

Katie Johnson:

Good morning and welcome to Apple a Day, Lake Region Healthcare's health and wellness show, where we feature news and information you can use to live a healthier life. I am Katie Johnson, your host, and my guest today is Laura Suggs. She's a Nurse Practitioner who is joining us in our Spine Care and Neurosurgery Center here at Lake Region Healthcare. One of the newest members of our medical staff, and we're so excited to welcome you to the Lake Region Healthcare family. Good morning, Laura.

Laura Suggs, NP:

Good morning.

Katie Johnson:

So we just like to take this time on Apple a Day to help our community get to know any new members of our medical staff and share helpful information for them to help manage their health. And this is just a great time to introduce you to them. So let's start by telling them a little bit more about who you are and what your background is prior to joining us here at Lake Region.

Laura Suggs, NP:

Sure. You bet. Thank you so much for taking the time to meet with me. And I'm so lucky to be working here at Lake Region. So just a little bit about me. I grew up between Enderlin and Barnesville. I did graduate from Enderlin. I left for 20 years and came back. But in my thirties I found that I had a life change and my neighbor, he worked for the Miami Dade fire department and he said, "Laura, Laura, you should be an EMT. That's the job you need to do." And I thought, "An EMT? I don't even know what an EMT is." So then I was like, okay. So I went to my first class and I walked out of that class and I said, "I should have been doing this my whole life."

Katie Johnson:

Wow.

Laura Suggs, NP:

Why didn't anybody tell me? So anyway, with the progression of that, I was an EMT and then I went to the fire academy and then I went to paramedic school and I earned a degree in Emergency Management and I was in south Florida at the time.

Laura Suggs, NP:

So one of my first jobs was I was a flight paramedic. And I flew all over the world and I transported patients. And then I got a job in a really busy ER. So I was working in the ER and then all of a sudden I'm watching all these nurses and nurse practitioners and physicians, and I'm like, "You get to do what? This is so cool. Well, wait a second. I want to do that." I didn't know that was out there either. So by being exposed, I thought this was so fabulous.

Laura Suggs, NP:

But at the time I had an opportunity at a job in Alexandria, Virginia, which is right outside of the Washington DC area. And I have family there and it was a big opportunity to work as a paramedic for the City of Alexandria in their fire department. So I moved there and I worked there and we were first due to

the Pentagon, so many really cool things. I was able to teach para-medicine. It was really fun, but I had this yearning to come back home.

Laura Suggs, NP:

I'm the oldest of five and all my brothers and sisters were having kids. They were still in Fargo, Morehead area. My mom and dad are still in Enderlin. And all my connections were still here. So my best girlfriend from high school said, "Oh, Laura, you should move back and become a nurse." So then I was like, "That's a great idea." So once more, a life change. And I actually, I started at Rasmussen and from there I got my associates and then I got my BSN and then recently finishing up, I got Simmons University out of Boston. That's where I got my Masters in Family Nurse Practitioner.

Laura Suggs, NP:

I'm really thrilled to have these other experiences. I'm not a traditional student per se, but I think some of these other career changes that I've had really helped build what I can offer in my Nurse Practitioner role.

Katie Johnson:

Absolutely. What a great diversity of background that you bring. That's really fascinating. So you've told me what inspired you to get to this point. What was it specifically about Lake Region Healthcare and the opportunity here in the Back Center that appealed to you?

Laura Suggs, NP:

So Lake Region itself has this reputation for exceptional care and they're also known to break barriers and really be progressive thinkers. So I've always had my eye on Lake Region, but sometimes the timing isn't always right.

Katie Johnson:

Right.

Laura Suggs, NP:

We live on a farm south of Barnesville, so for me, it's in my backyard, it's my community. This is where I go. This is where my father-in-law would go. My mom and dad are still in Enderlin. I needed to be in this part of the world, in this rural part, but they are progressive and I would feel comfortable sending them here. And I knew that. So that drew me in. They have a team-based approach in the community. And that's what I want to be a part of.

Katie Johnson:

That's great. That's all so true. Let's talk a little bit more about what are the kinds of things you do?

