



Fall 2025

Responder Newsletter

**Stony Brook World Trade Center (WTC)
Health and Wellness Program**

Dr. Luft's Letter



Dear Friends,

The Fall is a time of paradoxes for all of us. It is a time of changes when the world transforms from the hot, dry days of summer to the cool, colorful autumn. It is the time of harvest when our stores and farm stands are full of vegetables and fruit. However, for us, and all Americans, it serves as a poignant reminder of the tragedies of 9/11 and the profound loss of many loved ones. It is a time that transformed us.

In this edition of the newsletter, we aim to focus on strategies to reduce stress, promote health, and foster a positive outlook on life. We introduce new team members who are here to support you, and we provide Program updates. Additionally, we share research advancements aimed at enhancing our care for you, and present a fresh approach to asthma therapy. We also highlight mental health community resources, and offer self-care tips to help you integrate beneficial habits that can enhance your quality of life.

As always, we are here to support you on your journey to well-being.

With heartfelt wishes,

Dr. Ben Luft
Director, Stony Brook World Trade Center Health and Wellness Program

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Book your annual monitoring exam today!
See steps below

SCHEDULE MONITORING VISIT
You call us: (631) 855-1220

ONE MONTH BEFORE VISIT
We'll call you to:
Verify demographics
for visit paperwork

TWO WEEKS BEFORE VISIT
We'll call you to:
Verify delivery of visit paperwork

DAY BEFORE VISIT
We'll call you to:
Remind/prep you for appointment



ALL AUTOMATED REMINDER CALLS/TEXT MESSAGES ARE SENT THROUGH STONY BROOK MEDICINE.

If you would like more information on how to manage appointment reminders, call us at (631) 855-1200 and ask for "member services."

Meet Our New Team Members



Hello, I'm Gisella Mejia, a Licensed Master Social Worker with a specialization in integrated health, and I earned my MSW from Stony Brook University in 2024. With a background in case management and social services, I am passionate about providing holistic, compassionate care to individuals impacted by 9/11-related health conditions. I value the connection between mental and physical health and advocate for accessible, person-centered care. In my free time, I enjoy spending time with my dogs and exploring the outdoors.



Gisella Mejia, Social Worker



Elizabeth Medrano, RN

Hello, my name is Elizabeth Medrano. I am from Venezuela and graduated from college in 2008 with a Bachelor's Degree in Science of Nursing. In 2009, I emigrated to the United States. In 2010, I enrolled in a Medical Assistant program, which was the first step in pursuing my passion for nursing and becoming an RN in the US. With the help of God, I passed the NYS RN boards and began nursing courses at Molloy College. My career path, spanning over 10 years in Family Medicine, GI, Pediatrics, Maternity, Vascular, Occupational Medicine, Geriatrics, Rehabilitation, and Allergy-Immunology, has led me to work for the WTC Health Program. I am truly honored to be part of this Program and serve the community.

Hello, my name is Jacqueline. I'm thrilled to join the Stony Brook WTC Health & Wellness Program as a Registered Dietitian. I earned my Master's degree in Integrative Nutrition Therapy from Stony Brook University. I'm excited to offer personalized, one-on-one nutrition counseling to help you achieve your health and wellness goals. Whether you're looking to manage chronic conditions or simply make healthier choices, I'm here to support you. In my free time, I love spending time with friends and family, teaching dance, and keeping up with the latest fashion trends. I'm also a chocolate lover and believe in nutritional balance while still optimizing health!



Jacqueline Ehrlich, Dietitian



Mental Health Support



Your well-being and safety mean the world to us. Every day, we meet responders who face challenges, and we're here to lend a helping hand. Have you ever felt unsure about asking for support when you're in need?

Remember, reaching out is a sign of strength.

Depression, PTSD, and anxiety are very real and serious.

**If you or a fellow responder needs support, please reach out.
Give us a call at (631) 855-1200, and ask for a "social worker."**

What if it's after hours? Don't worry, community resources are available to assist you or your loved ones.



