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Jimi Olaghere and his wife, Amanda, are grateful for blood donors who helped save his life and enabled him to complete gene therapy to treat his sickle cell disease.

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Unsung heroes

Blood donors quietly revolutionizing Sickle Cell Treatment

For Jimi Olaghere, sickle cell disease once meant a life of limitations, sudden pain episodes and frequent hospitalizations. Today, thanks to groundbreaking gene therapy and blood donors, he is reaching new heights. "I don't think I would have had the opportunity to have a gene-editing transplant without blood donations," said Olaghere.

COMPLICATIONS OF SICKLE CELL DISEASE

Prior to gene therapy, Olaghere's life was consumed by severe health complications caused by sickle cell disease – the most common genetic blood disease in the U.S. He experienced acute chest syndrome, pneumonia, avascular necrosis, lung damage, and more. Once, he suffered cardiac arrest due to not receiving a preventative blood transfusion before a minor surgery. "Sickle cell was like a dream killer for me," said Olaghere. "I like to equate it to a succession of time bombs in terms of what it feels like living with sickle cell and having all these complications."

NEWFOUND HOPE

In 2019, hope appeared when Olaghere discovered a news article detailing how gene therapy could be used to boost fetal hemoglobin production in patients with sickle cell disease, potentially reducing symptoms. Inspired to have a better quality of life, Olaghere signed up to participate in a CRISPR gene-editing clinical trial under the care of Dr. Haydar Frangoul at Sarah Cannon Research Institute. "When we went with Dr. Frangoul's team, it was like when Dorothy goes into Oz and all of a sudden everything turns from black and white to color," said Amanda Olaghere, Jimi Olaghere's wife. "To finally have somebody listening to us and hearing us... it was a relief to know that while we were fighting our fight in the dark, somebody else was doing good work behind the scenes," she added. For a year, Olaghere underwent the gene therapy process. Before treatment, he had bi-weekly red blood cell exchanges – a non-surgical procedure that replaces abnormal red blood

Did You Know?
Blood and platelet donations are vital for people with sickle disease undergoing gene therapies and stem cell transplants, or to alleviate pain and help manage their disease. You can schedule a blood donation appointment at RedCrossBlood.org/OurBlood or 1-800-RED-CROSS (1-800-733-2767).

cells with healthy ones from blood donors – to keep him well throughout the trial. During the first phase, in which his blood stem cells were collected and sent to a lab for genetic editing, he had whole blood transfusions after each collection. Post chemotherapy, patients may need platelet donations to increase their platelet levels before getting the edited stem cells. "I received about 20 to 30 units of blood in total," said Jimi Olaghere, who has had over 200 blood transfusions throughout the course of his life. Since he completed gene therapy, Jimi Olaghere's life has transformed. He no longer experiences sickle cell pain crises requiring transfusions. His energy has skyrocketed, allowing him to manage work and family life in ways he never imagined. He and his wife now have three children and have transitioned from a life of "Netflix and chill" to one filled with swim lessons, travel, and constant activity. Recently, Jimi Olaghere hiked a 14,000-foot mountain in Colorado, preparing to climb Mount Kilimanjaro to raise awareness for sickle cell disease. "It kind of feels like I'm living my dream, but at the same time I'm still able to go after things I've always dreamed of that I haven't been able to attain because of my disease," he explained. "What I would say to the blood donors who helped Jimi through this process is 'we could not be here without you,'" said Amanda Olaghere. "Our story is your story."

WHAT YOU CAN DO
Blood and platelet donations are vital for people with sickle disease getting gene therapies and stem cell transplants as well as those in need of regular blood transfusions to alleviate pain and help manage their disease. A patient undergoing gene therapy for sickle cell disease may need as many as 50 units of blood and up to 25 units of platelets. To schedule a blood donation appointment, visit RedCrossBlood.org/OurBlood or call 1-800-RED-CROSS (1-800-733-2767).

Choosing a personal trainer

By Gini Grimsley
CONTRIBUTOR

Exercising with a personal trainer has transformed from a luxury amenity into a highly effective lifestyle routine in many people's health and fitness journeys. One reason, according to a report by International Health, Racquet and Sportsclub Association, a global health and fitness association, may be that 83 percent of consumers who exercise in-person with a personal trainer are on track to meet their fitness goals. If you're thinking about hiring a personal trainer, there are many things to consider.

GOALS

Set clear goals and search for trainers who specialize in your area of focus. All know the basics but if you're looking for something specific – competing in a race, for example – you may need to work with a trainer who has a specialized skill set.

