



Heart to Heart

NEWS FROM ST. LUKE COMMUNITY HEALTHCARE

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LASTING LEGACY

Dr. Vizcarra retires after 44-year career in healthcare

AFTER MORE THAN 44 YEARS OF PRACTICING MEDICINE — including 32 years with St. Luke Community Healthcare — Dr. Ed Vizcarra is retiring.

St. Luke CEO Steve Todd recalls Dr. Vizcarra serving on the interview board when Todd applied for his first role as clinic manager 27 years ago. He said he was struck by Vizcarra’s kindness from day one.

“Dr. Vizcarra is part of the bedrock foundation of St. Luke Community Healthcare,” Todd said. “He has served as chief of staff for at least a couple of decades combined and has been instrumental in growing St. Luke into the organization it is today.”

“When I think about the most impactful physicians who’ve helped shape the success of St. Luke over the years — physicians like Dr. Brooks, Dr. Ballhagen and Dr. McDonald — Dr. Ed Vizcarra stands among them.”

Todd noted that Vizcarra has delivered thousands of babies across the valley and saved countless lives in the emergency department.



Beloved family physician Dr. Ed Vizcarra is retiring from St. Luke Community Healthcare at the end of October.

“He has always led from the standpoint of what is best for the patient and works hard to get to the root of patients’ problems. He is a great listener and a lifelong learner. It has been a true pleasure to work with him over the years,” Todd said.

Leah Emerson, a longtime board member and former director of nursing at St. Luke, echoed Todd’s praise.

“I have known Dr. Vizcarra since the first day he joined the medical staff,” Emerson said. “I’ve had the privilege of working with him in various hospital settings — inpatient, emergency room, postpartum and pediatric/newborn care. He consistently takes time to listen to his patients and is truly devoted to their care. Although very pleasant to work with, he holds the staff caring for his patients to a high standard.”

She also recalled his composure under pressure and his surgical skill.

“His tenderness and respect for tissue was admired by colleagues who often

depended on him in emergencies,” Emerson said. “I’ll miss his ability to be the ‘voice of reason,’ contributing years of accumulated knowledge and insight into important discussions about patient care and healthcare overall.”

Over his three-decade career at St. Luke, Dr. Vizcarra witnessed and contributed to major advancements in rural healthcare. He was part of the implementation of state-of-the-art laboratory analyzers, CT scans, MRIs, nuclear medicine, cardiac stress testing and ultrasounds. He also saw the addition of new departments, a wide range of specialists and physician extenders, including family nurse practitioners, advanced practice registered nurses and physician assistants.

The hospital expanded during his tenure to include two private-room hospital wings, a convenient care clinic, a birthing center with a dedicated surgical suite, two

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HEALTHY AGING

What to expect as we age and how to thrive in our golden years

AGING IS A JOURNEY EVERYONE SHARES. While no two paths look exactly the same, there are common changes the body and mind go through as the years pass.

Dr. Megan Vigil, a primary care physician at St. Luke Community Healthcare, shares her perspective on what’s normal — and how to stay healthy along the way.

“Even if we don’t have major health conditions, our organs slowly lose some capacity over time,” Dr. Vigil said. “That can mean we tire more easily, medications may affect us differently and even our sense of taste can change.”

Other physical changes include slower metabolism, thinner skin and joints that feel the effects of years of use. Women, in particular, may notice more bone loss after menopause.

“It’s all part of the natural process,” Dr. Vigil said. “The key is to understand these changes so they don’t catch us by surprise.”

The brain also experiences changes with age. While many people worry when they misplace their keys or forget why they walked into a room, “those are very common memory lapses.” “Age-related memory loss is usually mild, and people are often aware of it,” Dr. Vigil continued. “Dementia is different — it involves memory problems plus other issues like difficulty with language or problem-solving, and it tends to worsen over time.”

Screenings remain an important part of preventive care, but Dr. Vigil encourages patients to think carefully about them as they age.

“Tests like mammograms or colonoscopies are meant to find treatable conditions early,” she said. “But it’s always worth asking yourself, ‘Would I want treatment if this test found something?’ That answer may change over time, and that’s OK.”

