



Fall 2023

Responder Newsletter

**Stony Brook World Trade Center
Health and Wellness Program**

In This Issue

TOPIC	PAGE NUMBER
Letter From Dr. Luft	Page 2
Recent Events	Page 3
Oral History Project	Page 4
Introducing: Our Patch Wall	Page 5
Member Spotlight: Robert Weisberg	Page 6-7
Self-Care/Nutrition Recipe	Page 8

**Book your annual monitoring exam today!
Call us to schedule at (631) 855-1200**

Need to Dispose of Unwanted or Expired Prescription Medication?

Find a drug take back location:

Check with local hospitals and pharmacies to see if they accept unwanted medication. The U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) also has a drug take back site locator at takebackday.dea.gov

- **Read your prescription medicine label.**
 - It may contain specific instructions that will allow you to safely dispose of the medicine at home.
- **No special disposal instructions or nearby take back locations?**
 - Dispose of your medication in the trash by following these five steps:
 1. Mix your medicine with an inedible substance like dirt, cat litter, or used coffee grounds.
 2. Put the mixture in a container, such as a sealed plastic bag.
 3. Throw the container in your household trash.
 4. Scratch out all the personal information on the prescription label to make it unreadable.
 5. Then dispose or recycle the empty medication bottle.



Learn more about safe medicine disposal at
www.cdc.gov/wtc/prescriptionsafety.html

Letter from Dr. Luft



Greetings,

I hope you have all been having a wonderful Fall season. We are excited to announce the opening of our Westbury clinic! For those of you who utilize our Nassau location, this beautiful new clinic will be more convenient for you to come in for your regular monitoring visits. Again, we thank you for your patience, in this transitional period for the past few months.

On September 17th, 2023, members of our staff participated in the Travis Manion 9/11 Heroes 5K Run/Walk in Huntington. We also participated in the Jones Beach – Making Strides Against Breast Cancer Walk. We were proud to participate in these important events, to show our support for the community.

We are re-launching our Remembering 9/11 Oral History Project. We have already interviewed over 450 responders, survivors, and family members. All of this is being archived at the Library of Congress. We want to hear the stories of 9/11, not only of the responders, but of their families, spouses, and children. We believe it's important to hear how the experience impacted the family unit. If you are interested in participating and sharing your story, please contact Camile Arnone at (631) 638-0323. Go to page 4 to see our new Oral History Room, where these video-recorded interviews will take place moving forward!

We are introducing our Responder Patch Wall! We encourage you to donate a patch of the organization you are affiliated with to add to our collection. Your patch will help us showcase the many responder groups that came to Ground Zero.

In our Member Spotlight, we are thrilled to feature Rob Weisberg, Accountant/Volunteer Firefighter, who hiked the Appalachian Trail and raised money for Paws of War, an organization that provides hundreds of Veterans with service and support dogs rescued from kill shelters. Dedicating himself to this amazing cause, Rob hiked an impressive 1,852.5 miles and has raised over \$16,000!

The Fall reminds us that change can be beautiful. It's important to find ways to take care of yourself, even if that means going for a walk, eating well, and spending time doing things that bring you joy. These small changes can make a big difference in your health and how you interact with the world. We know the winter months can be isolating and difficult for people. We encourage you to focus on the things you are thankful for and be mindful about surrounding yourself with people who are supportive and motivating.

On a solemn note, we live in tumultuous times where atrocities are occurring in the world which could trigger the memories of 9/11. If you are having these experiences, we want to support you. Our social workers, care coordinators, psychiatrists, and psychologists are here to make sure you don't feel alone. Just call.

All of us at the WTC clinic wish you and your families the very best. We hope to see you soon. Happy Holidays! Stay safe and be well.

Benjamin J. Luft, MD
Director, Stony Brook World Trade Center Health and Wellness Program

9/11 Heroes Run

September 17, 2023
Huntington, NY

On September 17th, 2023, staff of the Stony Brook World Trade Center Health and Wellness Program along with Stony Brook University students participated in the **Travis Manion 9/11 Heroes 5K Run/Walk** in Huntington, NY.

