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Cancer’s hidden weakness may begin with diet

by Michael Chase, MS, NTP
Nutrition Science
Oregon Natural Market

Fifty-five years ago, Richard Nixon declared war on cancer. Cancer, apparently, never got the memo. It still takes about 1,668 Americans a day – three fully loaded Airbuses, every single day – and the CDC expects it to bump heart disease from the top spot on our mortality charts by 2030. So why can’t the most expensive medical system on Earth close this deal? Because cancer cheats.



According to City of Hope researcher Ajay Goel, Ph.D., who has spent nearly 30 years staring at it under a microscope, no two cancers are alike, and no single cancer stays the same for long. Some tumors carry drug-resistant cells before treatment even starts. Others learn to shrug off a chemo agent within weeks. But the real villains are “cancer stem cells” – a tiny elite squad that governs the rest of the tumor and is astonishingly hard to kill.

Surgery, chemo, and radiation may wipe out 95% of a cancer, but these cells duck the assault, tuck themselves into the deepest recesses of the body, and go quiet for months or years. Then, when the coast is clear and the patient has been declared “in remission,” they wake up and start the whole mess over, often nastier than before. That’s why so many “cured” patients get the phone call nobody wants. And here’s the uncomfortable truth: conventional medicine currently has no drug that reliably touches them.

So where does this monster come from? Not, for the most part, from your family tree. Goel argues that inherited genes alone drive only a sliver of cancers – he cites under 2%, and even the more conservative estimates land around 5 to 10%. The bigger story is epigenetics: the way diet, body weight, toxins, stress, and movement flip our tumor-suppressor genes off and our cancer-promoting genes on. What “runs in families” is usually the dinner table, not the DNA.

Exhibit A: Japanese immigrants to Hawaii in the 1950s and ‘60s, lost their enviably low colorectal cancer rates within a single generation of eating like Americans.

Exhibit B: obesity, now linked to at least 13 types of cancer and roughly one in five cases. The good news, and it’s genuinely good, is that epigenetic changes are reversible. A plate built on vegetables (cruciferous ones especially), berries, garlic, whole grains, and wild-caught fish, plus about 8,000 steps a day – tied in an NIH study to a 51% lower risk of death from all causes compared with 4,000 – starts coaxing those genes back to their day jobs. None of it is glamorous, and all of it is cheaper than chemo.

The spark behind much of this is chronic inflammation. Not the honest, short-lived swelling of a stubbed toe, but the silent, low-grade kind fueled by processed food, overeating, smoking, polluted air, household chemicals, and the nonstop stress of modern life that never gets a recovery period. At the center sits a protein complex called NF-kappa B, which Goel calls the hub of inflammation. When it stays switched on, it bathes cells in free radicals, damages DNA, and helps rewrite the behavior of hundreds of genes. From there, cancer runs a three-part con. It disables apoptosis, the built-in timer that tells worn-out cells to die. It triggers angiogenesis, sprouting its own blood supply to hijack oxygen and nutrients. And it metastasizes, slipping through the lymph and bloodstream to set up shop in distant organs.

This is where conventional drug design hits a wall. Most cancer drugs are built to strike a single target, and cancer, with its endless backup pathways, simply reroutes like water around a rock. Ironically, roughly 75% of approved anticancer

drugs are derived from or modeled on plant compounds, yet the process strips away the dozens of companion molecules that make the plant work in the first place. Curcumin is the opposite of a sniper: it quiets NF-kappa B and COX-2, dials down inflammatory cytokines, mops up free radicals, and nudges damaged cells into autophagy, the cellular equivalent of taking out the trash. The catch? Turmeric is only 2 to 5% curcumin. India, where turmeric shows up at nearly every meal, reports cancer rates about four and a half times lower than ours, though a younger population and spotty record-keeping surely shade those numbers.

Here’s the part that gets me excited. Goel’s team – first at Baylor, now at City of Hope, with over 30 published studies to show for it – has spent years hunting those stem cells with plant compounds, and curcumin is the star of the show. Not turmeric the spice, mind you, but concentrated curcumin blended with turmeric essential oil, which is what Goel uses in his research because it’s actually absorbed. In lab models grown from real patients’ colorectal tumors, curcumin convinced those nearly immortal stem cells to die on schedule – something Goel calls a huge step forward buried in dry scientific jargon. It’s one of the very few substances, natural or pharmaceutical, shown to eliminate chemo-resistant cancer stem cells, and grape seed OPCs are the only other one his lab has seen do it. Which is why Goel makes a bold recommendation: anyone who’s been treated for cancer should consider taking curcumin (paired with andrographis) every day for the rest of their life as insurance against a recurrence. That’s the mindset shift here.