So what can people do to age well? Vigil highlights a few steps:

- Stay active to keep both body and brain strong.
- Stay socially connected, whether

continued on next page

HEARTFELT THANKS FOR EXCEPTIONAL CARE, LEADERSHIP

IN MY 30-PLUS YEARS WORKING IN THE HEALTHCARE FIELD, I have had the good fortune of working with some truly outstanding physicians. One physician who ranks among the best is Ed Vizcarra, MD.

I remember meeting Dr. Vizcarra for the first time during my interview for the clinic manager position at St. Luke Community Healthcare back in 1998. During our discussion, Dr. Vizcarra spoke highly of St. Luke Community Healthcare. He shared the virtues of a community-owned institution and the dedication the staff had to caring for neighbors, friends, and community members. He explained that the physicians were mainly family medicine trained, capable of working in all facets of care across a patient’s lifetime, and that those same physicians staffed the emergency department, inpatient service, and clinics—providing care to adults, pediatrics, and expectant mothers.

He emphasized that this unique combination ultimately delivered care to the community that is second to none.

For 27 years I have worked with Dr. Vizcarra and have seen firsthand what it means to be a family medicine physician and what it looks like to deliver care that is second to none. Dr. Vizcarra exemplifies the virtues of family medicine. While others have contributed along the way, Dr. Vizcarra has led the effort to instill the values of service, generosity, kindness, and excellence into the very DNA of St. Luke. These values will live on through the example he has set and the work he has done.



It is bittersweet congratulating Dr. Vizcarra on his retirement. If there was ever anyone who deserved the fruits of retirement and the opportunity to relax and pursue his other passions, it would be Dr. Vizcarra. For St. Luke, I am sad to see a generational leader and exceptional physician retire. He has touched the lives of so many. I am comforted knowing that we have an excellent group of physicians and providers, many of whom were mentored by Dr. Vizcarra and have already begun to help fill the void. Rest assured, the great care you have come to expect from Dr. Vizcarra will live on through our present group of physicians and providers who are here to serve our community.

While Dr. Vizcarra and I have shared in the satisfaction and delight of seeing St. Luke grow, we have also enjoyed watching each other’s children grow up. We have worked to build St. Luke services, add new clinics, and participate in the design of the new hospital. He has cared for me and my family members more times than I can count. We have played rounds of golf, hunted together, and enjoyed discussions over many meals. That is the beauty of family medicine physicians—they really become part of your family. Dr. Vizcarra will always remain a part of the St. Luke family and will have a special place in mine as well.

Please join me in extending a heartfelt thank you to Dr. Vizcarra for his service to his community and for his service to St. Luke Community Healthcare.

Steve

“Healthy aging isn’t about avoiding every bump in the road. It’s about keeping yourself engaged, moving and connected, so you can keep doing the things you love.”

- Dr. Megan Vigil, Primary Care Physician, St. Luke Community Healthcare

healthy aging (from page 1)

with friends, family or community groups.
Eat a healthy diet to fuel energy and mood.
Quit smoking, at any age.
Check in with your doctor regularly for recommended immunizations and screenings.
“Healthy aging isn’t about avoiding every bump in the road,” Dr. Vigil said. “It’s about keeping yourself engaged, moving and connected, so you can keep doing the things you love.”
St. Luke providers are available to help patients through each stage of life, offering guidance and resources that fit individual goals. To schedule a wellness visit with Dr. Vigil call 406-676-3600.



Dr. Megan Vigil visits with Kenneth Noland during an annual check up.

HEALTH WATCH

For those experiencing suicidal thoughts, or know someone who is, *please reach out.*

1-800-273-8255 / Text MT to 741-741

SuicidePreventionLifeline.org

EMPLOYEE OF THE QUARTER

Quarter 3:
Emma Smith, Maintenance

Emma has worked for several summers and school breaks at St. Luke. She does hard work, largely outdoors, but does so with a smile on her face. She comes to work early and is pleasant with everyone she interacts with. Emma has also assisted with special projects in other departments. Her teamwork and dedication are highly valued here at St. Luke!



