

Guide to Independence

2026-2027

OPTIONS

Center for Independent Living

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Occupational health services—including screenings, testing, and physicals—are available at Bourbonnais, Bradley, Coal City, and Watseka. Call (815) 935-7532 for more information.

RIVERSIDE HEALTHCARE

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WHERE TO GO WHEN HEALTH ISSUES ARISE

Understanding the difference between the Emergency Room, Immediate Care, and Primary Care

When a health issue comes up, knowing where to go can save time, money, and even lives. Here, we turn to Liberty Erfe, DNP, RN, Director of Population Health at Riverside Healthcare. She explains

how to decide between the emergency room, immediate care, and primary care.

“It is important for patients to know where to go before a medical issue arises,” she states. “Having a plan helps minimize stress and confusion when emotions run high and every second counts.”

Understanding the Differences

The emergency room (ER) is for life-threatening or severe conditions that need immediate treatment. This includes:

- chest pain
- head trauma
- severe abdominal pain
- major injuries

It is also the place for when signs of a stroke appear. For example, sudden confusion, facial drooping, or weakness on one side of the body. These are situations where minutes can make the difference in survival or recovery.

Immediate care is the place to go for non-life-threatening problems still needing prompt attention. It's designed for patients who can't get in to see their primary doctor but shouldn't wait several days for an appointment. Immediate care providers can handle things like:

- sprains
- earaches
- urinary tract infections
- minor cuts
- cold/flu symptoms

Riverside's Immediate Care centers see patients 18 months and older. This department can even handle school or sports physicals. (It is also often called urgent care.)

Primary care is your home base for health. This is where you go for:

- checkups
- vaccinations

- management of long-term conditions (high blood pressure, diabetes, asthma)

Primary care providers also help coordinate specialist referrals. And, they follow up after hospital or ER visits. Having a trusted provider means your care stays connected and consistent.

Why It Matters

Going to the wrong place can lead to unnecessary costs, longer wait times, or delays in treatment. The ER provides critical care but is the most expensive option. While immediate and primary care visits are often quicker and less costly.

Erfe reminds patients to stay proactive. “I encourage everyone to get the health screenings they need to detect and prevent common diseases. That includes breast, stomach, or lung cancer, osteoporosis, and diabetes,” she urges.

Knowing where to go before an emergency happens ensures faster treatment, lower costs, and better care. For more information, visit riversidehealthcare.org

Fundraising

EVERY PENNY COUNTS!

If you are unable to support one of our fundraisers, you can always make a donation.

You can send a check to our Bourbonnais office:

22 Heritage Drive, Suite 107

Bourbonnais, Illinois 60914

attention Therese Cardosi

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Options CIL

Options CIL (OCIL) was established in 1989. Our board and our staff are comprised of more than 51% of people with disabilities. We are funded by state and federal grants, private donations, private

foundation grants, United Way allocations, memberships and proceeds from fundraisers.

Our main office is located in Bourbonnais, Illinois serving Kankakee County. Our satellite office in Watseka, Illinois serves Iroquois County. OCIL serves individuals of all ages, races, faiths, genders, and disabilities. We provide five core services, which are: advocacy, information and referral, independent living skills, peer mentoring, and transition.

Through peer support and role modeling, Options team teaches consumers that persons with disabilities have the right and the responsibility to pursue goals of self-determination and self-sufficiency. We serve as a resource and mentor, empowering consumers with the skills to direct their own lives, set their own goals, and plan the necessary steps to achieve those goals.

Options CIL works to bring about positive change in attitudes and accessibility and provides our community with the information and knowledge needed to accept, respect, and accommodate citizens with disabilities.

MISSION STATEMENT:

Options Center for Independent Living Partners with Persons with Disabilities who want to Live Independently and Participate Fully in Society.

VISION STATEMENT:

Creating a barrier free community where independence, diversity & equality are valued by all.

OPTIONS SERVICE AREA AND OFFICES

KANKAKEE COUNTY

22 Heritage Drive, Suite 107
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815-936-0117 (Fax)

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Watseka IL 60970
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www.optionscil.org

A special thank you to Amber Gocken for designing the cover.

A History of Centers for Independent Living (CILs)

At the Federal Level, CILs came about with the passing of the Rehabilitation act of 1973. Title VII of this act created the Independent Living Services and Centers for Independent Living Programs. Originally under the umbrella of the U.S. Department of Education, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 created the Independent Living Administration, and these programs were transferred to the Administration for Community Living (ACL).

At the state level, Illinois has 22 CILs that serve all 102 counties, each with their own service area. The Illinois Network of Centers for Independent Living (INCIL) supports the 22 CILs across the state. CILs are run by and for the people they serve. To do that, each CILs staff and Board of Directors are comprised of at least 51% individuals with disabilities.

CILs provide support for people who may have been born with their disability as well as people who suddenly find themselves facing a new disability and how that will impact their daily living.

COMMUNITY REINTEGRATION PROGRAM

Options CIL supports community living for all individuals with disabilities. We receive state and federal funding dedicated to providing services that support qualifying individuals with disabilities transition out of nursing facilities into home and community-based settings.

For more information or to speak to our Community Living Advocate please call 815-936-0100 ext. 225

BINGO at the Watseka Elks

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Opportunities For Membership

All membership contributions will be used to support the mission of Options and are tax deductible according to federal income tax laws. All donors will receive a written acknowledgment.

Individual and Consumer – Contributions of \$10 or more. No consumer will be denied membership for inability to pay. All individuals and

consumers will be entitled to: Membership Cards, voting privileges at the Options annual meeting*.

Agencies and Businesses – Contributions of \$25 or more (not-for-profit) or \$50 or more (small businesses). Benefits include: Membership certificates, voting privileges at Options annual meeting*, acknowledgement at Options annual meeting.

Corporate Membership – Contributions of \$100 to \$299. Benefits include: Membership certificates, voting privileges at Options annual meeting*, acknowledgement at Options annual meeting, Company name listed in the Options annual Reference Guide to Independence, Company name listed on the Options website.