This isn’t herbs versus chemo and radiation; it’s herbs alongside them. His research suggests andrographis improved responses with 5-FU in advanced colorectal cancer, melatonin helped overcome 5-FU resistance, berberine re-sensitized pancreatic cancer cells to gemcitabine, and curcumin plus grape seed OPCs outperformed either solo – conventional therapy working harder at gentler doses while healthy tissue gets some armor.

Nobody should swap an oncologist for a supplement aisle, and yes, most of this evidence is still preclinical. But if I were staring down a diagnosis, I’d want every weapon on the table, a curcumin capsule in my pocket, and a doctor curious enough to read the studies.

About the Author

Michael Chase, co-owner of Chase’s Natural Market in Ontario, Ore., is a third-generation natural foods retailer with advanced training in human nutrition and nutritional therapy. Along with his wife, Emily, he is dedicated to helping individuals and families make informed choices for healthier living. Learn more about Chase’s Natural Market in their advertisement featured in this Healthy Living edition.

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Dr. Christopher Liby, a board-certified general surgeon at Weiser Memorial Hospital, provides a full range of surgical and digestive health services, helping patients throughout the region access expert care close to home. *Courtesy photo.*

Colonoscopy – What you should know

There are some topics people just don't generally feel comfortable with. Colonoscopy tends to be one of these topics – it either elicits jokes, cringes, or disengagement from conversation. It is, quite literally, an intrusive (see, the jokes have already begun) sort of thing.

The truth is though, as the children's book says, everyone poops. This means we all, at some point, need to examine the systems involved in that process.

Experts are saying 45 is the new 50 when it comes to Colorectal Cancer screening. So, if you fondly remember dial-up internet's early days, playing Oregon Trail in school, or Weiser before McDonald's it's probably about time for your first colonoscopy.

Colorectal Cancer is the third most common cancer for men and women combined. It is highly treatable and is often curable when caught early. This is why you should keep reading.

While it can seem daunting, or even embarrassing, to schedule a colonoscopy, patients report it as the "best nap" of their lives. Think of it like a little "me time" with an important screening – which is adulting at its best.

Choosing a colonoscopy over the alternate stool FIT test (the kind that you send off in the mail) has several benefits. First, in general, people only need a colonoscopy every 10 years vs yearly for the alternate stool FIT test. Another benefit is that colonoscopy is a one-step test that looks for growths (called polyps) in your entire colon (large intestine) and rectum and your doctor can remove polyps and prevent Colorectal Cancer all in one step. You also don't have to bother with the sample, mailing it off, and the likelihood of repeated testing (and cost) due to false positives. Plus, did I mention the amazing nap?

Dr. Liby, at Weiser Memorial Hospital, can perform your colonoscopy here locally. For more information, or to schedule your appointment, call 208-549-3152.

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A Weiser High School graduate, Dr. Lucia Carbajal treats families and pregnant patients at Gritman’s Medical Center’s Downtown Clinic in Moscow, Idaho. She received an undergraduate degree and then her medical degree in 2022. From there Dr. Carbajal completed a Family Medicine Residency in 2025 and completed a Full Circle Health OB Fellowship in 2026. *Courtesy photo*

Lucia Carbajal MD: A dream fulfilled

by Keith Boles

When we were children, our imaginations ran wild with dreams of who we might become — a doctor, a scientist, an astronaut, a teacher. For most, those dreams faded with time. But for one Weiser High School graduate, Lucia Carbajal, that childhood vision never wavered. She carried it all the way to reality and now serves as a family medicine doctor, turning youthful inspiration into a lifelong calling.

After graduating from Weiser High School, Carbajal headed to college in Arizona. Once she earned her degree, she began working as a medical scribe for an endocrinologist — a job that gave her firsthand insight into patient care while she prepared for the MCAT, the entrance exam for medical school. What followed was a demanding journey: four years of medical school, three years of residency, and an additional year of specialized training.

That final year allowed her to master high-risk deliveries

and manage complex pregnancies. She completed the program in Boise this July and will soon begin her new position in Moscow, Idaho.

As a family medicine doctor, Carbajal’s days are full and varied. She cares for children, teens, adults, and expectant mothers — often guiding families through every stage of life. It’s work she truly loves.