COURTESY PHOTO
Caitlin Hicock, St. Luke Community Healthcare FNP, poses for a photo with her baby girl.

Welcome to St. Luke: Meet Caitlin Hickok, FNP

ST. LUKE COMMUNITY HEALTH-CARE IS PLEASED TO WELCOME **CAITLIN HICKOK, FAMILY NURSE PRACTITIONER**, to the Ronan Community Clinic. Caitlin brings a passion for primary care and women’s health, along with a love for the Mission Valley community, which she now calls home.
Q&A with Caitlin Hickok, FNP
Q: Tell us a little about your background. Where are you from?
A: I’m originally from Seattle, but I left at 18 to do some traveling. I spent time in Vancouver, Atlanta, and eventually Montana. My mom’s side of the family is from the South, so I grew up with ties in several places. My brother grew up in Lolo, Montana, and in 2020, I decided to move here to be closer to his family. I ended up meeting my husband Sean, who is from Mission, and it’s now become my home too!
Q: What inspired you to become a nurse practitioner?
A: During a period when I was still deciding what I wanted to do, I worked alongside a nurse practitioner who made such a strong impression on me. I admired her skill, her compassion, and the autonomy she had in her role. That experience really lit the spark for me. I also loved my time as a nurse—it taught me communication, building rapport, and

the importance of caring for the whole person. Becoming an NP felt like the perfect next step.
Q: Can you tell us about your education and training?
A: I earned my first bachelor’s degree in Psychology from the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, but I realized I wanted to pursue healthcare. I went on to complete my nursing degree at Emory University in Atlanta and worked as a nurse for several years. Ultimately, I returned to Emory to complete my nurse practitioner training. Since then, I’ve worked in both Georgia and Montana, gaining experience in primary care and women’s health.
Q: What areas of healthcare are you most passionate about?
A: Women’s health is my biggest passion, especially after becoming a mother myself. Going through pregnancy and childbirth gave me an even deeper appreciation for how incredible women’s bodies are. I enjoy caring for patients of all ages, but I especially love supporting women through every stage of life, from adolescence to pregnancy to menopause. In Missoula, I did quite a bit of work with hormone replacement therapy and menopause care, and I hope to bring those services here as well.
Q: What do you enjoy most about primary care?

A: Primary care is such a unique opportunity to walk alongside patients and families throughout their lives. I enjoy the relationships, the preventative care, and being able to support people in making healthier choices every day.
Q: What do you like to do when you’re not at work?
A: I’m happiest outdoors! I love fishing on the river, paddle-boarding, running, and hiking. My husband and I stay busy with our two amazing children – Caeleb and Remi, our two pups - Lady and Monte, and Louie the Cat, who rules over us all.
Q: Do you have a piece of health advice you often share with patients?
A: I remind patients that you only get one life, so take care of yourself now—preferably in a preventative way—so you can live as long and healthy a life as possible. And it doesn’t have to be overwhelming. Start small. Walk around the block today, drink a little more water tomorrow. Those steps add up.
Q: Fun fact—are you really related to Wild Bill Hickok?
A: Yes! My family is related to him. It’s always a fun surprise when people ask about my last name.
Caitlin is now accepting new patients at **St. Luke Community Clinic – Ronan**. To make an appointment, call **406-676-3600**.

FOUNDATION **NEWS:** caring community makes 25th annual dinner a success

This fall, something beautiful happened in our valley. We gathered for the 25th Annual St. Luke Foundation Dinner and Auction, raising funds to refresh the New Beginnings Birth Center. To those who attended, sponsored, donated, or simply cheered us on—thank you. You showed, once again, just how much heart lives in the Mission Valley.
What I loved most about this



Tammy Campbell

event isn’t just the total raised (though it’s exciting to see what we can accomplish!). It’s the way every act of generosity, big or small, comes together to create something extraordinary. A donated handmade item, a business sponsorship, a volunteer’s time, or a gift from the heart—it all matters. When combined, these gifts ripple outward in ways we may never fully see.
St. Luke is called “the Heart of the Mission Valley,” and I believe that’s because of people like you. We’re more than a healthcare system—we’re neighbors caring for neighbors, families supporting families, and friends lifting each other up. That spirit is what makes this valley so special.