CREDENTIALS

Never hire a trainer who does not hold the minimum standard qualifications to practice personal training. These certifications are considered the gold-standard: National Strength and Conditioning Association; National Academy of Sports Medicine; American Council on Exercise; American College of Sport Medicine.

FIT

Interview your prospective personal trainers. You'll be spending a lot of time with this person, so it's important you enjoy being around them. Have them share their training philosophy: Personal trainers should be able to articulate what they do and why, helping you understand their thoughts around fitness and how they'll help you reach your goals. Don't forget to ask about availability to ensure the trainer can fit you into their current schedule on your preferred dates and times.

TAILORED PROGRAMMING

A great personal trainer will be able to take what they learn about you during an introductory session and build out a personalized program. The program should be holistic and focus on activities and lifestyle habits conducted inside and outside the gym. Have them outline a plan for you, detailing mini milestones you can achieve during the process. *Gini Grimsley is a Personal Training expert at VASA Fitness. Learn more at www.vasafitness.com.* (NAPS)

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Healthy snack ideas for kids

Parents know that growing children need a lot of food. According to pediatric dietitian Hanna Leikin, MS, RD, CSP, LD, kids need a higher calorie demand per body weight compared to adults to support bone development, muscle growth and other bodily functions.

Perhaps that's why it seems like a stocked refrigerator or pantry can become barren in just a few days when kids are in the house.

Children are frequently looking for snacks between meals, which means that parents need to have a variety of snack foods at the ready for their youngsters. But it can be a struggle to find healthy snacks children will eat.

With that in mind, parents can consider these healthy alternatives to less nutritional fare like chips or sugary treats.

Fruit on a stick: It seems any food enjoyed on a stick is fun to eat. This is certainly an item for older kids, as parents won't want to worry about younger children getting injured with the pointy wooden skewers. Simply slide a variety of chopped or sliced fruit onto the skewers and make a healthy, colorful snack. For an added bonus, include a small cup of low-fat vanilla yogurt for a fruit dip.

Baby carrots and hummus: Few people can resist baby carrots. After all, they seem tailor-made for kids' small fingers. Pair with a homemade or store-bought hummus, which is full of protein and fiber. You can even find dessert hummus, which may prove particularly appealing to children's palates.

Crackers and cheese: Choose whole-grain crackers and a low-fat cheese. This provides the crunch of chips without the fat and calories. In addition, cheese adds protein and the benefits of calcium and other nutrients found in dairy.

Nut butters and pretzels: Kids need unsaturated fats to spur brain growth and overall development. Nuts and nut butters offer these good fats. The National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases says peanut butter can be given to kids as young as four months old, and that early exposure may prevent peanut allergies. Additional nut butters include almond and cashew. Let kids dip pretzels into the nut butter for a filling snack.

Overnight oats creations: Let kids take part in building jars or containers of overnight oats with their favorite ingredients. When old fashioned rolled oats are mixed with low-fat milk (or dairy alternatives), raisins, granola, fresh fruit, chia seeds, and even low-fat yogurt and left to sit overnight, the result is a spoonable treat that's ideal for meals and snacks. Plus, the fiber in oatmeal will help keep children feel fuller longer.

Frozen smoothie bowl: This is a great alternative to ice cream. Simply blend your child's favorite frozen fruits (and toss in a few veggies) with low-fat Greek yogurt. Serve in a bowl with toppings like granola, finely chopped nuts or coconut flakes.

Energy balls or bars: Mix dates, nuts, seeds, and rolled oats and press into bar shapes or roll into bite-sized balls when kids need a sweet and energizing snack.



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Turkey and cheese roll-ups: Ensure that kids are getting enough protein by offering a lean protein source like sliced turkey. Roll up a slice of turkey or sliced chicken breast around a cheese stick for a portable and fun snack.

Healthy snacks for children are easier

to dream up than one may think. It can take children several times of seeing a new food on his or her plate before being inclined to try it, so parents should stay the course with healthy snacks even if kids are initially reluctant to try them.

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Fitness classes worth considering

Taking place indoors makes them ideal this time of the year

Ask people what their top New Year's resolution is each year and they're likely to say something along the lines of "lose weight" or "get fit."

That is why area gyms run specials throughout the month of January as they seek to attract new people intent on improving their overall health. Too often these resolutions are a distant memory by the ides of March.

Despite repeatedly hearing about how important diet and exercise can be for personal health, and even despite the same resolutions made at the start of every year, a recent survey from Healthy People 2020, an initiative of the Department of Health and Human Services, found only 24 percent of Americans 18 and older met current aerobic physical activity and muscle-strengthening guidelines.