“I truly love getting to know my patients well and being able to care for whole families,” Carbajal said. “Some of the most fulfilling moments I’ve had in my career have been taking care of pregnant mothers throughout their whole pregnancy, delivering their baby, and then becoming their baby’s doctor as well.”

Carbajal chose to stay in Idaho for a simple reason: the state needs more physicians. Her decision reflects both her sense of purpose and her deep appreciation for the community that raised her.

“I love the sense of community that small towns offer and how well you get to know peo-

ple,” she said. “It also helped me understand how important rural primary care physicians are within their communities and how much of a difference they can make for their patients.”

Many people from Weiser helped her reach this point. Dr. Lore Wootton was an encouraging voice and offered Carbajal a job-shadowing opportunity in high school — an experience that left a lasting impression. Her high school English teacher, Mr. Maxfield, also inspired her, nurturing her critical-thinking skills and encouraging her to chase her dreams.

Now, as Carbajal begins the next chapter of her career, her story stands as a reminder that childhood dreams can lead to extraordinary realities. Her dedication and compassion continue to make a difference — and perhaps inspire the next generation of Weiser students to follow in her footsteps. After all, the world always needs people like Lucia Carbajal in it.



Sip Your Way to Better Health

Three refreshing beverages packed with nutrients, hydration, and flavor.

Berry Spinach Power Smoothie

Servings: 2

Ingredients

- 1 cup fresh spinach
- 1 cup frozen mixed berries
- 1 banana
- 1 cup unsweetened almond milk
- ½ cup plain Greek yogurt
- 1 tablespoon chia seeds

Directions

1. Add all ingredients to a blender.
2. Blend until smooth.
3. Serve immediately.

Why It’s Healthy

Packed with antioxidants from berries, fiber from chia seeds, and protein from Greek yogurt, this smoothie is a great breakfast or post-workout drink.

Citrus Mint Hydration Refresher

Servings: 4

Ingredients

- 1 orange, thinly sliced
- 1 lemon, thinly sliced
- ½ cucumber, sliced
- Fresh mint leaves
- 1 quart cold water
- Ice

Directions

1. Combine fruit, cucumber, and mint in a pitcher.
2. Add water and refrigerate for at least 1 hour.
3. Serve over ice.

Why It’s Healthy

A refreshing alternative to sugary beverages that encourages hydration with natural flavors and no added sugar.

Tropical Green Energy Smoothie

Servings: 2

Ingredients

- 1 cup frozen pineapple chunks
- 1 cup mango chunks
- 1 handful kale or spinach
- 1 cup coconut water
- Juice of ½ lime
- 1 tablespoon ground flaxseed

Directions

1. Blend all ingredients until creamy.
2. Add more coconut water if needed.
3. Serve chilled.

Why It’s Healthy

Provides vitamins A and C, along with potassium and fiber, while coconut water offers natural electrolytes.

Healthy Living Tip

Watch what you drink. Many specialty coffees, energy drinks, and sodas contain more sugar than most people realize. Replacing just one sugary beverage a day with water, infused water, or a fruit smoothie can reduce added sugar intake and support overall health.

Looking for an extra wellness boost? Single-serve nutrition packets and drink enhancers make it easy to customize your favorite beverages. Whether you’re seeking more energy, added collagen, hydration support, immune-boosting vitamins, protein, or ingredients aimed at improving focus and memory, there’s likely a mix designed to fit your needs. These convenient add-ins can transform an ordinary glass of water or smoothie into a personalized wellness drink that supports your health goals throughout the day.

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Weiser Memorial Hospital’s CEO Beau McNeff, pictured below, spoke with the *Signal American* about the hospital’s planned strategies to deal with expected cuts to reimbursements from Medicare and Medicaid covered patients. The pressure from the cuts is not exclusive to small, rural hospitals, and Weiser Memorial’s leadership is taking proactive measures to add services and continue to serve Weiser and the surrounding communities.

Growth strategy at WMH counters healthcare cuts

by Nancy Grindstaff

Weiser Memorial Hospital CEO Beau McNeff says federal Medicaid cuts could create new challenges for rural healthcare providers, but the local hospital’s strategy is not to shrink.

Instead, Weiser Memorial plans to expand key specialty services, strengthen internal operations and grow patient volumes in an effort to remain financially sustainable despite a changing healthcare landscape.

McNeff said changes in federal healthcare funding will inevitably affect rural providers, especially hospitals that serve large numbers of Medicare and Medicaid patients.