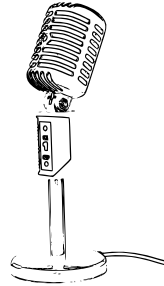
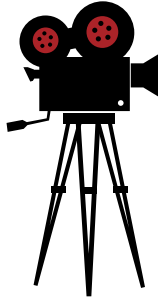
Our staff completed the 5K to honor the heroes of 9/11. The Travis Manion Foundation addresses the needs of veterans and survivors, including mental health and wellness support in the community.



For more information, visit: <https://www.travismanion.org/>

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Ensure that your story is not lost to time.
Document your role as a 9/11 responder, survivor or family member.



The Remembering 9/11 Oral History Project has interviewed over 450 9/11 responders, survivors and family members.

We want to hear your perspective.

We need your help to document one of the most significant events in American history and its consequences. We have partnered with the Library of Congress, so the story of 9/11, told by those who were there, is preserved for future generations.

Not only are we looking for the unique recollections of first responders, we also deem it important to include the perspective of family members of 9/11 first responders and survivors.



**Our New
Oral History Room**

If you are or a family member is interested in learning more or joining us for this project, kindly contact:
Camile Arnone, Communications Coordinator
(631) 638-0323 or Camile.Arnone@stonybrookmedicine.edu

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



ROB WEISBERG

HIKES THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL & RAISES MONEY FOR PAWS OF WAR

On March 11, 2023, Rob Weisberg, Accountant/Volunteer Firefighter, embarked on a journey to hike the Appalachian Trail starting at Springer Mountain in Georgia. On August 19, he came off the trail in Bartlett, New Hampshire, completing an impressive 1,852.5 miles! He dedicated his hike to raising money for Paws of War, an organization that provides hundreds of Veterans with service and support dogs rescued from kill shelters. So far, Rob has raised over \$16,000. Donations can still be made by going to his Facebook Page: "Rob Weisberg Appalachian Trail Hike". Readers can see his posts about the trail, including many photos, and what it has been like living and coping with PTSD.

What inspired you to hike the Appalachian Trail?

I am an Eagle Scout and have known about the Trail since I was a kid. It was something that I always wanted to do. I have been trying to manage my PTSD for over 20 years. I found that being in nature has been my happy place. My friends would always tell me when we were hiking, camping, fishing, canoeing, etc. that they never see that smile anywhere else. The trail changed from something that I wanted to do to something that I needed to do.

How did you prepare for your journey?

I spent a year researching the trail. I read a lot of books and articles written by people who already hiked it. I also spoke to and e-mailed people who hiked it. A year before I started my hike I went to the Trail's starting point in Georgia and spoke to people who worked on it trying to get as much advice as possible. Besides that, I spent a lot of time in the gym trying to get myself into shape. However, I did eat a lot of ice cream before leaving home since I knew I was going to drop a lot of weight rather quickly. I dropped approximately 60 pounds.

What were your biggest challenges? How did you overcome them?

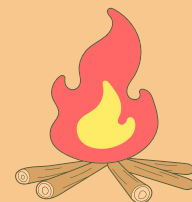
There were many challenges. The brutal weather was very difficult. For example, I was caught in a storm where the wind was approximately 75 mph, gusting up to 100 mph. The temperature was near freezing, so I was very concerned about hypothermia. I relied on maintaining a positive mental attitude throughout my hike. I had a choice. I could be cold and wet, or I could be cold wet, and miserable.



Finding water during the drought was another issue. I carried a lot of water with me. This increased my pack weight significantly. When finding reliable water sources was really difficult, I stayed in hostels more often. This way I could fill up my water bottles when I left in the morning and again when I made it to the next hostel in the evening.

Did you have any revelations out in nature?

I used my time hiking to think and clear my head of all the baggage I had been carrying since 9/11. For example, I told my sons, who were both born after 9/11, that I wished they knew me before that day. I was chasing the goal of being my former self. I had been trying to do the impossible. I learned that I can't turn back the clock. I am the person I am as a result of my life's experiences. I have to accept who I am, and I hope they can too.