Among those who exercise regularly, a study published in the International Journal of Liberal Arts and Social Science found women tend to exercise more than men and have different exercise habits and motivation to exercise.

Women were apt to exercise to control weight, while men do so to improve fitness level. As women find more time for exercise, they may be drawn to the various classes available that can help them meet their exercise goals.

BARRE CLASSES

Barre classes are inspired by ballet and work on the ballet bar. They are designed to help participants develop a lean and long dancer's body.

The classes may be low-intensity or vigorous, depending on the instructor.



As people find – or make – more time for exercise, they may be drawn to the various classes available that can help them meet their exercise goals. This is the perfect time of year to give some new classes a try.

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They certainly will be leg-heavy with a lot of squat or plié type maneuvers.

ZUMBA

Zumba is a danced-based class that incorporates dance styles from around

the world but tends to feature a notable concentration of Latin moves.

The music is full of energy, and instructors engage the classes with fancy footwork that feels more like visiting a dance club than a workout studio.

CYCLING

Riding a bicycle pays enormous cardiovascular dividends. Stationary bikes line workout rooms, and the instructor varies the pace and intensity to simulate various real-world conditions.

CIRCUIT CLASSES

Circuit classes feature short intervals at various stations or machines. Participants move around the circuit in predetermined periods of time to complete the exercises.

HIGH INTENSITY INTERVAL TRAINING (HIIT)

HIIT stands for high intensity interval training. HIIT features short bursts (anywhere from 30 seconds to 3 minutes) of cardiovascular exercises that are designed to work at intense levels with recovery, but not rest periods.

This keeps the heart pumping and is designed to boost metabolism. Plus, the workouts are short, so time-crunched people don't have to devote as much time to the gym each day.

AERIAL FITNESS

Those who have been to the circus may have been amazed at the aerial artistry of being twisted and suspended in silk. Aerial fitness classes blend elements of this performance art with gymnastics and yoga.

Exercise classes come in many forms and can motivate women to fully commit to their fitness goals.

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STRETCHES THAT CAN HELP ALLEVIATE LOWER BACK PAIN

Lower back pain is a big problem. Though that's likely no surprise to people who suffer from lower back pain, the scope of the problem is perhaps wider than many may realize.

A recent study conducted by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington found that lower back pain affects 619 million people across the globe.

Researchers behind the study, which was published in The Lancet Rheumatology, estimate that 843 million people will suffer from lower back pain by 2050.

Lower back pain can have an adverse effect on quality of life. The good news is that people are not helpless against lower back pain. In fact, the American Association of Neurological Surgeons notes roughly 90 percent of lower back pain cases are temporary and treatable without surgery.

Stretching can help individuals alleviate lower back pain, and the following are four stretches that can be performed at home without expensive equipment.

KNEE-TO-CHEST STRETCH

This stretch is straightforward. Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor. Grab one leg beneath the knee with both hands, interlocking your fingers, while keeping the other leg flat on the floor.

Pull the knee up toward your chest, holding the stretch for 15 to 30 seconds.

New York Presbyterian advises keeping the lower back pressed to the floor for the duration of the stretch, which can be repeated with the opposite leg.

Perform the stretch between two and four times for each leg.

TRUNK ROTATION

When beginning a trunk rotation, lie on your back and bring the knees up toward your chest.

The online medical resource Healthline notes the body should be positioned as if you're sitting in a chair. Extend arms out to the sides fully, with palms facedown on the floor.

With knees together and hands on the floor, roll both bent knees to one side and hold for 15 to 20 seconds.

Return to the starting position and then do the same for the opposite side, repeating several times for each side.

CAT-COW

Various yoga exercises, including the cat-cow, can help to alleviate lower back pain.

The British Heart Foundation recommends beginning slowly when attempting to alleviate lower back pain, doing the cat-cow 10 times, once or twice a

week.

Kneel on all fours with hands flat on the floor and arms positioned straight under the shoulders and knees directly below the hips. Breathe in as you drop your stomach toward the floor, arching the back and looking up to the ceiling.

Hold for one to two seconds, then reverse. Breathe out as you pull your stomach back toward the back, rounding your back upwards and dropping the head toward the floor.

SEATED HAMSTRING STRETCH

The seated hamstring stretch can be beneficial because Healthline notes tight hamstrings are believed to be a common contributor to lower back pain. Stretching the hamstring muscles helps to release tension in the spine.