Philanthropic – Contributions of \$300 or more. Benefits include: Membership certificates, voting privileges at Options annual meeting*, acknowledgement at Options annual meeting, a free business card size ad in our annual Reference Guide to Independence, Company name listed on the Options website with a link to your company website, your company logo on the Options website.

*Members must have been in good standing for at least thirty (30) days prior to any meeting at which ballots are to be cast.

Please complete our Membership Application or call Therese Cardosi at (815) 936-0100 for more information.

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Today, CSL – including our businesses: CSL Behring, CSL Seqirus and CSL Vifor – serves patients in over 100 countries and employs more than 29,000 people worldwide. Our strength lies in combining commercial expertise, research and development, and operational excellence to bring innovative solutions to our patients.

CSL is a global biotherapeutics committed to our promise to save lives. At CSL, we focus on areas such as immunology, hematology, cardiovascular and metabolic health, respiratory care, and transplantation. Leveraging plasma fractionation, recombinant protein technology, and cell and gene therapy, we continually innovate to meet unmet medical needs and help patients live fuller lives.

Our Kankakee site has proudly produced lifesaving medicines for over 70 years, employing more than 1,200 people. With roots tracing back to Armour & Company, we are honored to continue this legacy in the region. CSL Behring also operates one of the world's largest plasma collection networks, CSL Plasma, and in 2023, we opened a new plasma donation center on our south campus.

Beyond our scientific mission, CSL Behring is committed to supporting the communities where we live and work. At the Kankakee site, we believe strong community relationships are key to delivering on our promise to patients and our neighbors.

Through volunteering and fundraising, we partner with local nonprofits to support those in need. We are proud to partner and support Options Center for Independent Living.

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Disability, Health, and Well-being

KEY POINTS

- People with disabilities need comprehensive health care to stay healthy.
- Regular physical activity is crucial for maintaining health and independence for people with disabilities.
- Individuals with disabilities face higher risk of abuse and violence. Raising awareness and providing support resources is essential for their safety and well-being.

ABOUT

People with disabilities need health care and health programs for the same reasons anyone else does—to stay well, active, and a part of the community.

Having a disability does not mean a person is not healthy or that he or she cannot be healthy. Being healthy means the same thing for all of us—getting and staying well so we can lead full, active lives. That means having the tools and information to make healthy choices and knowing how to prevent illness.

For people with disabilities, it also means knowing that health problems related to a disability can be treated. These problems, also called secondary conditions, can include pain, depression, and a greater risk for certain illnesses.

To be healthy, people with disabilities require health care that meets their needs as a whole person, not just as a person with a disability. Most people with or without disabilities can stay healthy by learning about and living healthy lifestyles.

LEADING A LONG AND HEALTHY LIFE

Although people with disabilities sometimes have a harder time getting and staying healthy than people without disabilities, there are things we can all do to get and stay healthy.

Tips for leading a long and healthy life:

- Be physically active every day. Learn about physical activity.
- Eat healthy foods in healthy portions. Learn about nutrition.
- Don't get too much sun. Learn about preventing skin cancer.
- Don't smoke. Learn how to stop smoking.
- Use medicines wisely. Learn about medication safety.
- If you drink alcoholic beverages, drink in moderation. Learn about alcohol.
- Get help for substance abuse. Find treatment services near you.
- Stay in touch with family and friends.
- If you need help, talk with your health care professional.

GETTING THE BEST POSSIBLE HEALTH CARE

People with disabilities must get the care and services they need to help them be healthy. If you have a disability, there are many things you can do to make sure you are getting the best possible health care:

- Know your body, how you feel when you are well and when you're not.
- Talk openly with your health care professional about your concerns.
- Find health care professionals that you are comfortable with in your area.
- Check to be sure you can physically get into your health care professional's office, such as having access to ramps or elevators if you use an assistive device like a wheelchair or scooter.
- Check to see if your health care professional's office has the equipment you need, such as an accessible scale or examining table.
- Ask for help from your health care professional's office staff if you need it.
- Think about your questions and health concerns before you visit your health care professional so that you're prepared.
- Bring your health records with you.
- Take a friend with you if you are concerned you might not remember all your questions or what is said by the health care professional.
- Get it in writing. Write down, or have someone write down for you, what is said by the health care professional.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Adults of all shapes, sizes, and abilities can benefit from being physically active, including those with disabilities. For important health benefits, all adults should do both aerobic and muscle-strengthening physical activities. Regular aerobic physical activity increases heart and lung functions; improves daily living activities and independence; decreases chances of developing chronic diseases; and improves mental health.

Adults with disabilities should try to get at least 2 hours and 30 minutes (150 minutes) a week of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity (i.e., brisk walking; wheeling oneself in a wheelchair) or at least 1 hour and 15 minutes (75 minutes) a week of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity (i.e., jogging, wheelchair basketball) or a mix of both moderate- and vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activities each week. A rule of thumb is that 1 minute of vigorous-intensity activity is about the same as 2 minutes of moderate-intensity activity. They should avoid inactivity as some physical activity is better than none.

Muscle-strengthening activities should include moderate and high intensity, and involve all major muscle groups on two or more days a week (i.e., working with resistance-band, adapted yoga) as these activities provide additional health benefits. All children and adolescents should do 1 hour (60 minutes) or more of physical activity each day.

If a person with a disability is not able to meet the physical activity guidelines, they should engage in regular physical activity based on their abilities and should avoid inactivity. Adults with disabilities should talk to their healthcare provider about the amounts and types of physical activity that are appropriate for their abilities.

Tips for getting fit:

- Talk to your doctor about how much and what kind of physical activity is right for you.

- Find opportunities to increase physical activity regularly in ways that meet your needs and abilities.
- Start slowly, based on your abilities and fitness level (e.g. be active for at least 10 minutes at a time, slowly increase activity over several weeks, if necessary).
- Avoid inactivity. Some activity is better than none!

A personal story

“For some years, I could not stand up or stretch my arms above my head. I had to use a walker. My wife and I started using a fitness club regularly. Now, I can again walk upright and stretch my arms over my head. It’s made a difference in my life, like being able to put the dishes in cupboards.”