“We took almost a trillion dollars out of Medicaid and healthcare over the next 10 years,” McNeff said. While he noted federal programs aimed at supporting rural healthcare will provide some assistance, he said the reductions still represent a significant challenge for hospitals nationwide.

Those concerns are particularly relevant in communities like Weiser, where McNeff said approximately 70 percent of patients rely on some form of government-funded healthcare coverage.

“When the government cuts some, that’s a big piece for us,” he said.

Nationally, hundreds of rural hospitals have been identified as financially vulnerable, and McNeff said the trend is troubling. Yet rather than retreating, Weiser Memorial is focusing on expansion in areas where local demand is strongest.

“The best way we know to go forward is to grow and kind of grow out of being in a risky place,” he said.

That growth strategy begins with specialty care.

Over the past year, the hospital has worked to add services that residents have traditionally had to seek outside the community. McNeff pointed to the recent addition of podiatry services and the launch of an expanded wound care program as examples of investments designed to keep patients closer to home.

“We’re just going to keep trying to find those areas where there’s a group that we really need to serve, that makes good sense for us to serve, and try and grow those services,” he said.

The approach is rooted in feedback gathered through the hospital’s Community Health Needs Assessment, which identified specialty care as one of the area’s top healthcare priorities.

“The number one need that we heard in our Community Health Needs Assessment was more specialty services out here,” McNeff said. “That’s what we need to respond to.”

At the same time, hospital leaders are carefully evaluating every service line to ensure resources are being directed where they can have the greatest impact.

According to McNeff, decisions are guided by several questions: whether providers are available, whether reimbursement supports the service, and whether the community demonstrates a clear need.

Not every decision is based on



financial performance alone.

McNeff pointed to behavioral health services as an example of a program that remains essential despite generating limited revenue. The hospital has seen reductions in behavioral health-related emergency and 911 calls as those services have expanded, reinforcing their value to the community.

“It’s a huge community need and something that we’re going to continue to offer,” he said.

In addition to growing services, McNeff said the hospital

is focused on operating more efficiently, reducing unnecessary expenses, developing internal expertise and encouraging employee involvement in organizational decision-making. Ultimately, he believes one of the hospital’s greatest strengths is the personalized care that comes with being a small, rural facility.

“The folks, when they come here, they love us,” McNeff said. “We’re trying to highlight those things and remind folks we’re here.”

Community turns out for Angel Wings fundraiser



The 2026 Angel Wings Walk/Run event drew a nice turnout of supporters of the southwest Idaho and eastern Oregon cancer support group. Ringing cowbells to start the race were young Milo Hernandez, a cancer survivor and fighter from Payette, and Weiser volunteer Ralph Rowley, who just recently finished tying his 710th blanket for Angel Wings clients. Throughout the event and silent auction, Angel Wings is closer to its 2026 fundraising goal. *Photos by Wendy Martell*

by Nancy Grindstaff

Saturday's brisk autumn wind did little to dampen spirits as Angel Wings Network hosted its 15th annual Walk/Run fundraiser, bringing together cancer survivors, caregivers, volunteers and supporters from across southwest Idaho and Eastern Oregon.

Before participants took to the course, Angel Wings Executive Director Mabel Dobbs recognized the volunteers, donors and community partners who make the organization's work possible year-round. Among those honored was longtime volunteer Ralph Rowley, a retired educator and coach who recently completed his 710th handmade blanket for cancer patients through the nonprofit's comfort program.

The crowd also welcomed 6-year-old Milo Hernandez of Payette, who has battled osteosarcoma and recently returned home after treatment. Dobbs invited Milo to help ring the ceremonial cowbell and start the race, drawing enthusiastic applause from participants gathered at Weiser's City Park.

Throughout the morning, at-

tendees visited the survivor tent, signed tribute markers in honor or memory of loved ones affected by cancer, enjoyed refreshments donated by local businesses and met Angel Wings' volunteer drivers, who provide transportation for patients traveling to treatments. According to Dobbs, 23 volunteer drivers currently help serve cancer patients throughout the region.

The event also highlighted the broader impact of cancer awareness and advocacy. Among those attending was Erica Watkins, Idaho Grassroots Manager for the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, who visited with Angel Wings representatives during the fundraiser.

Also in the crowd was Olivia Sanders, a 2025 Weiser High School graduate now attending the College of Idaho. Sanders, participating in the walk/run with her mother, Lorinda Sanders, and aunt Leanna Young of Orem, Utah, shared how her studies are connecting scientific research with her lifelong passion for music.