Sit on the floor with one leg out in front of you and hook a bath towel around the heel of your foot. Gently bend forward at the hips, brining the belly down to the thighs. Keep your back straight as you grab the towel so you can bring the belly closer to your legs.

Healthline advises keeping the stretch until you feel mild tension in the lower back and the back of the leg. Hold for 10 seconds, rest for 30 seconds and repeat three times for each leg.



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Lower back pain is a common but treatable problem. These stretches and more can help people overcome lower back pain and improve their quality of life.

(METRO CREATIVE)

Tips for success with dry (or damp) January

For many, the New Year is not just about turning a page on the calendar. It's also about becoming a better version of themselves.

If you're looking to reduce (damp) or abstain from alcohol (dry) in the first month of the year (and maybe beyond,) you're not alone. It's a common resolution, sparked by a desire for healthier habits and clearer minds.

Here are several tips to help you navigate this journey.

SET CLEAR, ACHIEVABLE GOALS

Is your goal zero alcohol or reduced consumption? Be specific.

Setting daily limits for yourself, such as having no more than two drinks on a particular day can be a powerful strategy. Then, define your biggest motivator such as your children or your mental health.

According to Edwin A. Locke's theory, setting specific goals can lead to higher performance.

REPLACE THE HABIT

Neuroscience shows brains are wired to form habits through the creation of neural pathways. To break a habit, it's often effective to replace it with a new one.

If you usually have a drink after work, try replacing it with a different activity such as exercise or sipping on a smoothie.

USE AN ACCOUNTABILITY APP

Leverage technology to stay on track. Using an accountability app such as Reframe can be beneficial.

Developed with experts in neuroscience and psychology, Reframe goes beyond tracking progress and setting reminders, it also provides you with a guided plan that works with your lifestyle and helps you change the way you view alcohol.

UNDERSTAND TRIGGERS

Research shows that habits, including drinking, are often triggered by cues in the environment (people, places, emotions, or time of day).

By identifying your triggers, you can develop strategies to manage them, such as avoiding certain situations or finding healthier techniques to cope with stress.

CELEBRATE SUCCESS

Don't forget to celebrate your progress, no matter how small it may seem. Each day you stick to your goal, you're reinforcing that commitment. Celebrate these victories – whether it's another week of sticking to your plan or opting for a non-alcoholic drink instead.

For more information, visit www.joinreframeapp.com.

(NAPS)



Cozy up with nourishing, soup-centered meals

Now that the days are cooler, nothing comforts quite like a warm bowl of soup. Welcome the crisp air by making wholesome, hearty soups the star of your meals. Ideal for family dinners, quiet nights in, or meal prep for busy weeks, soups are versatile and satisfying, offering a variety of flavors and textures that the whole family will love.

While soup has always been a cool-weather favorite, incorporating it into baked dishes can bring a new twist to classic recipes. By adding seasonal ingredients, protein, and hearty grains, you can create balanced, warming meals that feel both familiar and fresh.

Soups not only provide comfort, but they also pack a nutritious punch. Filled with vegetables, legumes, and whole grains, they're a great way to create nourishing dishes that warm both the body and soul. Amy's Kitchen – known for its high-quality, organic meals and snacks – cooks its soups from scratch using slow-simmered broths, fresh vegetables, and plant-based proteins.

This soup season, Amy's is introducing five new soups that can transform any meal into a nutrient-rich delight. Whether you're savoring a Sunday supper with their pasta fagioli, warming up with vegetable jambalaya, dal makhani, or gumbo soup, or whipping up a pot of 3 bean vegetable

chili for a football watch party or tailgate, Amy's soups provide flavorful, wholesome solutions for every occasion.

Want to elevate your soup game? Try incorporating classic soups into new recipes! Host a cozy soup night or brunch gathering with friends, where everyone brings their favorite twist on traditional soups.

Need some inspiration? Here's a crowd-pleasing recipe to try that pairs cheesy cornbread with flavorful chili:

CHILI TOPPED CHEESY CORNBREAD

Ingredients:

- 2 cobs of corn
- 1 cup self-rising flour
- 1/2 tsp baking powder
- 1/2 tsp cayenne pepper
- 1 tsp salt
- 3/4 cup natural yogurt
- 4 1/2 ounces olive oil
- 1 cup instant polenta
- 2 tbsp maple syrup
- 1 tbsp cider vinegar
- 1 bunch green onions, finely sliced
- 3 ounces feta, crumbled
- 1/2 can Amy's Organic 3 Bean Vegetable Chili
- 1 1/2 ounces mature cheddar, grated
- 1 tsp nigella seeds

Directions:

1. Place a large frying pan over high heat and char the whole corn on all sides for 10 minutes, turning regularly until slightly blackened. Remove to a board and cut off all the kernels into a bowl.