ABUSE AND VIOLENCE OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

People with disabilities are at greater risk for abuse, violence, and harm than people without disabilities. This is called victimization. Victimization is harm caused on purpose. It is not an “accident” and can happen anywhere. The two most common places where victimization occurs are in hospitals and homes.

Victimization includes:

- Physical violence with or without a weapon.
- Sexual violence of any kind, including rape.
- Emotional abuse, including verbal attacks or being humiliated.
- Neglect of personal needs for daily life, including medical care or equipment.

In the United States, people with disabilities are 4 to 10 times more likely to be victimized than people without disabilities. Children with disabilities are more than twice as likely to be victimized as children without disabilities. Researchers found that 11.5% of adults with a disability were victims of sexual assault vs. 3.9% of adults without disabilities. In addition, 13.0% of people with disabilities were victims of attempted sexual assault compared to 5.7% without disabilities.

Victims usually know the person who harms them. They can be health care workers, intimate partners, or family members. More men than women cause harm to people with disabilities. If you or someone you love is being victimized, there is help available.

- Dial 911 if you need immediate assistance.
- Call the National Domestic Violence hotline at: 1-800-799-SAFE or TTY 1-800-787-3224

SEXUAL HEALTH AND SEXUALITY

Health care professionals and people with disabilities should feel comfortable talking to each other about sexual health and sexuality. People with disabilities can ask their doctor questions about sexuality, sexual functioning, contraceptives, and reproductive concerns.

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

For everyone, overall mental health and well-being is very important. Mental health is how we think, feel and act as we cope with life. People need to feel good about their life and value themselves.

All people, including those with disabilities might feel isolated from others, or have low self-esteem. They may be depressed. There are different ways to treat depression. Exercise may be effective for some people. Counseling, medication, or both might also be needed.

Everyone feels worried, anxious, sad or stressed sometimes. If these feelings do not go away and they interfere with your daily life, you should talk with other people about your feelings, such as a family member or health care professional.

For more information visit www.cdc.gov- Disability and Health Branch

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At Good Shepherd Manor, our services include:

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- Dietary services
- Vocational training
- Community integration opportunities
- Special Olympics
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Meal Preparation Tips for People with Low Vision: Strategies for Safe and Efficient Cooking

ESSENTIAL KITCHEN TOOLS FOR MEAL PREP WITH LOW VISION

Adapting meal prep for low vision requires careful organization and specific tools. Focusing on tactile guidance, voice assistance, and stability helps make the kitchen safer and meal prep more manageable.

ADAPTIVE CUTTING BOARDS

Adaptive cutting boards provide increased safety and efficiency for people with low vision or blindness. These boards often use high-contrast colors, such as white on one side and black on the other, allowing users to match food to the background for better visibility.

Some models include fixed guards or spikes to hold foods in place, reducing the need to stabilize items by hand. Corner guards can create a designated “cutting zone,” helping to prevent ingredients from slipping off surfaces.

Adaptive boards are usually larger and made from non-slip materials. Product options often feature tactile markings along the edges or sides. Using an adaptive cutting board can decrease fatigue and boost independence in the kitchen for those managing vision loss. For more details, refer to accessible food preparation tools such as adaptive boards at The Blind Kitchen.

USING NON-SLIP MATS EFFECTIVELY

Non-slip mats are essential for meal prep with low vision. By placing these mats under cutting boards, bowls, or small appliances, we reduce movement and improve stability while working in the kitchen.

Mats made from silicone or rubber are especially effective. They can be washed and reused multiple times. Some mats come in high-contrast colors, improving visibility for those with residual vision.

Simple steps can maximize mat effectiveness:

- Place a mat under every major work area
- Cut mats to fit custom shapes or specific counter spaces
- Wipe mats dry before use to maintain grip

This simple adaptation can prevent accidental spills and improve kitchen safety, as recommended by many safe cooking guides for people with low vision.

INCORPORATING TALKING THERMOMETERS

Talking thermometers make it easier to check the temperature of foods without relying on sight. With audible readouts, these devices clearly announce temperatures in either Fahrenheit or Celsius.

Many talking thermometers include large tactile buttons. Some models offer backlit screens and vibrating alerts for extra feedback. These features are crucial for anyone who finds traditional thermometers difficult or unsafe to use.

We suggest keeping a talking thermometer within reach whenever you cook—especially when working with meat, baked goods, or boiling liquids. Regularly calibrate the thermometer and keep the tip clean for accurate, reliable readings. Devices like these can enhance cooking confidence, as found in leading adaptive kitchen tool recommendations.

BRAILLE AND TACTILE LABELS

Labeling kitchen items is vital for safely identifying ingredients, measuring cups, and appliance controls. Braille labels, tactile bump dots, and raised symbols can all be used to mark items in the kitchen.

We recommend using durable, heat-resistant materials for labels on items like spice jars, stove dials, and microwave keypads. Many specialty suppliers sell customizable labeling kits designed for people with low vision or blindness.

For tasks requiring quick access to multiple ingredients, tactile bands or raised rubber bands can differentiate containers by touch. Organizing and labeling in this way makes meal prep safer and more efficient, as supported by advice in safe kitchen organization resources.

PREP STRATEGIES AND ORGANIZATION FOR LOW VISION MEAL PREP

Successfully preparing meals with low vision starts with tailored organizational approaches, reliable food placement methods, and accurate ingredient measurement. Intentional kitchen setups and smart techniques can make meal prep safer, easier, and more efficient.

CLOCK REFERENCE SYSTEM FOR FOOD PLACEMENT

One practical method for food arrangement is the clock reference system. When using this approach, we describe the layout of food on a plate as if the plate is the face of a clock. For example, placing vegetables at 3 o'clock, starch at 6 o'clock, and proteins at 12 o'clock helps us easily locate different foods by touch or memory.

This system also supports identifying the placement of drinks and utensils. If a glass is at 2 o'clock and a fork at 9 o'clock, it's simple to find these items without needing vision. The clock method is invaluable for maintaining independence during meals and is commonly recommended by specialists supporting those with low vision.

