mobility in our hips and thoracic spine (mid-back where your ribs attach to the spine)," said Naveed Shan, a doctor of physical therapy at Banner Sports Medicine Scottsdale. "We also need to produce force very quickly (power) to swing a golf club."

These movements can also help older adults stay stronger and more agile off the course.

## It gives your heart a workout

Golf may not seem like a cardio activity, but it can still support your heart, especially if you walk the course instead of riding in a cart.

"Doing several short sessions of aerobic exercise, which add up to the same total time as one longer session, can yield the same cardiovascular benefits," Alexander said. "For example, nine walks lasting five minutes can have similar benefits as a walk lasting 45 minutes."

That's good news if your energy comes in smaller bursts—or if you're easing into a more active routine.

## It connects you to others

Golf also offers valuable social benefits. Whether you're hitting

the course with old friends or chatting with new ones between holes, the game builds community.

"Engaging in a sport that addresses both physical benefits and psychosocial (mental health and well-being) is a great way to work on wellness, and golf does that," Dr. Shan said.

And since golf is usually played outdoors in calming natural settings, it can also reduce stress and lift your mood.

## Tips to get started—or get back into the game

### Start small

You don't have to play 18 holes right away. Try putting or chipping to get comfortable with the basics. "Learn how to putt properly, little one-to-two-foot putts, and work your way out from there," Alexander recommended.

Starting with short shots can help build confidence and reduce frustration.

### Invest in lessons, not gear

Before buying expensive clubs or gadgets, spend time learning proper form. "Establishing a base of good technique helps minimize the risk of injury," Alexander said.

You can rent or borrow clubs to start. Later, if you enjoy the game, consider investing in a set that's custom-fitted to your needs.



## Warm up before you play

Like any sport, golf requires preparation—especially as you age.

"Some good warm-up exercises may include quadruped thoracic rotations, shoulder CARs (controlled articular rotations), standing clamshells and hip airplanes," Dr. Shan said. "These help loosen up the areas that are key to your swing."

Working with a physical therapist can help you create a personalized warm-up that matches your fitness level and flexibility.

## Stay safe on the course

While golf is low impact, it's not risk-free. Common injuries include lower back strain, shoulder issues and elbow pain (like golfer's elbow or tennis elbow).

### To avoid injury:

- Take golf lessons from a professional
- Use a proper warm-up
- Wear shoes with good grip
- Stay hydrated and use sunscreen

### Don't play through pain

"If you feel increased pain as you play, it's almost always best not to continue," Dr. Shan said. "You're out there to have fun—not to push through injury."

## Ready to tee off?

Golf is a sport you can enjoy at any age—and every round is a chance to move your body, clear your mind, and connect with others. Whether you play nine holes, practice your swing or just putt in the backyard, it's all progress.

Before starting any new sport or exercise, talk to your primary care provider or a physical therapist to make sure it's safe and right for you.

BANNER HEALTH  
2901 N CENTRAL AVE, SUITE 160  
PHOENIX, AZ 85012

NONPROFIT ORG  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
LONG BEACH, CA  
PERMIT NO. 2297

## HEALTHY LIVING CALENDAR

# Helpful events at Banner Sun Health Research Institute

### **Brain Health Check-In**

Do you question whether your brain is working normally for your age? To help keep your brain healthy and active well into your later years, Banner Sun Health Research Institute is hosting a free Brain Health Check-In.

Assessments are provided by the Center for Healthy Aging and Neuropsychology teams and last approximately one hour.

**WHEN:** Daily, Monday - Friday:  
9 a.m. - 3 p.m.

**REGISTRATION:** Free, but appointment is required.

**Call to schedule:** 623-832-5747



### **Research tour**

Learn more about exciting progress taking place in Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease research, and take a walking tour of our facility. See experts at work in the Brain and Body Donation Program.

**WHEN:** Every third Thursday, 10:30 a.m. – Noon

**WHERE:** Banner Sun Health Research Institute,  
10515 W. Santa Fe Drive,  
Building A, Sun City, AZ, 85351

**REGISTRATION:** Call 602-230-CARE (2273) or visit [www.bannerhealth.com/calendar](http://www.bannerhealth.com/calendar). Wheelchairs must be requested at time of registration, if required.