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BONUS SECTION

In today's Travel Extra, Napa Valley reboot: After the fires.

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HEART HEALTH

Skipping a beat usually no cause for alarm

By Emily Sohn
Special to The Washington Post

You might feel them as skipped heartbeats or unusually forceful beats. One friend describes her heart palpitations as a soft fluttering that starts in her chest, moves to her neck and sometimes makes her cough. Another says her heart feels as if it's flipping over in her chest. Mine come in a "pause-thump" pattern that occasionally make me lightheaded.

"Heart palpitations" is a catch-all term used to describe anything unusual that people feel in the rhythms of their hearts. And pretty much everyone has them at some point, said Gregory Marcus, a cardiac electrophysiologist at the University of California at San Francisco.

But palpitations vary in what causes them and how serious they are - ranging from benign to a sign of a serious problem. And even though they are exceedingly common, medical knowledge about heart rhythm abnormalities, called arrhythmias, lags behind the understanding of other heart problems such as arterial blockages and congestive heart failure.

That mismatch between experience and awareness extends to the general public.

"There's a misconception that if something is wrong with the heart, it means someone is going to die or have a heart attack," Marcus said. "But there are primarily electrical problems that, most of the time, are completely separate from blood flow to the heart."

Over the course of a day, a person's heart beats about 100,000 times, and each beat begins with an electrical signal generated in the sinus node in the heart's upper right chamber. But any heart muscle cell can beat on its own in a petri dish, Marcus said, and any one of those cells can initiate a wayward heartbeat that temporarily interrupts the muscle's normal beating rhythm.

Depending on where they happen, these extra or early beats are called premature ventricular contractions (PVCs) or premature atrial contractions (PACs). These palpitations can feel like a pause, a big boom or both, as the heart fills with blood while its electrical system resets.

But they don't feel the same to everybody. Friends have described them to me as hamsters running on wheels inside

BREAST IMPLANTS



Amy Novitzke a month after her breast "explant" surgery. Novitzke, who will speak at a seminar Wednesday afternoon alongside her surgeon, Dr. Fredric Barr, has already noticed a number of health improvements. "My thyroid is functioning properly for the first time in years. My hormones are coming back into balance. My posture is better, my neck and spine don't hurt all the time, my complexion is clearer and I have more energy," she says. BRUCER BENNETT / THE PALM BEACH POST

Smaller ... but safer

Many women are having their implants removed amid growing health concerns.

By Steve Dorfman
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

After Amy Novitzke underwent breast implant surgery in 2002, she says, "I was thrilled with the results."

The athletic 48-year-old, then-newly-divorced Wisconsinite, who's currently snowbirding at a friend's house in West Palm Beach, had the surgery to rectify a common condition: asymmetrical breasts.

"As the surgeon said, 'Your sisters aren't twins' - one was a B cup, the other a C."

Post-surgery, Novitzke was a 32DD.

For almost a decade, she looked and felt great. But that began to change in 2011.

"I began suffering a wide array of conditions," she recalls.



Novitzke before the surgery to remove her breast implants. CONTRIBUTED

two ribs - necessitated she take medical leave from her job as an executive assistant to a Fortune 500 company's in-house legal counsel.

After doing copious research and seeing more doctors than she can name, Novitzke concluded

CELEBS WHO HAVE HAD THEIR BREAST IMPLANTS REMOVED



Sharon Osbourne Pamela Anderson Stevie Nicks Melissa Gilbert Victoria Beckham

Novitzke's surgeon - Dr. Fredric Barr of Palm Beach Plastic & Cosmetic Surgery - will host a free seminar at noon Wednesday at PGA National Resort & Spa where he'll discuss this topic.

"More and more in my practice, I'm seeing women who are having concerns about their health and the ongoing controversies related to breast implants," says Barr. "Our goal on Wednesday is to present all of the current infor-

away.)

■ Around 1 in 5 women will experience "capsular contracture" - which is a painful stiffening of scar tissue that can lead to misshapen breasts.

■ In 2011, the FDA issued an advisory that a small subset of women may develop an extremely rare form of cancer called anaplastic large cell lymphoma associated with their breast implants (BIA-ALCL). According to the FDA's

their heart is beating backward. Some people become extremely bothered by palpitations that are harmless, while others have serious arrhythmias that they never notice. Marcus has seen patients who report symptoms that don't show up on an electrocardiogram, or EKG, which records electrical activity in the heart.