2. Preheat the oven to 325 degrees F. Grease and line a 10-inch ovenproof skillet pan.

3. Put the flour, baking powder, cayenne pepper, and salt into a bowl and whisk together.

4. In another bowl, mix together the yogurt, oil, polenta, maple syrup, and vinegar; whisk until combined.

5. Pour the wet mix into the dry ingredients and fold to combine. Add the green onions, feta, and charred corn and stir again.

6. Pour the cornbread mix into the prepared skillet. Add small spoons of Amy's Organic Spicy Chili on top. Top with grated cheddar and nigella seeds. Bake in the oven for 40-45 minutes until risen and a skewer comes out clean.

7. Enjoy while warm or serve at room temperature. Best eaten the same day.

Pro tips: Serve alongside smashed avocado or fresh tomato salsa. Slice the cornbread up, pop into the freezer, and when you fancy a slice, simply defrost and reheat in the toaster.

(STATEPOINT)

Need some inspiration for incorporating soups into fun, new dishes? Try some delicious cheesy cornbread topped with Amy's Organic 3 Bean Vegetable Chili, for a healthy but hearty meal ideal for the cold weather.

WHAT TO EXPECT AT YOUR NEXT EYE EXAM

Regular eye examinations are important components of a personal health regimen. Visiting an eye doctor can alert a person to potential vision impairments, and certain symptoms that show up in the eyes could be indicative of notable health problems.

The American Academy of Ophthalmology says everything from brain tumors to aneurysms to high cholesterol can be detected in the eyes.

For those who do not have any apparent vision problems, most doctors recommend following a chart based on age.

The insurance experts at Aetna suggest the following age-based intervals:

- Ages 20 to 39: Every five years
- Ages 40 to 54: Every two to four years
- Ages 55 to 64: Every one to three years
- Ages 65 and up: Every one to two years

Individuals who wear glasses or contact lenses, have a family history of eye disease, or have a chronic condition that puts them at risk for eye disease, like diabetes, should get vision exams more frequently.

Despite the significance of eye exams, many people do not visit an eye doctor until something is amiss with their vision or eyes. Perhaps individuals would be inclined to visit the eye doctor more frequently if they knew what to expect during an exam.

Here's what people can expect the next



Despite the significance of eye exams, many people do not visit an eye doctor until something is amiss with their vision or eyes. If people know what to expect they may decide to schedule an exam.

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time they step into a private eye doctor's office or a vision center, courtesy of The Cleveland Clinic and Warby Parker.

• **Visual acuity:** The eye doctor will ask you to read an eye chart while looking through a device called a phoropter. This device has several lenses that can be adjusted to help you see better and find the right corrective lens prescription.

• **Visual field:** The doctor will check peripheral vision by holding up a finger or

an object and moving it gradually to the side of your face. Additional movements may include up and down. Some offices use a computer program to conduct this test.

• **Automatic refraction:** Visual acuity can be measured with this test, during which an autorefractor shines light into the eye and measures the eye's response. It's commonly used with children or adults who may struggle to communicate

what they're seeing.

• **Pupil function:** The eye doctor will briefly shine a handheld light into each eye and then move the light away to watch how the pupils constrict and dilate.

• **Slit lamp exam:** This test involves a slit lamp, which is a type of microscope that enables the eye doctor to see the eyes in close detail.

• **Tonometry measurement:** Glaucoma occurs when intraocular pressure is high. Some eye doctors will conduct tests to determine the pressure. One way is with a non-contact tonometry test, which is a puff of air squirted at each eye. With applanation tonometry, the doctor first administers a mild numbing agent to the eye, and then uses a pressure-sensitive instrument to gently tap on the surface of the eye to get a pressure reading. A rebound tonometry test requires a handheld device that makes brief contact to the eye and doesn't require local anesthesia.

• **Pupil dilation:** The eye doctor will administer eye drops that dilate the pupils, which enables a better view of the retina, optic nerve, cornea, and surrounding blood vessels during an ophthalmoscopy.

• **Special photography:** The eye doctor may utilize specialized imaging equipment that will take digital images of the eyes to diagnose various retinal, optic nerve and corneal conditions.

These are some of the things people may experience during a comprehensive vision exam.

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