What was your biggest takeaway from this experience?
 My biggest takeaway from this experience is I am not responsible for what happened that day and what happened afterward. For over two decades, I have been blaming myself for what happened on 9/11. The survivor's guilt has been such a burden on me. I did my best to keep people safe. One person died in the firehouse, and I kept thinking that I should have done something differently. I wasn't looking at how many people I saved that day. I was laser-focused on the fact that I didn't bat 1.000. Then, subsequent to 9/11, my younger friends joined the military and were deployed to the Middle East. One friend was killed during his last deployment. While I know I didn't make him enlist, I still felt responsible.

What would you like fellow responders to know about the companionship of an animal?
 I love having my canine partner. We are a team. He knows my physical cues when I am having a PTSD episode. He will whack me with his paw when he sees them. It's his way of saying let's go for a walk or let's change what I am thinking about before I head too deeply into the episode. Other times he just lays his head on me to pet him. Besides that, he is my friend. He knows when he is working and when he can relax. Either way, he just wants me to be happy.



**Paws of War
Welcome Home
Ceremony**

What would you like people to know about Paws of War?

Paws of War is an amazing organization. They rescue dogs and other animals and place them with veterans, active military, and first responders to help them manage service-related mental health issues. The dogs and the recipients train together so the dogs can become certified service animals. The dogs, training, and veterinary care are provided at no cost to the recipient. While this is huge, Paws of War provides me with something even more important. When I am having a PTSD moment, I will tell my family that I am having a bad day, and they will give me some space. However, they will never understand what I am going through. If I go to Paws of War and say to my friends that I am having a bad day, they understand because we are all in this special club. Paws of War provides me with a safe place where I can be me.

Rob & Chip



Self-Care Tips & Featured Recipe

Have you gone for a walk on the beach, in the woods, etc. outside and felt like your stresses paused for a moment? A walk in the woods gazing at trees, flowers, water, and if we are lucky, wildlife, can have a multitude of benefits for us, as we are listening to green noise (ocean waves, waterfalls, rivers, wind) and residing in green spaces (areas of trees, grass, and other vegetation) or blue spaces (areas near lakes, rivers, beaches, etc.).

Although many of us understand that time in nature is good for us, we may not realize HOW good it really is to take in the green/blue space and green noise.

THE BENEFITS:

- Exposure to forests and trees
- Boosts the immune system
- Lowers blood pressure
- Reduces stress
- Improves mood
- Increases ability to focus
- Accelerates recovery from surgery or illness
- Increases energy level
- Improves sleep

LOCAL PARKS TO CHECK OUT:

- Sunken Meadow State Park
- Riverhead Cranberry Bog
- Gardiner County Park
- Nissequogue River State Park
- Cold Spring Harbor State Park
- National Wildlife Refuge
- Planting Fields Arboretum



The Science Behind It: While we breathe in the fresh air, we breathe in phytoncides, airborne phytochemicals that plants give off to protect themselves from insects. Phytoncides have antibacterial and antifungal properties which help plants fight disease. When people breathe in these natural chemicals, they cause our cells to respond by creating increased natural killer cells which can strengthen our immune system among other benefits from being in green/blue spaces.

References:

- [Immerse Yourself in a Forest for Better Health - NYS Dept of Environmental Conservation](#)
- [Walk in the Woods for Wellness: Health Benefits of Forests | US Forest Service \(usda.gov\)](#)

Good Recipe for a Hike

Monster Cookie Peanut Butter Protein Balls



Ingredients:

- 1 ½ cups old-fashioned rolled oats (160g)
- 3 tablespoons ground flaxseed (25g)
- 1 tablespoon chia seeds (10g)
- Pinch of fine salt
- ¼ cup vanilla whey protein powder (or vanilla protein powder of choice)
- ¾ cup natural creamy peanut butter* (190g)
- ¼ cup honey (80g)
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- ¼ cup candy-coated chocolate pieces
- ¼ cup mini chocolate chips
- 1–2 tablespoons water, if needed