If you’ve ever wondered whether your gift makes a difference, I promise you—it does. Together, we’ve built stronger facilities, expanded care, and created spaces where new life begins and healing happens.
And if you couldn’t join us for the dinner this year, there’s still another opportunity. Soon, you’ll receive a letter in the mail about our annual year-end giving campaign—a wonderful way to keep the spirit of generosity alive and make an impact close to home.
Thank you for being part of this story. I’m grateful to live here with you.

With warm regards,
Tammy Campbell

Understanding dementia and the Medicare Mini-Cog exam

by Eleanore Hobbs, M.D., Diplomate of the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology

THE POST-WORLD WAR II GENERATION is large and aging, likely leading to more age-related conditions, including cognitive decline. While some degree of memory loss can be part of the normal aging process, it is important to distinguish between typical changes and symptoms that may signal the onset of dementia.

One of the tools used to screen for memory issues is the **Mini-Cog**, a brief, evidence-based assessment included in the **Medicare Annual Wellness Visit**. This screening is designed to identify individuals who may benefit from further cognitive evaluation. A positive Mini-Cog result does not constitute a diagnosis but rather serves as an important prompt for further investigation and discussion with your primary care provider. It is essential to understand that **not all memory loss is related to Alzheimer’s disease**.

In fact, there are at least eleven recognized types of dementia, including:

1. Alzheimer’s disease
2. Vascular dementia
3. Lewy body dementia
4. Frontotemporal dementia
5. Dementia due to traumatic brain injury
6. Dementia associated with Parkinson’s disease or Huntington’s disease
7. Dementia secondary to HIV or prion disease
8. Pseudodementia (often linked to depression)

9. Dementia-like symptoms caused by other medical or psychiatric conditions

Each type presents differently, with varying onset, symptoms, progression, and treatment options. Some forms of memory impairment may be **reversible** if caused by an underlying medical or psychiatric condition. These possibilities should be ruled out and treated before a diagnosis of irreversible dementia is considered. If your screening is positive and further symptoms are present, your primary care provider may begin a more thorough evaluation, which includes medical and psychiatric history — both personal and family-related. This is a must. In many cases, referrals to specialists such as board-certified psychiatrists, neurologists, or geriatricians may be appropriate for a comprehensive diagnosis and care plan.

A Proactive Approach to Brain Health

Regular check-ins with your primary care provider remain one of the most effective ways to support healthy aging. If you are 65 or older and enrolled in Medicare, you are likely eligible for an **Annual Wellness Visit** each year. If you have not scheduled your visit yet this year, we highly encourage you to do so. These appointments offer preventive screenings — such as the Mini-Cog — along with an opportunity to create a personalized plan for maintaining your health. Early detection and intervention can make a meaningful difference. **If you test positive on the Mini-Cog**, it is just as critical that you schedule a timely follow-up with your primary care provider to discuss prognosis and treatment options.

“Critical access hospitals with a comprehensively trained family medicine base are key to quality, efficient rural healthcare.”

- Dr. Ed Vizcarra, St. Luke Community Healthcare physician



Dr. Vizcarra cares for a young patient during his early years at St. Luke. **Right:** A “bedrock physician,” Dr. Vizcarra will be missed for his leadership and patient-centered care.



Dr. Vizcarra (from page 1)

operating rooms and a procedure room. In more recent years, electronic medical record systems were introduced. “They’ve stayed cutting edge without being superfluous,” Vizcarra said.

He believes St. Luke’s success as an independent, community-owned institution lies in its strong base of family medicine, supported by generalist specialists such as surgeons and orthopedists.

“Critical access hospitals with a comprehensively trained family medicine base are key to quality, efficient rural healthcare,” he said.

Throughout his career, Vizcarra said he valued his coworkers as family and was driven by the opportunity to help people and learn something new each day. That, he said, is what he’ll miss most.