SETTING UP EFFECTIVE PLACE SETTINGS

A well-organized place setting can minimize confusion and make eating more enjoyable. High-contrast materials make it easier to distinguish between the plate, utensils, and the table or placemat. For example, using a white plate on a dark placemat highlights the edges and helps us locate dishes quickly.

Arranging items in a consistent order on the table is equally important. We recommend setting forks on the left, knives and spoons on the right, and water glasses above the knives. Tactile markers or rubber bands can be added to utensils for greater distinction. Organizing the table setup in the same way every time reduces uncertainty and supports comfortable, independent dining.

ACCESSIBLE INGREDIENT MEASUREMENT

Consistent and accurate ingredient measurement is critical for safe cooking. Large-print or tactile measuring cups, talking kitchen scales, and audible timers can help us measure ingredients with confidence. Raised markings on measuring spoons let us identify quantities by touch, while digital scales with voice output are a leading-edge way to confirm weights.

Set up all ingredients before starting to cook. Organize them on a tray or in clear, labeled containers with braille or large-print labels. Keeping

things tidy and well-labeled limits confusion and ensures we're always confident in each step of meal preparation. Tools such as audible timers and tactile measuring devices are highlighted by Wisconsin Department of Health kitchen guidance.

COOKING TECHNIQUES FOR SAFETY AND INDEPENDENCE

Staying safe and maintaining autonomy in the kitchen is achievable with tailored strategies. With the right adaptive tools, clear routines, and a few accessible techniques, we can confidently navigate common meal prep challenges related to pouring, cooking, and maintaining a clean environment.

SAFE POURING OF HOT LIQUIDS

Pouring hot liquids can be hazardous when dealing with low vision or blindness. To minimize risk, we recommend using tactile guides or liquid level indicators. Devices that beep or vibrate as a cup nears full can prevent overfilling and burns.

A simple but effective method involves placing a finger over the rim of the mug while slowly pouring, stopping once the liquid touches the finger. For greater independence, insulated measuring jugs with textured handles offer a secure grip and extra control. Accessible talking kitchen gadgets are available, providing audio feedback to track volume accurately.

Selecting kettles with automatic shut-off and covered spouts limits splashes and reduces potential for accidents. More safe pouring techniques can be found through national low vision resources.

MODIFYING COOKING METHODS

We can adapt traditional cooking routines using leading-edge accessible tools and simplified workflows. Non-slip mats keep cutting boards in place, while finger guards offer additional safety protection. Pre-chopped or portioned ingredients further reduce handling hazards.

Braille- or large-print labels on spices and pantry items are helpful. Talking timers and tactile oven dials streamline tasks that require precise timing or temperature control. Using slow cookers or induction cooktops with easy-to-identify controls minimizes open flame risks and provides stable surfaces for pots and pans.

Color-contrasting equipment like measuring spoons and pans makes identification easier for those with low vision. Learn more about these adaptive cooking techniques and tools tailored for vision impairment.

MAINTAINING CLEANLINESS

Keeping our workspace clean is essential for safe cooking routines. Tactile marking pens or raised-label stickers on cleaning products and appliances help identify critical items. We can organize countertops and cupboards by grouping related items and maintaining set places, so spills or misplaced tools are quickly noticed.

Using cutting mats with high-contrast colors improves visibility for clean-up. We suggest establishing a step-by-step cleaning checklist in large print or Braille, which reinforces thoroughness. Adaptive sponges with textured grips prevent slipping and offer better feedback while washing dishes.

To ensure surfaces are residue-free, wipe down counters in a grid pattern, allowing for systematic coverage. For further insights on safe and organized kitchen routines, explore strategies at ConnectCenter's safe cooking guide.

DEVELOPING EATING SKILLS AND CONFIDENCE

Eating independently with low vision can feel challenging, but effective techniques and hands-on practice allow us to approach mealtimes with greater confidence. The right strategies promote safety, comfort, and independence at the table.

ADAPTIVE EATING TECHNIQUES

Many people with low vision use adaptive methods that make identifying and handling food easier.

One widely used approach is the clock method. This technique divides the plate into sections like a clock face, where we can remember, for example, “vegetables are at 9 o’clock, chicken is at 3 o’clock.” This makes locating food items on the plate more predictable.

Using high-contrast tableware helps us see items more clearly. For example, a dark placemat with a light plate can make dishes and cutlery stand out. Plates with a raised edge can help guide utensils and prevent food from being pushed off the plate, making the entire eating process smoother.

Choosing simple, non-patterned dishes and keeping the table free of unnecessary clutter improves both safety and independence. We can find additional tips on adaptive techniques for dining confidently with low vision and tools to support daily eating.

BUILDING CONFIDENCE WITH PRACTICE

Gaining confidence with eating skills comes with repeated practice and support. We recommend starting with familiar foods and gradually introducing new textures or plate arrangements. Practicing in a comfortable setting, such as our own home, can help us master basic techniques before trying them in public. Small successes, like accurately identifying the placement of silverware or serving ourselves a drink, build the trust we need to feel capable at meals. Working with a vision rehabilitation specialist can also boost our skills and assurance at the table.

These professionals can demonstrate strategies for safer meal prep, food identification, and adaptive eating. More detailed resources and specialist guidance on developing daily living skills for low vision are available for those wanting extra support.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

MEAL PREP TIPS FOR PEOPLE WITH LOW VISION

Organizing a kitchen with tactile labeling, reliable lighting, and accessible storage increases safety and efficiency for low vision cooks. Using adaptive tools, planning meals ahead, and adjusting recipes

can help people with visual impairments maintain independence at mealtime.

WHAT ARE SOME SIMPLE MEAL PREPARATION TECHNIQUES FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH LOW VISION?

We recommend using non-slip mats under cutting boards and bowls to keep them from moving during food prep. Dividing tasks into smaller steps, pre-measuring ingredients, and opting for recipes with fewer components can help make meal prep easier. Touch, scent, and sound become valuable guides for monitoring food progress.

HOW CAN KITCHEN ORGANIZATION AID IN MEAL PREP FOR THOSE WITH VISION IMPAIRMENTS?