A biomedical sciences and music double major, Sanders partici-

pates in laboratory research examining how proteins are absorbed by breast cancer tumors. The work aims to develop treatments that target tumors more precisely while potentially reducing side effects.

"We're looking at what proteins these tumors are eating and trying to engineer a drug that can attach to those proteins and Trojan-horse its way into the whole tumor," Sanders said.

Outside the lab, Sanders is preparing to perform with Opera Idaho's upcoming production of Mozart's *The Abduction from the Seraglio* at Boise's Egyptian Theatre. She said balancing science and the arts is both challenging and rewarding.

As walkers crossed the finish line and volunteers continued welcoming guests, Sanders' story reflected much of what the day's event celebrated: hope, perseverance and the many ways people contribute to the fight against cancer. For Angel Wings Network, the annual fundraiser remains a reminder that support comes in many forms, from a ride to treatment and a handmade blanket to



A steady volunteer for Angel Wings Network, Ralph Rowley began making hand-tied blankets just a few years ago that are given to clients as they enter cancer treatment. Rowley recently completed his 710th blanket.

research that may one day improve lives for patients everywhere.

Reframing the journey to a healthier you

by Crystal Linn

This month I am sharing excerpts from my upcoming book Stress Free Weight Reduction, scheduled for 2027 publishing – enjoy.

One critical step to begin with is to identify the cause of the weight gain. Is it the result of stress eating, hormonal imbalances, medications or something else? Check with your doctor or a trusted mentor to confirm the reason(s) for the weight.

Another important step is to understand your whys. What is your main motivation for weight reduction. With a clear picture in your mind that image will create the needed motivation to go forward.

Once we begin shedding excess pounds a key factor is to reframe our words, eliminating the words lose and loss. When we were children and lost something, the consequences were always negative. One example is, if we lost our lunch money we went hungry. Over the years our inner child learned

that it is harmful to lose things, and does its best to make sure we lose nothing – not even unwanted weight! Instead of saying, “I want to lose weight,” it is better to say something like, “I want to shed weight.” When we were children it was acceptable to shed our coats and our inner child is willing to comply to shedding unwanted pounds.

The temptation to cheat is greater when a person is on a diet. We all have experienced the inner conflict illustrated by an angel on one shoulder and the devil on the other. Replace those angel and devil images with parent and child images, and designate one day a week for a free eating day. Again, reframing our words. Since we know cheating is a bad thing, if we designate one day for a cheating day we feel guilty and stressed. However, if we have a free eating day then when our inner child throws a tantrum demanding candy, the adult image can calmly tell the inner child to

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- Reconnect with Hunger Cues
- Eat Slowly & Enjoy Every Bite
- Focus on How You Eat, Not Just Calories



EAT NOURISHING FOODS

- Prioritize Protein (e.g., Eggs, Yogurt)
- Fill Up on High-Fiber Plants
- Naturally Crowd Out Cravings



MOVE GENTLY FOR MOOD

- Find Activities You Enjoy
- Boost Metabolism with Light Resistance
- Exercise for Energy, Not Punishment



PRIORITIZE QUALITY SLEEP

- A Foundation for Weight Loss
- Balances Hunger Hormones
- Keep Bedroom Cool & Consistent

A GENTLE, SUSTAINABLE APPROACH TO HEALTH

hush and they can have that treat on the next free eating day. The parent image can also remind that child image of the multiple treats he/she

received last week on free eating days. This practice reduces the inner turmoil and stress of wanting to eat healthy and still craving the un-

healthy foods.

In all of the books and articles I have read on weight issues not once have I seen anyone address the issue of obliga-

tion eating. It most likely started when we were children and told we had to eat everything on our plate. If we think about it, eating is a part of every celebration in every culture in the world. Two examples are ice cream for Memorial Day and pumpkin pie for Thanksgiving. When we attend a family gathering or a birthday party everyone is always pushing food on us – and it is done in love. Here are a few ideas for dealing with this issue. Feel free to come up with your own.

The doctor placed me on a strict diet.

I’m too full, let me take some home.

I’m too full, just one tiny bite to taste it.

I am allergic, or this gives me hives, or something similar.

One other excuse which could be used in special occasions is to say, “It is against my religion to eat this food.”

Email us your comments at info@WellnessWithAge.com. We always enjoy reader feedback, and I personally reply to each email.

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