In retirement, he looks forward to spending more time with his wife, Eleanor, along with their children and

grandchildren. He’s also excited to travel — and to finally clean out his “man-cave and shop/barn,” which he jokes may take years. Still, he hopes to remain of service to the community in some way.

Todd said he will miss Vizcarra’s leadership, sense of purpose to community and holistic approach to health-care.

In a lighter memory, Emerson shared that the physician’s only flaw may have been his handwriting. “In true physician form, Dr. Vizcarra’s handwriting is atrocious,” she said, laughing. “Nurses often consulted with each other to decipher what he had written. On one occasion, I gave up and took the document directly to him — and he couldn’t read it either!”

To the next generation of physicians, Dr. Vizcarra offers this advice: Learn the cultures of your patients, treat everyone with respect and “always remember what a privilege and honor it is to do what you do.”

Dr. Vizcarra’s final day at St. Luke Community Healthcare is Friday, Oct. 31.

PROVIDER DIRECTORY

St. Luke Community Clinic – Ronan
Family Medicine and Obstetrics
406-676-3600
Joanna Billings, DO
John Foster, MD
Caitlin Hickok, FNP
Jay Perret, DO
Megan Vigil, MD
Ed Vizcarra, MD
Peggy Martino, NP-C
Katherine Mitchell, NP-C
Stacey Burdett, NP

St. Luke Community Clinic – Ridgewater
Family Medicine and Obstetrics
406-883-3737
Kelli Larson, DO
Justin Morgan, MD - coming 12/25
Mike Schallock, PA-C
Jamie Engeldrum, PA-C
Katie Troxel, DNP, FNP-C

St. Luke Community Clinic – Southshore
Family Medicine and Obstetrics
406-883-2555
Christina Marchion, MD
Tanner Staley, PA-C

St. Luke Community Clinic – St. Ignatius
Family Medicine and Obstetrics
406-745-2781
Joanna Billings, DO
Simon Crawford, PA-C
Steve Shepro, PA-C
Peggy Martino, NP-C
Stacey Burdett, NP

St. Luke Community Orthopedics
406-528-5580
Michael Dolecki, MD
Robert Alfiero, PA-C

St. Luke Community General Surgery
406-676-3600
Zach Hovorka, DO
Jesse Alfiero, PA-C

COUNSELING / PSYCHOLOGY

406-676-3600

Lyssa Haase, PsyD	Mikel Baxter, LCSW
Rick Greene, LCSW	Rachel Harriman, LCPC ACLC

EMERGENCY ROOM

Abi Nutt, MD	Phillip Anuta, DO
Isaac Billings, DO	Cara Harrop, MD
Darren Brockie, MD	Alex Nutt, MD
Ben Grass, MD	Claire Raines, MD
Mark Harding, MD	John VanArendonk, MD

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INDEPENDENT SPECIALISTS PROVIDING SERVICES WITH ST. LUKE COMMUNITY HEALTHCARE

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Ear, Nose and Throat 406-752-8330 Kyle Tubbs, MD Kent Keele, DO	
Psychiatry Eleanore Hobbs, MD 406-676-3600	

ECF PROFILE: Lou Ann Philips

LOU ANN (SCOTT) PHILLIPS WAS BORN on July 14th, 1934, 91 years ago, in Rapid City, South Dakota. Lou Ann was delivered in her Aunt Carrie’s home by another aunt, Minnie, who was a midwife. The middle child of five children, Lou Ann grew up with two older brothers and two younger sisters. Lou Ann is half Swiss, something she is very proud of, and her parents were some of the first settlers in the Rapid City area.



Lou Ann grew up on the Pine Ridge reservation – home of the Oglala Lakota people - on a big ranch, although the family would later move into town. Lou Ann’s father was a carpenter, primarily building homes, but he also built a courthouse, which still stands to this day in Belle Fourche. The children were no strangers to hard work – being ten years older than her youngest sister, Lou Ann, often helped with child care and housework, cooking and cleaning alongside her mother. She even helped drive the work horses when her parents would put up hay. She loved to ride horses – she even rode a horse to her one-room school until she got into high school, at which point she boarded in town.