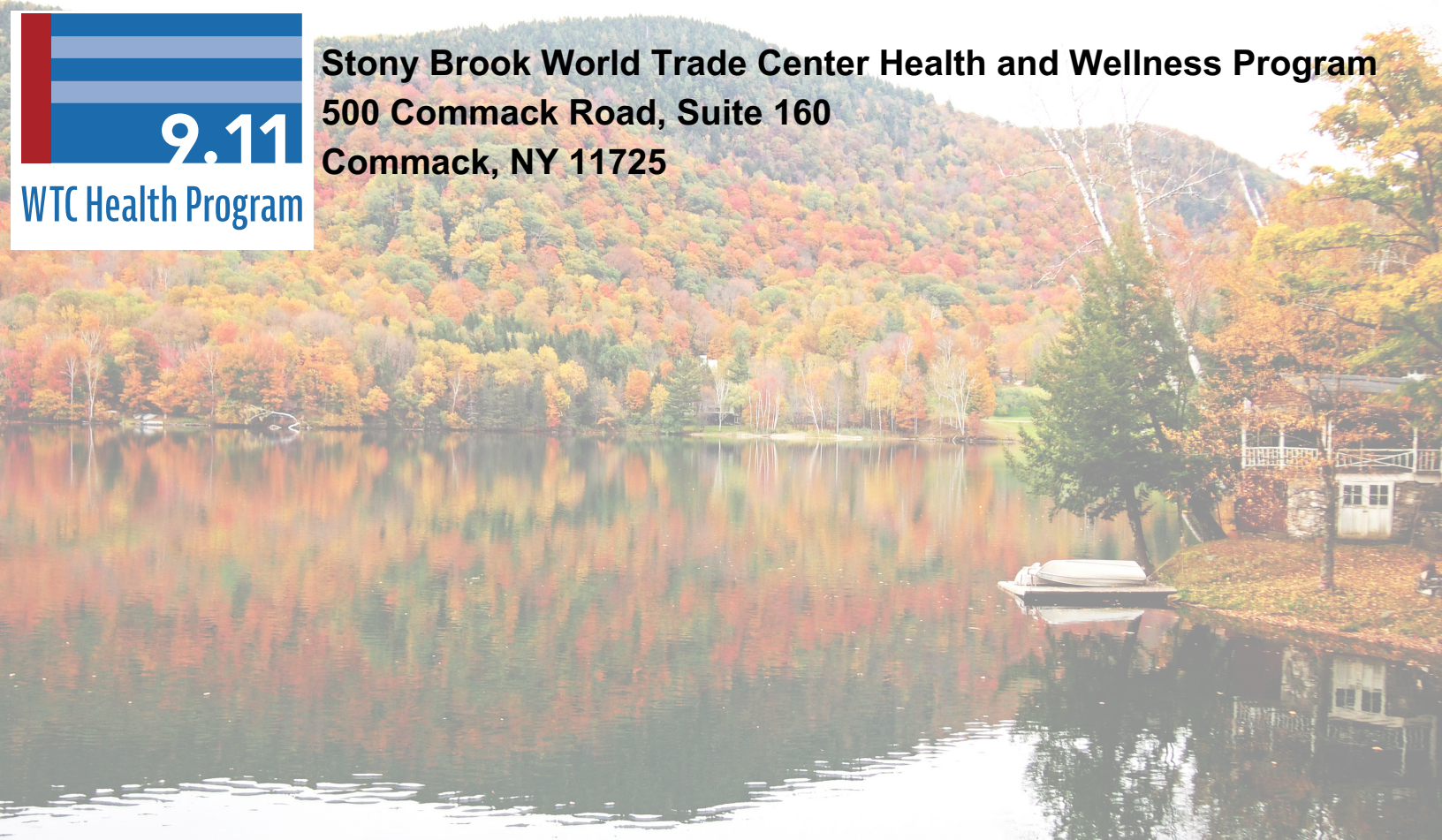
Instructions:

1. To a food processor or blender, add oats, ground flaxseed, chia seeds, and salt. Pulse 10-15 times.
2. To a medium bowl, add the oats mixture, whey protein powder, peanut butter, honey, and vanilla. Mix well.
 - a. (If the dough does not stick together, add ½ tablespoon of water at a time and stir until the dough sticks together easily when formed into a ball.)
3. Stir in the candy-coated chocolate pieces & chocolate chips.
4. Roll the dough into 20 balls, using about 2 tablespoons of dough per bite.
 - a. (*Dampen hands to prevent dough from sticking.)
5. Store in a covered container in the fridge for up to 2 weeks.

Recipe Credit: <https://therealfooddietitians.com/monster-cookie-peanut-butter-protein-balls/>



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Westbury Clinic

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