Laura Suggs, NP:

Well, one of the things that we are going to do is, we always want to do the first goal is nonsurgical. So that means triaging is really, really important. So whether it be through imaging or the physical assessment, we're going to get you to the right place. So we initially, maybe it's strengthening, maybe it's massage, heat and cold therapy, those type of things. We're going to really address those first, get to the underlying problem so that we can really make your picture whole.

Laura Suggs, NP:

And if we need to get you to the next level, I'm going to know how to get you there. And I'm going to have a team, a really collaborative team of folks that can get you the help that you need.

Katie Johnson:

Absolutely. We're so lucky to have Dr. Jared Broadway here with his surgical experience, like you said, determining what the right path is, and then having all the right experts in the right places where you can get people too, to get the help and the pain relief that they need. Back pain is such a common issue. So let's talk a little bit about that. What kinds of tips do you have for protecting your back and neck, both from injury or from those things that are likely to long-term cause some chronic pain?

Laura Suggs, NP:

Sure. This is very interesting. So just like good nutrition, it's important to feed your body, you have to take care of your spine. And I know this is for everything, it's hydration. You want those discs, you want that spine to work, you got to drink water. Everybody says drink water. Well just do it. That's the simplest one of all. Of course, I'm kind of kidding, but really I'm not. That's very, very sincere. Aerobic exercise, it'll help preserve them. Maintain a healthy weight. And then of course, it's good posture, putting your ears in line with your shoulders.

Laura Suggs, NP:

When you lift something, get close to it, keep your back straight and bend with your knees. Please bend with your knees. Strengthening your core, and that's a lot about strengthening and conditioning too. So make sure you have a strong core. It'll save your back. Identify, if you are doing repetitive motion, if it hurts. You're going to have to identify, do I need to do this better? Is this some job that I can do? Maybe I have to back off. And if you're going to lift something heavy, don't do it by yourself. Have the patience and just know I couldn't hurt myself for long-term.

Laura Suggs, NP:

So those are really important things. And lastly, we can call this the no-brainer, cigarettes, nicotine, you got to watch. Don't do it. It really depletes the body from the proper blood flow circulation because they are vasoconstrictors. So, it just doesn't do us any good. So I just really want to reiterate that.

Katie Johnson:

It's so interesting. It's not something you expect to hear when you're talking about how do I prevent back pain? I'm not smoking, but it's a really good, really good connection to make and a reminder. And I had to chuckle, I was just visiting with a friend this morning, when you said, if you have to lift something really heavy, just have the patience. She was tired of waiting for someone at Walmart to help pick up something heavy and she hurt her back. So that patience can often be a critical component to not hurting ourselves. That's such good advice.

Katie Johnson:

Something else I wanted to ask you about is, how do you know when you should get help? I think, myself personally, friends of mine, I know, we maybe minimize a pain that's nagging at us, or we really don't think it's that bad. Or we know someone else who we think should get care, but they're not

necessarily there yet. What are your tips for, this is when you should really see someone about your back pain, because we really could make a difference in your quality of life.

Laura Suggs, NP:

Sure. So there is a difference obviously between wear and tear and this chronic pain and of course, true emergency. So I just want to differentiate that. So this true emergency, things I want you to just really be aware of, those red flags, any bladder or bowel dysfunction, they call it saddle anesthesia. Those inner thighs, if they becomes numb and it's usually bilateral symmetrical pain. So if any of those ever cross your path or you're experiencing any of those, you need to go to the ER. So I wanted to differentiate that.

Laura Suggs, NP:

So then we're talking about the next step is this chronic pain. Is it really chronic? Is it acute? How long should I wait? What should I do about it? Those are the kind of things that we all wonder. Is it worth a trip to see the doc? Do I want to pay a co-pay? Those are all things that we think about.

Katie Johnson:

Exactly, yes.