Lou Ann graduated from high school magna cum laude in 1952 and shortly after married her sweetheart, Jim, whom she met while he was working for her father. Jim was drafted into the Korean War just one month later and was quickly shipped off to boot camp at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. Lou Ann didn’t wish to be apart from her new husband any longer than she had to be, so she followed him down there and worked at a children’s nursery. When Jim shipped out overseas, Lou Ann returned home to live with her parents temporarily. There, she grew a victory garden and helped foster children with her mother. Jim sent some money home, and the young couple hoped to be reunited soon.

Jim was overseas for two years when he was wounded in action; Lou Ann found out on her birthday. Jim didn’t return home immediately. Rather, he healed up and went back into action until he had completed his service. When he finally returned home, Jim went to work for Barber Transportation, where he would drive truck (mostly delivering freight) for the next 31 years! He also had several side jobs, such as breaking horses and working the sale barns.

The couple originally settled near family in Rapid City, where they had their son, Ed, in 1955. Daughter Jeanne then joined the family in 1959. The family moved a couple of times before settling in Rapid Valley. Jim tried his hand as a cattle rancher, while still working at Barber’s, and Lou Ann served as caregiver to her parents and others. In 1968, Lou Ann, her mother, and Jeanne were hit head-on by a drunk driver. Lou Ann suffered severe whiplash, which partially paralyzed her, and required surgery. She still has a scar down the back of her head and spine to this day. The surgery and the option of *not* operating both carried steep risks to her life, but Lou Ann went on to regain her full functions and, in the process, discovered a love for painting while stuck in a hospital bed in her living room. Painting was her therapy, and it also became an income stream.

With pastels as her favorite medium, Lou Ann captured life’s beauty around her for decades. She



went on to become the President of the Dakota Artists Guild and was instrumental in establishing the Dahl Arts Center in Rapid City. Lou Ann would travel all over half the country, attending western art shows. She even has artwork in the Mount Rushmore Visitor Center! In 1972, Rapid City experienced the worst flood in the history of the town, with 238 lives lost – including the doctor who performed Lou Ann’s surgery and her beloved nephew, Freeman, who was just 20 years old.

The family recovered from this devastation and moved to Montana in 1985 when Jim retired and sold the ranch. The whole family moved, including Ed and Jeanne. Ed became a saddle maker, Jeanne became a nurse (and would go on to work at St. Luke for 31 years!), and Lou Ann got involved with the schools, teaching art and subbing all over, including at Ronan, Pablo, St. Ignatius, and SKC. She also did lessons and workshops from home. Jim continued to break horses and riding for The Big Meadow Grazing Association. His love for horses would ultimately be the reason for his passing. In 2009, he died as the result of a horse accident.

Lou Ann leaned heavily on her family and her faith to get through life’s tumultuous times, including the loss of Jim. She set up an art studio on her son’s property, where he also had a saddle shop. At 80, while recovering from knee replacement surgery, Lou Ann fell at home, which resulted in a compound fracture of her ankle. She used a stick to knock the phone off the wall and call Ed. Surgeons were able to save her foot and she spent a month in St. Luke Hospital. While Lou Ann continued to live independently into her 80’s, she began to require more care, and she and the family elected for her to move to the St. Luke Extended Care Facility in 2022. As a resident of the ECF, Lou Ann enjoys all the activities offered, along with visits from family and getting outside – where she enjoys working in the resident gardens and flowerbeds.

When thinking of what words of wisdom she would share with her community, Lou Ann is quick to turn to her faith and her family, as she has for years. Her family has so many cherished and fun memories together. Lou Ann recalled how all four of them got baptized at the same time – Jim had a full leg cast (he broke his leg three times) and Jeanne had an eye patch! Her connection to others through faith and love is her legacy. Jeanne recalls her mother saying, “Just because you’re poor doesn’t mean you have to be dirty!” With a determined happiness and a will to find a path forward, Lou Ann has thus far shaped quite an artful life!

NUTRITION CORNER



Nourishing Longevity: A Plant-Forward Approach to Healthy Aging

Aging is a natural part of life, but how we nourish ourselves can profoundly shape how we experience it. While we can’t stop the clock, we can influence the quality of those years—supporting energy, mobility, mental sharpness, and overall well-being.