If you are having a crisis & prefer
to chat online: 988lifeline.org

For additional mental health resources:
www.cdc.gov/mental-health/caring

Mental Health Resources

National:

Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: *Call or Text* 988

National Domestic Violence Hotline: (1-800) 799-7233

New York State:

NYS Crisis Text Line: Text GOT5 to 741741

Local:

Family Service League-DASH Hotline 24/7: (631) 952-3333

Long Island Council on Alcoholism & Drug Dependence

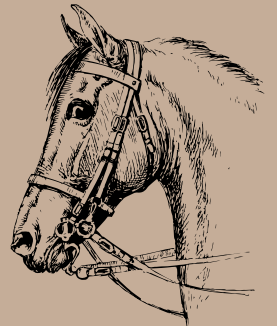
24/7 Hotline: (631) 979-1700

Nassau County Alcoholics Anonymous 24/7 Hotline: (516) 292-3040

Suffolk County Alcoholics Anonymous 24/7 Hotline: (631) 669-1124

Equine Therapy

Equine therapy is a way to boost your physical, emotional, and mental health by engaging with horses. Imagine working with these majestic creatures under the guidance of a therapist or equine expert. Activities like grooming, feeding, leading, and riding are tailored to help you reach your therapy goals.



According to a study done at Columbia University, equine therapy can significantly reduce PTSD symptoms. Spending time with horses can ease anxiety, depression, and disconnection. The bond you form with these animals can lower stress levels and trigger the release of oxytocin, the hormone that makes us feel happy. Many participants report better sleep, stronger social ties, and a boost in self-esteem. Some even say this therapy changed their lives!

Local ranches provide equine therapy for veterans and first responders, offering a chance to connect, heal, and grow with a familiar community. Thanks to grants, participation is free.

Warrior Ranch Foundation



1179 Edwards Avenue, Calverton, NY



www.warriorranchfoundation.org



Info@warriorranchfoundation.org



(631) 740-9049

Pal-O-Mine Equestrian, Inc.



829 Old Nichols Road, Islandia, NY



www.pal-o-mine.org



cevers@pal-o-mine.org



(631) 348-1389

Self-Care Tips

Self-care means taking the time to do things that help you live well and improve both your physical and mental health. This can help you manage stress, lower your risk of illness, and increase your energy. Even small acts of self-care in your daily life can have a big impact.

Get regular exercise.



Did you know that just 30 minutes of walking each day can lift your spirits and improve your health? Even small amounts of exercise can have a big impact. You don't need to do it all at once—every little bit helps. So, why not take a stroll and feel the difference it makes?



Eat healthy, regular meals & stay hydrated.

Eating a balanced diet and drinking plenty of water can really boost your energy and focus throughout the day. Did you know that caffeine and alcohol affect your mood and well-being? For some people, cutting back on these can make a big difference.



Stay connected.

Connect with your friends or family who can offer emotional support and practical assistance.

Make sleep a priority.



A regular sleep schedule enhances mood and energy. Getting enough rest is crucial, and reducing screen time before bed can help lessen the effects of blue light, making it easier to fall asleep.

Set goals & priorities.



Decide what must get done now and what can wait. Learn to say “no” to new tasks if you start to feel like you're taking on too much.

Take a moment to celebrate what you have accomplished at the end of the day.



Try a relaxing activity.

Enhance your well-being by making time for enjoyable and healthy pursuits.

- Explore meditation, muscle relaxation, or breathing exercises through various apps or programs.
- Set a regular schedule for these practices.
- Include activities you love, such as:
 - Listening to music
 - Reading
 - Enjoying nature
 - Indulging in low-stress hobbies



Practice gratitude.

Every day, take a moment to think about what you're grateful for. What are those specific things that bring you joy? Jot them down or simply replay them in your mind.

Focus on positivity.



Identify and challenge your negative and unhelpful thoughts.

Program Updates

**Protect yourself & your loved ones.
Get the flu shot.**



-  Get your flu shot during your annual visit, whether or not you have a certified condition.
-  The WTC Health Program covers all flu shots at no cost for members with certified conditions at in-network pharmacies.
-  Use the Express Scripts pharmacy card—no prescription needed.
-  If you're not due for your annual visit during flu season, members without certified conditions should chat with their primary care physician and utilize their health insurance.
-  This year in the clinic we will only have Fluzone available, not Fluzone High-Dose (*ideal for folks 65 & older*).



Bill Issues?

You should never receive a bill for treatments, doctor visits, or hospital stays related to a certified condition. If you do, don't worry! Just call the number at the bottom of the billing document and inform the billing representative that the World Trade Center Health Program should be billed, not your health insurance company.

Received a second bill after calling? Let us know, and we'll happily assist you in resolving it.

**Call us at (631) 855-1200 and ask for "case management."
We're here to support you!**

Changes in CPAP Supply Coverage



If you're using Durable Medical Equipment (DME) for CPAP therapy, here's some important news: Recent changes by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services are adjusting how often you can get certain supply items. Now, some items are available every 6 months instead of every 3 months.