Labeling shelves and containers with large print, braille, or tactile markers helps quickly locate ingredients and utensils. Grouping similar items together—such as spices, canned goods, or baking tools—minimizes searching. A well-organized space reduces stress and increases efficiency in the kitchen, as suggested by practical kitchen labeling and organizing tips.

WHAT SAFETY TIPS SHOULD BE CONSIDERED WHEN COOKING FOR SOMEONE WHO IS VISUALLY IMPAIRED?

We advise relying on stove guards, cut-resistant gloves, and pot stabilizers to prevent accidents. Keeping sharp utensils and hot items in designated spaces within reach improves safety. Using solid or heavier foods, such as mashed potatoes, as a buffer can help guide the placement of other items on a plate when serving or eating, as described in this guide to easier eating.

WHAT KITCHEN GADGETS CAN ASSIST SOMEONE WITH LOW VISION IN PREPARING A MEAL?

There are talking kitchen scales, liquid level indicators, and digital thermometers that provide audio feedback. Large-print and tactile measuring cups or spoons help with accurate portioning. These devices can offer greater confidence and efficiency in meal preparation for individuals with low vision.

HOW CAN PEOPLE WITH LOW VISION MAINTAIN INDEPENDENCE WHILE COOKING?

Planning meals ahead, relying on accessible recipes, and using adaptive equipment can foster independence. Taking advantage of specialized training and resources empowers cooks to prepare their favorite dishes safely. Practicing new skills with guidance builds confidence for cooking solo, as outlined in adaptive cooking resources.

WHAT STRATEGIES CAN BE USED TO MAKE RECIPES MORE ACCESSIBLE FOR THOSE WITH LOW VISION?

We encourage using large print or accessible electronic recipe formats, as well as simplifying complex recipes to include step-by-step instructions. Adding tactile cues, high-contrast labels, and color-coded utensils makes each step easier to navigate. Breaking down recipes into smaller, manageable tasks helps reduce confusion and increases success in the kitchen.

For more information go to New England Low Vision and Blindness at www.nelowvision.com

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Our rehabilitation team includes licensed physical therapists, occupational therapists, and speech-language pathologists who develop personalized plans of care focused on improving function, safety, and quality of life. Physical therapy addresses strength, balance, mobility, pain management, and post-surgical recovery. Occupational therapy supports independence with daily activities, and speech therapy assists with communication, cognitive and swallowing challenges using evidence-based techniques.

Outpatient and industrial rehabilitation services are provided in modern, accessible facility with convenient parking.

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James J. Murphy, MD, orthopedic surgeon, brings more than 20 years of experience to Iroquois Memorial Hospital. Dr. Murphy partners with patients to help them understand their orthopedic condition and participate actively in their care. His services include total hip and knee replacement, partial hip and shoulder replacement, arthroscopic joint procedures, and tendon and muscle repair. He sees patients at the IMH Specialty Clinic in Watseka.

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Supreme Court Strengthens Education Rights for Students with Disabilities

In June 2025, the U.S. Supreme Court issued a unanimous ruling in the case of A.J.T. v. Osseo Area Schools. The decision significantly lowers the legal burden for students with disabilities to pursue claims under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

Previously, some courts had required families to prove “bad faith or gross misjudgment” in education- based discrimination cases. The Court ruled that such claims should be held to the same “deliberate indifference” standard used in other civil rights law.

The case involved a Minnesota student with epilepsy who had been denied the evening instruction she required due to her condition. The ruling now makes it easier for families to seek justice when reasonable accommodation is denied in school settings.

This landmark decision reaffirms what disability advocates have long argued: that students with disabilities deserve equal legal protection, access to education, and a pathway to advocate for themselves in court.

JULY 3, 2025

On June 12, 2025, the U.S. Supreme Court released its decision in *A.J.T. v. Osseo Area Schools*, a case that could’ve shook the very foundation of disability civil rights. The Court ruled that students with disabilities have the right to seek justice for discrimination in schools without facing legal barriers that don’t exist in workplaces, housing, or other areas of public life. Here’s why this case matters and what you need to know.

WHAT IS THE A.J.T. V. OSSEO AREA SCHOOLS CASE ABOUT?

This case is about whether federal disability rights laws require children with disabilities to meet a strict “bad faith or gross misjudgment” standard when suing because they experienced discrimination in K-12 public schools. This standard means that families would have to prove that school districts and/or administrators acted with a level of intent beyond negligence or indifference, requiring evidence of dishonesty, ill will, or a conscious disregard for the student’s rights. This high standard is not required to prove disability discrimination in any other context, including in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, which only require showing that the defendant acted with “deliberate indifference.”

WHAT LAWS PROTECT STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES?

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) guarantees a free, appropriate public education for eligible students who have disabilities and need specialized instruction and related services.

These services are established in an individualized education plan (IEP) that is created by the child's parents and the school.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibits discrimination in places that receive federal funding. Most, if not all, public schools receive federal funding. Section 504 requires schools to provide reasonable accommodation for students with disabilities. Reasonable accommodation can include allowing a child with diabetes to eat whenever necessary and not be limited to snack or lunch time.

The Americans with Disabilities Act bars discrimination in services provided by state and local governments. Public schools are operated by state or local governments. Like Section 504, the ADA requires schools to provide reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities.

Article; Education Law Center Publishing

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START YOUR NEXT JOURNEY!

Jaguar Jumps is a program to support persons with disabilities of ages 17+ looking for a transition from high school/post-high school to higher education or to enter the workforce.

JAGUAR JUMPS 1 (JJ1): Empowering Transition -

At the core of JJ1 is an advocacy-focused approach that guides students through understanding their disability and building self-advocacy skills. Students will explore pathways in higher education, workforce training, or online courses. The students will learn about empowering themselves, self-awareness, legal protections, accommodations, requesting appropriate support, navigating disclosure decisions, and effective communication skills.

JAGUAR JUMPS 2 (JJ2): Bridging Education and

Employment - JJ2 provides personalized, one-on-one guidance and support to students who have successfully completed JJ1. The program assists students in navigating their chosen paths, whether transitioning to higher education or entering the workforce.

Throughout the year, Jaguar Jumps also offers other activities designed to foster a sense of community, belonging, and engagement among participants to support their overall growth.