From a plant-based dietitian’s perspective, the path to healthy aging is paved with colorful plants, mindful habits, and a deep respect for the body’s evolving needs.

1. Prioritize Nutrient-Dense Foods

As we age, our calorie needs may gradually decline, but our nutrient needs remain the same—or even increase. Every bite matters. Focus on foods that are rich in vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, protein and fiber without excessive calories.

Vegetables & Fruits: Especially deep-colored varieties like berries, leafy greens, tomatoes, and squash for antioxidants and phytochemicals that combat cellular damage.

Legumes: Lentils, chickpeas, and black beans provide plant protein, fiber, and minerals like iron and magnesium.

Whole Grains: Oats, quinoa, farro, and brown rice support heart health, blood sugar balance, and gut health.

Nuts & Seeds: Walnuts, flaxseeds, and chia seeds offer omega-3s for brain and heart health.

2. Support Muscle & Bone Health

Loss of muscle mass (sarcopenia) and bone density can happen with age—but they’re not inevitable.

Protein: Include protein-rich foods at each meal—soy products (tofu, tempeh, edamame), legumes, eggs, low-fat dairy products, and lean meats are all excellent options.

Calcium & Vitamin D: Low-fat dairy products, fortified plant milks, tofu set with calcium, almonds, tahini, and leafy greens help maintain strong bones. Pair calcium with adequate vitamin D from sunlight or supplements as needed.

Strength Training: Nutrition works best alongside movement—resistance exercises help preserve both bone and

muscle.

3. Protect Brain Health

Nutrition plays a vital role in maintaining cognitive function.

Eat the Rainbow: Polyphenol-rich foods like blueberries, green tea, and dark leafy greens may protect against age-related cognitive decline.

Omega-3 Fatty Acids: Walnuts, chia, flax, hemp seeds, salmon, and sardines support brain structure and function.

Limit Processed Foods: Minimize added sugars and ultra-processed snacks that may contribute to inflammation.

4. Nurture Gut Health
A healthy gut microbiome supports immunity, nutrient absorption, and inflammation control.

Fiber First: Eating a variety of plant fibers feeds beneficial gut bacteria.

Fermented Foods: Tempeh, sauerkraut, kimchi, and yogurt provide probiotics that help maintain digestive health.

Hydration: Adequate fluid intake keeps digestion moving and joints cushioned.

5. Make Meals Enjoyable & Social

Food is more than fuel—it’s connection, culture, and joy. Eating with others, exploring new recipes, and savoring each meal not only nourishes the body but supports emotional and mental well-being.

Bottom Line
Healthy aging isn’t about restriction—it’s about abundance. A varied, colorful, plant-rich diet offers the nutrients, antioxidants, and anti-inflammatory compounds that help protect the body and mind over time. Paired with movement, hydration, rest, and social connection, it’s a delicious recipe for vitality at any age.

As a plant-based dietitian, I see food as a lifelong ally—one that empowers you to thrive, not just survive, through every chapter of life.



MacKenzie Stark, RDN

SL Heart to Heart

www.stlukehealthcare.org

IN RONAN:
St. Luke Community Hospital
St. Luke Community Convenient Care
St. Luke Community Extended Care
St. Luke Community Oxygen & Medical Equipment
St. Luke Community Hearing Center
St. Luke Community Healthcare Foundation
107 6th Ave. SW 406-676-4441
St. Luke Community Clinic – Ronan 406-676-3600
St. Luke Orthopedic Clinic 406-528-5580
St. Luke General Surgery 406-676-3600
126 6th Ave. SW

IN POLSON:
St. Luke Community Clinic – Ridgewater 406-883-3737
St. Luke Community Clinic – Ridgewater PT 406-883-2666
107 Ridgewater Drive
St. Luke Community Clinic – Southshore 406-883-2555
104 Rufus Lane

IN ST. IGNATIUS:
St. Luke Community Clinic – St. Ignatius 406-745-2781
330 Six Tracts Way

**The Heart of Healthcare
in the Mission Valley**