PVCs and PACs are so common that, when study participants

Heart continued on D2

Arthritis.
Neuropathy.
Autoimmune disorders.
Thyroiditis.
Hormonal imbalances.
Vision and digestive disorders.
"It was like playing Whac-A-Mole," says Novitzke. "Every time I got treatment for one condition, another two or three would pop up."

Eventually, her deteriorating health – which included an asthma attack so severe she broke

a silicone coating – were the likely source of her maladies.

Novitzke is not alone. In May, WPTV profiled five local women whose stories were remarkably similar to Novitzke's. And, just as Novitzke did in January – and celebrities such as Pamela Anderson, Sharon Osbourne and Victoria Beckham have done in recent years amid growing health concerns – the WPTV subjects all opted to have their implants removed.

Barr stresses that he's neither pro- nor anti-implants.

"We just want people to have all the facts so that they can make the best decisions for themselves."

Among the pertinent facts of which women may be unaware:

■ Studies done by manufacturers reveal that anywhere from 10 to 25 percent of silicone and saline implants will rupture or significantly degrade after a decade. (Novitzke noted that nearly all of her silicone coating had sheared

medical device reports (MDRs) of BIA-ALCL, including nine deaths."

■ The organization Breast Surgeons of Australia & New Zealand reported in 2016 that some 60 patients in the two countries had developed BIA-ALCL and it calculated the statistical risk at 1 in 5,000 breast implant patients.

■ The most common symptom of BIA-ALCL is a persistent swelling of the breast, but can include

Implants continued on D3

DEPRESSION

How I became a 37-year-old snowbird

By Jen A. Miller
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This is how I found myself crying early one morning in January: For the three weeks I had been living in a studio apartment in Daytona Beach, I had gone running four times a week. On that particular day, I ran down to the beach, turning right when I hit the sand so that I would see the sun rise.

The sight wasn't new, but on that day I felt so good and warm and light that, just as the sun crested over the waves, that well-worn line from "Annie" blasted through my mind: "The sun will come out tomorrow." And I burst into tears.

In an effort to outrun more than a year of depression and grief, and the seasonal affective disorder that swamped me most winters since childhood, I had

become a 37-year-old snowbird. The tears that morning were a mixture of joy and relief because, in pointing my car – packed with three duffel bags of clothes and a box of books – south for most of January and February after the worst year of my life, I had finally started to feel whole again.

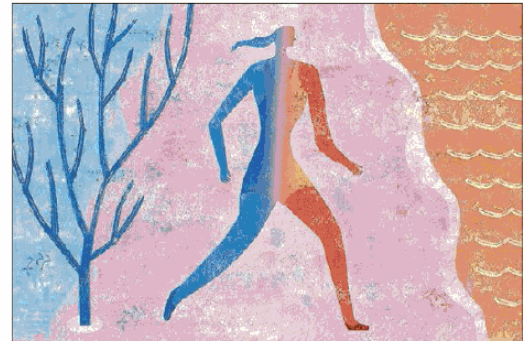
I hadn't for a long time. Last January, I was hit by both the death of my dog and, soon after, the forced sale of my home, which together uncorked a depression unlike anything I had ever known.

Sure, I had had bouts with depression before, especially in winter. Seasonal affective disorder was first given a name in 1984 by Dr. Norman E. Rosenthal and his colleagues. I was a toddler then, but even when I was in grade school I knew what it was. My father always called it "baseball's offseason," saying the worst part of the year was the stretch

from the final World Series game to the first day of spring training, a time when most of our six-member family would be folded into a long, black mood.

I had gone to college in Tampa, which sidestepped the issue for a little while, but as an adult, in winter, I would fold again. So I set up a double-edged solution: I would sign up for a long spring race (from 10 miles to a marathon), which meant that I was exercising (always a useful tool against depression). It also meant that I would run long miles in the middle of the day, and soak up as much sun as I could in New Jersey in January, February and March.

But this year was different. I knew that I would never get my head above water if I stuck it out through another New Jersey winter. That's why, with no pet to care for, no house to pay for and a transportable job as a



After the death of a pet and the forced sale of her home, combined with a bad case of seasonal affective disorder, a writer heads south and keeps running. JAMES O'BRIEN / THE NEW YORK TIMES

freelance writer, I opted out of the season and headed south.

Running still played a part in my treatment. I chose an easy running schedule to train for the Daytona Beach Half Marathon: no speed work, no hills,

just plain old miles four days a week. On cooler – for Florida – days, I'd run in the late morning, my skin tanning and highlights streaking through my hair two

Depression continued on D2