JAGUAR JUMPS

TWO SEMESTERS - Each semester is 10 weeks and is held virtually on a weekday. Some on-campus activities will occur as well.

For program questions, please contact: 708.534.4099 or
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For more than six decades, 94.1 WGFA has been the trusted hometown voice across east central Illinois and west central Indiana. Locally owned and operated, WGFA and our sister station 96.9 The Buckle, have proudly served listeners throughout portions of 19 counties, delivering the information, entertainment, and community connection that only local radio can provide. In 2026, this legacy reaches an exciting milestone as WGFA Radio celebrates 65 years of service to the region. At the heart of both stations is a commitment to local news coverage that keeps residents informed about the issues and stories shaping their communities. From municipal updates and school happenings to weather alerts and public safety information, listeners rely on WGFA and The Buckle for timely, relevant reporting that reflects the realities of rural and small-town life. This dedication to local storytelling strengthens the bond between the stations and the communities they serve.

Sports coverage is another cornerstone of the stations' identity. Area high school athletics receive extensive play-by-play and feature coverage, highlighting student-athletes and fostering hometown pride. Beyond local teams, fans also tune in for coverage and conversation surrounding Fighting Illini football and Fighting Illini men's basketball, bringing Big Ten excitement to living rooms, tractors, and pickup trucks throughout the listening area.

Agriculture also plays a vital role in programming, reflecting the region's economic backbone. Market updates, farm news, weather insights, and interviews with producers and industry experts provide valuable information for farmers and agribusiness professionals navigating an ever-changing landscape. In fact, WGFA stands for the World's Greatest Farming Area!

Community involvement remains a defining characteristic of 94.1 WGFA and 96.9 The Buckle. The stations actively promote local festivals, fundraisers, civic initiatives, and nonprofit events, helping organizations reach audiences and encouraging residents to participate in community life. This role as a community connector has been a consistent thread throughout the stations' 65-year history.

As 94.1 WGFA and 96.9 The Buckle look toward the future, their mission remains unchanged — to inform, entertain, and support the communities they call home. With deep local roots, dedicated listeners, and a continued focus on relevant programming, the stations stand as enduring examples of the power of local radio. Download our free apps, learn more and listen online at www.wgfaradio.com and www.969thebuckle.com.

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How Speech Therapy Can Help

Speech therapy supports people who have difficulty communicating, understanding language, using their voice, thinking clearly, or swallowing safely. These challenges may be related to developmental conditions, neurological disorders, injury, or other health changes. Speech-language pathologists work with individuals of all ages to improve daily communication, independence, and safety.

Speech Therapy for Children

For children, therapy may begin with speech sounds such as “S” or “R” or help with stuttering. It can also support children who need help understanding language, interacting socially, or expressing themselves. This is especially important for children with developmental differences, including autism.

“Can we figure out a voice for that person who needs to communicate a different way? For example, on an AAC device, which looks like an iPad or tablet, kids press different buttons and icons to help speak for them,” explains Camille Joly, Riverside speech-language pathologist.

Speech Therapy for Adults

Adults may benefit from speech therapy if they experience changes in memory, thinking, speech, or swallowing.

These changes can occur after conditions such as stroke, neurological disease, or other medical issues.

Speech-language pathologists help adults:

- Improve communication and word-finding
- Develop strategies for memory and thinking challenges
- Strengthen voice and speech clarity
- Learn safer ways to swallow food, drinks, and medications

Therapists often work with other rehabilitation specialists to support daily functioning and quality of life.

Voice & Swallowing Support

People with chronic hoarseness, vocal fatigue, or frequent throat clearing may be referred for evaluation and therapy.

Speech-language pathologists also help individuals with swallowing disorders (dysphagia), which can make eating and drinking difficult or unsafe.

At Riverside Healthcare, therapists use specialized tools to evaluate and treat these conditions.

Video stroboscopy uses a strobe light and a camera to closely examine how the vocal cords move and function.

VitalStim™ therapy uses gentle electrical stimulation to help strengthen swallowing muscles and improve coordination.

Personalized Care

Speech therapy is tailored to each person's needs, goals, and abilities.

“We truly work with each individual based on what they need. And, we look so much more past the medical diagnosis,” Joly says. “I always say you can be surprised how much you learn, how much you'll progress over the course of the whole therapy session.”

“We truly work with each individual based on what they need... You can be surprised how much you learn, how much you'll progress over the course of the whole therapy session.” - Camille Joly, Speech-Language Pathologist

Start Your Journey Today

To learn more about how Riverside Healthcare's Speech Therapy services can help you or someone you love, visit myrhc.net/speechtherapy, or call (815) 935-7496.

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DISABILITY ETIQUETTE A STARTING GUIDE

GENERAL DO'S AND DON'TS

- Get to know your colleagues as people and professionals!
- Don't assume other people's needs/wants.
- Use 'Disability Pride' language: "Wheelchair user" instead of "confined to a wheelchair."

INDIVIDUALS WITH MOBILITY DISABILITIES

- Do not touch a person's mobility equipment.
- Be considerate of possible pain, balance, or post-traumatic stress concerns during physical contact.
- When engaging in a conversation, select a location where you can engage comfortably and that reduces distance between you.

INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE BLIND OR HAVE LOW VISION

- Identify yourself when entering a conversation and announce when you leave.
- When serving as a sighted guide, offer your arm or shoulder rather than grabbing or pushing the individual.
- Describe the setting, environment, written material, and obstacles when serving as a human guide.
- Resist the temptation to pet or talk to a guide or service animal.

INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE DEAF OR HARD OF HEARING

- Gain the person's attention before starting a conversation.
- If the individual uses a sign language interpreter, speak directly to the person, not the interpreter; keep your eyes on the individual and not on the interpreter.
- Face the person and speak in normal tones.

INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE SPEECH DISABILITIES

- If you do not understand what the person is saying, ask the person to repeat what they said and then repeat it back to ensure you understood.
- Do not speak for the person or attempt to finish their sentences.

INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE NON-APPARENT DISABILITIES

- Seek to understand their lived experience.
- Recognize that disclosing their disability comes with a risk and honor requested confidentiality.
- Engage in a dialogue to determine individual needs.
- Support accommodations.