Laura Suggs, NP:

So I think what we're trying to do and what we are going to be doing with this new Back Center is that we are going to allow you to be streamlined. So if you have those types of questions that we will be able to triage you and help you immediately. So it's not going to be so painful to even make that decision because back pain, it is debilitating. And I think it gets brushed aside when it comes to diabetes and hypertension. So let's get on it right away.

Laura Suggs, NP:

So my piece of advice is if you're having back pain, it's more than a couple of days, anything going down your legs, those type of things. And it's making the quality of life not the way you see it or want it to be, you need to get in here. Let's get you squared away. We will get you evaluated. We'll get you to the right person so that you can have this good quality of life and feel good about things.

Katie Johnson:

That's so important. Another thing I wanted to ask you about is opioid pain relievers. They've really gotten a lot of attention the past few years. What do you think it's important to know if you're someone that's either currently taking opioids for back pain or someone who's maybe thinking that this might be the key to their current pain relief?

Laura Suggs, NP:

Sure. Pain management is on everyone's mind. That is definitely a hot topic. Our focus with the Back Pain Center is really going to be getting to the root and find what the underlying cause of pain is. I think chronic pain is underestimated. And so when we talk about, there's a fine line between opioid use and should we, or shouldn't we. I think end goal for long-term, opiates are not the number one thing we're going to choose, but I think sometimes for acute reasons, maybe for a short time, if it's monitored and those type of things, it is probably okay for some people.

Laura Suggs, NP:

But it really is case by case and time by time, but we're really going to look into the other alternatives. There's so many alternatives that weren't turned to prior to this opioid crisis that you talk about. So there's acupuncture, chiropractic care, the cold and heat, exercise movement, PT, those types of things, rehab therapy. There's a lot that goes into this.

Laura Suggs, NP:

Long-term, there's a lot of other avenues than the opioids. And I think people are scared of them with good reason, but I think also too, in a controlled environment where we've really had some good thought and we've closely looked at patient procedure, it's okay to be on them for a short period of time.

Katie Johnson:

And I think what you highlight is the benefit of just really having a good relationship and an individual triaging of your situation. And that's the benefit of knowing your providers like the team at Lake Region Healthcare takes so much pride in really knowing and having a relationship with their patients.

Katie Johnson:

Tell me, what is it that you like most about what you do or that you're most looking forward to as you join the team here?

Laura Suggs, NP:

I think for me developing the strong and healthy relationships among my colleagues and the community is really, really important to me. I'm thrilled to collaborate with so many specialties even then we're a rural type community, but we still have so many resources. That is just so fantastic to me. And really to be able to serve the people that are around me and in my community. It sounds pretty corny, but it is a dream come true. So patients needing help in rural care, brought me home from the east coast where I traveled for many, many years and did all kinds of wonderful things. But I knew that I could come home and help the people that raised me. And so to get back is huge.

Katie Johnson:

What a great circle.

Laura Suggs, NP:

Yeah.

Katie Johnson:

That's awesome. What about when you're not working? What do you like doing in your spare time?

Laura Suggs, NP:

Oh my gosh. Oh, so we have a three-year-old named Harper and Olivia is four. So they are too busy little girls. So we lived south of Barnesville on a farm. So we're very busy just living on the farm, but we love to go snowmobiling. So we're big snow mobile enthusiasts. And then of course in the summertime,

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we're at the lake. So we are jet skiing, boating, water skiing, biking, you name it. If it's got wheels and a motor we're doing it somewhere.

Katie Johnson:

Fun.

Laura Suggs, NP:

So we're really very active with my young family and we have a lot of fun and you will always find us together.

Katie Johnson:

Oh, that is awesome. Well, we are so excited to get to know your family and to welcome you to our family. Laura Suggs, she is going to be joining our spine care and neurosurgery team here in the Back Center as a Nurse Practitioner. And I just can't thank you enough for taking some time to introduce yourself to our listeners this morning and sharing your background with us. We're so glad to have you on the team.

Laura Suggs, NP:

Thank you so much. Yes, of course. So happy to be here.

Katie Johnson:

Laura Suggs and Katie Johnson on Apple a Day today, reminding you there is so much to do here. Stay healthy for it. Have a great day.