**Call us at (631) 855-1200 and ask for "DME."
We're here to help you navigate these updates and ensure you have everything you need.**

Research Updates

Our clinical researchers continue to look for ways to help our patients manage their WTC health conditions. By participating in our research studies, you become a vital part of the solution. We are thankful to all of our patients who willingly share information, participate in scans, and undergo other tests. Your participation makes our research program robust and meaningful. Below is information about ongoing studies focused on post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and physical activity.



The Impact of PTSD Over 20 Years

For over 20 years, providers and researchers have been checking in on nearly 14,000 people who helped with rescue and cleanup after the 9/11 attacks. Every year, about 8 to 15 out of every 100 of these responders showed signs of serious PTSD.

The study, funded by the CDC, SUNY, and the NIH, and led by Dr. Roman Kotov and Dr. Frank Mann, followed responders who came through our clinics. It found that PTSD symptoms often peaked around 10 years after 9/11, then slowly got better. One major finding is that for many people, recovery takes time. About half of the responders did not improve for many years, which means short-term help often isn't enough. Ongoing monitoring visits are important because symptoms can present late or return after feeling better.

This research would not have been possible without the hard work and dedication of the providers, research staff, and investigators who have supported the World Trade Center Health Program since the beginning. Above all, it's thanks to the responders themselves who have continued to participate in important research studies.

DID YOU KNOW?

The 10% of people who struggled the most with PTSD had the highest mental health costs and trouble doing everyday activities, which is why it's so important to stay connected to care and support.



Motivating Members to Increase Physical Activity

Although knowing that physical activity may help alleviate pain and fatigue from cancer treatments, many people struggle to stay active. Our latest study incorporates motivational education into clinical visits for cancer survivors. We aim to integrate this educational approach into patient care by working closely with study participants to find the best physical activity for them.

Eligibility:

- Open to anyone in the WTC Health Program with a history of cancer

Participants will receive:

- A Fitbit to track your progress
- Educational resources on physical activity
- Personalized action planning guidance

Physical Activity can improve:

- Cancer-related fatigue
- Health-related quality of life
- Physical function
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Swelling in arms/legs
- Bone health
- Sleep

Enrollment is open and expected to close by November 2025.



If you would like to learn more or participate in this study, you may reach out to Pam Ginex:

Email: pamela.ginex@stonybrookmedicine.edu

Phone: (917) 207-0174

or

Research Project Coordinator - Candace Arneaud

Email: Candace.Arneaud@stonybrookmedicine.edu



New MART Asthma Therapy



**Symbicort (Budesonide/Formoterol)
Used as a Maintenance and Rescue Inhaler**



MART THERAPY - INHALER Maintenance And Reliever Therapy

MART, or Maintenance and Reliever Therapy, is a promising way to manage asthma with just one inhaler! Isn't that convenient? This inhaler combines a regular asthma control medicine with a quick-relief medicine. Patients can use the same inhaler for their daily asthma care as well as to quickly ease sudden symptoms or asthma attacks.

HOW?

How does it work?

- **Maintenance dose:** 1-2 inhalations twice daily
- **Rescue dose:** 1-2 inhalations as needed for symptom relief, before exercise or allergen exposure
- **Total maximum number of inhalations per day:** 12 inhalations



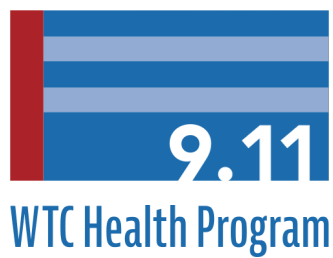
When should I call for a refill?

- When the actuation counter reaches the yellow zone
- Symbicort is good for 3 months after it is taken out of its pouch

help

When should I seek medical attention?

- When symptoms worsen rapidly
- When you are experiencing extreme difficulty breathing or speaking
- There is little to no improvement from your Symbicort inhalation



Stony Brook World Trade Center Health and Wellness Program
500 Commack Road, Suite 160
Commack, NY 11725

Clinics Closed:

October 13 - Columbus Day
November 27 - Thanksgiving
November 28 - the day after Thanksgiving
December 25 - Christmas Day
December 26 - the day after Christmas
January 1 - New Year's Day
January 2 - the day after New Year's
February 16 - President's Day

Locations:

Commack Clinic

500 Commack Road, Suite 160
Commack, NY 11725
(631) 855-1200

Westbury Clinic

1600 Stewart Avenue, Suite 220
Westbury, NY 11590
(631) 855-1200



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