What are some other tips?

Disability:IN

Every Number, A Story of Independence

“Behind every person with a disability is a story of strength, perseverance, and untapped potential.

We believe that with the right support, barriers can be broken and lives transformed.

This past year, Options CIL collaborated directly with 441 individuals with disabilities to provide the tools necessary for them to achieve their independence!

148 of those individuals were over the age of 55 and experiencing vision loss/blindness. Options CIL Vision Services Advocate provided assistive technology/adaptive living aids to each vision consumer as needed to maintain or enhance their independence. Some examples of items provided are talking blood pressure cuffs, talking watches, large print check books, talking calculators, digital magnifiers, and much more.

112 of those individuals requested and received Independent Living Skills and Life Skills training. Each of these consumers worked towards

goals they chose for themselves and achieved with support and services provided by Options CIL team members.

29 youth and adults with disabilities received peer support services by participating in 1 or more of the 3 group meetings held regularly in both Kankakee and Iroquois county.

213 individuals with disabilities received Assistive Technology services and/or training on how to use assistive technology.

49 individuals with disabilities received Housing, Home Modifications or Emergency Shelter Services to prevent institutional placement.

30 individuals with disabilities worked with Options to use public transportation and receive bus passes allowing them to travel as needed to various appointments and social activities.

21 adults with disabilities worked with Options CIL Personal Assistant Advocate to manage their Personal Assistant Services. Our PA Advocate also trained 42 people to work as Personal Assistants for our consumers in Kankakee and Iroquois county.

8 individuals with disabilities transitioned out of long-term care facilities into their own apartments with the support and services needed to live independently in the community.

31 youth with disabilities received services needed to transition into post-secondary life after high school. Each youth learned about self-advocacy, workplace readiness and job exploration counseling.

1 disability etiquette training was provided upon request to local partner agency.

2 ADA site surveys were provided upon request to local businesses. We hosted a lunch and learn presentation by Prairie State Legal Services about Fair Housing and how to become a Fair Housing Tester. 30 people attended, ranging from consumers, family

members, local educators, and community partners increasing their awareness of this issue. We celebrated the Americans with Disabilities Act with a picnic in Iroquois County. Community partners, Prairie State Legal Services, Harbor House and Iroquois County Public Health Department were on hand to provide information about services they offer. As a result, 37 individuals increased their awareness and knowledge of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Beyond individual services provided, we collaborated with our community partners, businesses, schools, local landlords, transportation providers, employers and many others who support and align with our mission and vision of creating a barrier free community with equal access for all.

Thank you to our Options CIL team members who helped create a more inclusive world and empowered these 441 individuals with disabilities to access opportunities, embrace independence, and thrive in ways that many take for granted.”

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- 13 Local Routes serving Aroma Park, Kankakee, Bradley, Bourbonnais, and Manteno

Whether traveling around town or to a Chicago area destination, all River Valley Metro buses are wheelchair accessible. And, if you have a disability that prevents you from using our local fixed route buses, Metro Plus can pick you up!

Metro Plus origin-to-destination service provides local transportation by appointment for people who have a disability that prevents them from using our local fixed route service. Eligibility must be verified through a simple application process. For details, please visit RiverValleyMetro.com or call 815-935-1403.

Our buses run 365 days a year. Whether going to an appointment, visiting friends, or going out for the evening, Go Where You Want To Go With River Valley Metro!

River Valley Metro Mass Transit District

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River Valley Metro Mass Transit District

What is it, and what do they do?

River Valley Metro Mass Transit District is a public service agency that offers three types of bus services for the residents of Kankakee County.

1. Traditional, or “fixed route”, bus service in the urbanized area of Kankakee County. This includes Aroma Park, Kankakee, Bradley, Bourbonnais and Manteno.
2. Commuter shuttle service to Midway Airport.
3. Service for individuals with disabilities who are unable to independently use fixed route service. This is referred to as Metro Plus service.

Fixed route buses serve more than 300 bus stops from 5:00 am to 9:30 pm Monday through Friday, 7:00 am to 9:30 pm on Saturdays, and 8:00 am to 4:00 pm on Sundays and major holidays. Most stops are served once each hour, but a few are served every half hour. All buses are wheelchair accessible. Fare is \$1.00 per trip.

The Midway Airport commuter shuttle departs from the Metro Centre in Bourbonnais and makes one stop in Manteno. It then runs non-stop to Midway Airport. Our Bus Stop at Midway is located in the area designated for Regional Buses near the Baggage Claims exit.

Free parking for Midway Airport commuters is available at both the Bourbonnais and the Manteno departures points. Fare is \$2.00 each way.

Metro Plus service requires pre-qualification and operates by appointment. Metro Plus buses will pick you up at your home and take you to your destination. This is a shared ride service, meaning that multiple individuals' trips are grouped together in an effort to meet all

trip requests and improve efficiency. Ride time on Metro Plus is comparable to travel time on the fixed route system, including transfers and wait times. Fare is \$2.00 each way.

Additional details about each of these services are available at RiverValleyMetro.com or by calling 815-937-4287

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The ABLE Age Adjustment Act Fact Sheet

What is the ABLE Age Adjustment Act?

The ABLE Age Adjustment Act amends Section 529A of the Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act to allow more individuals who have a disability to become eligible for an ABLE account effective January 1, 2026. The age of eligibility expands to allow individuals who have a disability that began before age 46 (instead of before the age of

26) to be ABLE-eligible. The ABLE Age Adjustment Act extends opportunities of financial empowerment for people with disabilities.

Why is this Important?

Millions of individuals with disabilities, including Veterans, whose disability began between age 26 to before age 46 were previously excluded from opening an ABLE account. The increase in the age of disability will allow additional people to:

- Save money in a tax-advantaged account.
- Maintain eligibility for crucial public benefits while building assets.
- Gain financial independence and security.

Key Benefits of an ABLE Account

1. Tax Advantages: Investment growth is tax-free and withdrawals for qualified disability expenses are not considered income by means tested benefit programs;

2. Asset Protection: Up to \$100,000 of savings in an ABLE account is not counted toward the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) resource limit. Any amount of ABLE savings up to the ABLE plan's limit does is not a countable resource for FAFSA, HUD, SSDI, SNAP, Medicare or Medicaid.

3. Financial Flexibility: ABLE accounts can be used for a broad range of expenses including housing, education, transportation, healthcare, employment support and more.

New ABLE Eligibility

Beginning January 1, 2026, individuals who meet the following criteria can open an ABLE account:

1. Disability Onset: The disability must have occurred before age 46 and

2. Severity of Disability: The individual must have a severe disability that meets the Social Security Administration's (SSA) criteria defined

as resulting in marked functional limitations which have lasted or can be expected to last for at least 12 months. An individual does not have to be receiving nor previously received benefits to be eligible. Employment status and income has no effect on eligibility for an ABLE account.

Prepare Now

1. **Verify Your Eligibility:** Check that your disability onset occurred before age 46. If you have not received a benefit based on disability from Social Security Administration since before age 46, you must request that your doctor sign a disability statement indicating that the disability began before age 46. You may use this sample ABLE Account Disability Certification Form for this purpose. Keep this documentation in your records.
2. **Research State ABLE Plans:** Use the three ABLE National Resource Center's comparison tools to learn about and compare ABLE plans. Many plans allow non- residents to enroll in their plan. Explore your state's ABLE plan first with the Select a State Program tool and use the State Plan Search tool to compare plan features such as fees, investment options and state-specific tax benefits to find a plan that best meets your needs.
3. **Select An ABLE Plan:** Only one ABLE account may be opened per individual. Visit: [How Do I Choose a Plan](#) to learn more about choosing a plan that best meets your needs. Most accounts are opened online. ABLE plans allow authorized representatives to assist people with their ABLE account although the person with the disability is always the ABLE account owner. An ABLE account may be opened at any age.
4. **Compile Information:** To facilitate an easy online enrollment process, visit: [How Do I Open An Account](#). The ABLE account is always opened in the name of the person who has the disability. Gather information such as account owner's date of birth, mailing address, email address, social security or tax identification number, mother's maiden name, your primary disability, and as applicable, identify who you want to designate as an authorized representative (if any) and know the status

and type of your social security benefits, if you receive them. You can start the online enrollment process by filling out a portion of your ABLE plan application but wait to click submit until January 1, 2026.

5. Open Your ABLE Account: As millions of people are ringing in the new year on January 1, 2026, you can celebrate your new opportunity for financial stability by submitting your online application and opening your new ABLE account. ABLE account owners report that the enrollment process is simple and takes less than 15 minutes to complete.

Learn More

- Visit: ABLEnrc.org for additional resources.
- Join ABLE NRC's email list at: Subscribe to ABLE National Resource Center to stay informed of ABLE related updates.
- Speak with a financial advisor about integrating an ABLE account into your financial plan and start planning for your future.

Connecting people with disabilities and their families to information about ABLE accounts
ablenrc.org

Important SNAP Updates

As we move into the new year, IDHS continues to prepare for significant federal changes to SNAP work requirements affecting Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs). As a result of new federal policy, on February 1, 2026, ABAWDs who do not meet or who are not exempt from work requirements may only get SNAP for 3 months in a 3-year period unless they meet the work requirement or are otherwise exempt.

That means beginning May 1, 2026, ABAWDs who have received SNAP for 3 months and have not met or who were not exempt from work requirements will lose benefits.

Who is affected?

- People with no disabilities, ages 18-64
- People with kids at home who are only 14 or older
- People who are homeless
- Veterans

IDHS has already issued initial notices and exemption forms to all current and newly identified ABAWDs.

New tool to support customers

IDHS has launched a new SNAP Work Requirements Screener to help customers understand whether they are subject to work requirements, meeting them, or may qualify for an exemption.

Partner resources and outreach

- Updated information, notices, and resources are available at snapfederalimpactillinois.gov.
- Shareable posts about SNAP changes and the new screener are available on IDHS Facebook and LinkedIn channels.

IDHS is grateful to our partners for helping ensure Illinois families stay informed, supported, and connected to the nutrition benefits they rely on.

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- ½ pg. (7 ½ x 5) (can include a free ½ pg. article written by sponsor) \$150
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WHY HAVE A PRIMARY CARE PROVIDER

Your Primary Care Provider is the person you turn to for routine care and everyday health needs.

A primary care provider (PCP) is your main partner in health. Whether it's a family medicine doctor, internal medicine provider, nurse practitioner, or physician assistant, your PCP is the person you turn to for routine care and everyday health needs.

Think of primary care as your “home base” for health.

What does a PCP do?

Your PCP helps with a wide range of care, including:

- Annual checkups and wellness visits
- Preventive screenings and vaccinations
- Treatment for common illnesses like colds or infections
- Management of long-term conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, or asthma
- Guidance on mental health concerns

They also help coordinate your care if you need to see a specialist, making sure nothing gets missed along the way.

Why having a PCP matters Prevention comes first

Many serious health conditions don't show symptoms right away.

Regular visits with a PCP can help catch issues early—when they're easier to treat.

Care that knows you

Over time, your PCP learns your health history, lifestyle, and goals. This helps them provide more personalized, effective care.

A trusted first call

When something feels off, you don't have to guess where to go. Your PCP can guide you on next steps—whether that's treatment, testing, or reassurance.

Support for long-term health

Chronic conditions are easier to manage with consistent care. Your PCP works with you over time to keep you feeling your best.

Connected, coordinated care

If you need additional care, your PCP helps connect the dots—following up after ER visits, hospital stays, or specialist appointments.

Taking Charge of Your Health

Taking charge of your health starts with simple, consistent steps. Regular checkups and screenings can catch issues early—often before symptoms appear—making them easier to treat. Staying on top of your health today can prevent bigger problems tomorrow.

It also means building healthy habits like eating well, staying active, managing stress, and getting enough sleep. Your primary care provider can guide you with personalized recommendations to help you stay on track and feel your best.

Choose a primary care provider you feel comfortable with who listens and supports your goals. Visit myrhc.net/acceptingnew

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