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BROOKSVILLE - Michael W. Higgins, DO, an orthopaedic surgeon in Spring Hill says achieving optimum health and wellness at any age should include watching out for the precursors to disease.

Using anti-aging and regenerative options can positively impact orthopaedic longevity, he added.

Higgins recently became board certified by the American Board of Anti-Aging and Regenerative Medicine (ABAARM). The ABAARM is a certification program of the American Academy of Anti-Aging Medicine (A4M).

The A4M (www.worldhealth.net) is a nonprofit organization comprised of more than 22,000 member physicians, health practitioners, scientists, governmental officials and private citizens representing more than 105 nations.

The A4M is dedicated to the advancement of technology to detect, prevent and treat aging related disease, to promote research into methods to retard and optimize the human aging process, and to educate on biomedical sciences, breaking technologies and anti-aging issues.

Higgins' certification is the result of two years of intensive study and examination, during which he learned how to utilize anti-aging diagnostic and treatment interventions in his Spring Hill practice.

"Our golden years don't have to be rusty," Higgins said. "The health and wellness initiative is about ensuring increased energy and good health at any age, maintaining your life and your level of activity. While you may someday need an orthopaedic surgeon to repair an injury or replace a knee or hip, I'd rather catch you on the flip side of your health. I'd rather keep you educated and out of the office."

Six years ago Higgins read "The New Anti-Aging Revolution" by Dr. Ronald Klatz and Dr. Robert Goldman. He found it very interesting but didn't incorporate anti-aging interventions in his practice until about two years ago when his office manager, Rose Privitera, re-introduced its benefits.

"Like everybody else, Rose was tired, not feeling right, and searched the Internet to see what was out there," Higgins said.

"I wanted to feel better," Privitera added. "I was intrigued by anti-aging medicine. I said, 'You know what? We should do this.'"

Higgins' interest was peaked for his patients and for himself and his family. He decided to become certified in anti-aging and regenerative medicine.

"I did a lot of research before embarking on it," Higgins said. "I looked at how I could utilize it in my orthopaedic surgery practice. I've come up with an orthopaedic health and wellness program that addresses the nutritional aspects of everyday life, weight issues, osteoporosis and other things that are part of wellness like exercise and nutritional supplements."

Being a father of a three and five year old helps put health and wellness in Higgins' personal spotlight for his future well-being.

"I've always felt there's been a different way to approach medicine," he said. "This program spoke to me in a lot of different ways, like why 'an apple a day' makes sense."

"This body of medicine treats disease before it becomes disease. We treat precursors to disease with hormones, nutraceuticals (a food product that provides health and medical benefits), vitamin supplements, exercise – a multitude of therapies to make the 'golden years' a little less rusty."

Higgins said diseases they look for are "anything related to aging, from osteoarthritis to osteoporosis," adding there are a number of studies on cardiovascular, heart and brain health. "There are neurological transmitters that we see start to decrease as we age. There's Alzheimer's. It really applies to any disease related to aging – which can be anything."

Higgins said it's his personal belief that as men and women grow to maturity, developing different characteristics, we have a variable period of time before we start to deteriorate, based on genetics and what we do to our systems.

Smoking, obesity, lack of exercise, drugs or alcohol can all speed the aging process, he said. There are things people can do to help reverse or delay that, he added.

"When we talk about anti-aging, we're not talking about making people 20 again; we're talking about maximizing the level of their body's function and how it responds to everyday stresses."

Higgins' wellness initiative includes an hCG diet that has thus far been successful for 150 of his patients. Some doctors believe taking the hCG hormone stimulates your body to be satiated while unlocking fat stores.

Higgins and his wife have utilized the diet.

"I lost 53 pounds in six weeks. My wife went from a size 14 to a size 8. Men lose pounds, women lose inches. It really works," Higgins said.

Done in three or six-week phases, the diet includes following a diet plan plus taking the hCG hormone, vitamins, and two "free radical scavengers," L-Carnitine and L-Glutathione.

"I think of free radicals as, your body's oxidizing itself, it's 'rusting.' These two nutrients eliminate anything that's wearing out in your body." Higgins explained.

Higgins cited statistics linking obesity to disease: 26 percent of obese people have high blood pressure; 80 percent of Adult Onset diabetes is related to obesity, as is 70 percent of cardiovascular disease, 43 percent of breast and colon cancer, and 30 percent of gallbladder surgery.

Childhood obesity is another concern. Higgins thinks the answer starts with parents ensuring children eat a balanced diet and get proper exercise.

"We need more physical fitness in schools, and less junk food in vending machines. Stuff that's '0 calories' and has artificial sweeteners is not good for you," he added.

"Children are walking time bombs. As they mature it's harder to lose weight. When children's hormones are changing for puberty, the body needs to take that hormone out of those fat cells. The more fat cells you have, the more stored-up it is, so the less it's going to have its effect on your body.

"Osteoporosis is based on where your bone density is in your 30s. Your bone mass at that age is your bank. As you start declining with menopause or andropause (male menopause), you start borrowing from that bank. At some point you're borrowed-up and your bone is weak. That's why some develop osteoporosis and some don't."

As part of his personal wellness plan, Higgins received a blood screening that determines what vitamins are specifically needed based on a person's unique body chemistry. A custom vitamin company then compounds a personalized supplement.

Higgins said, "It's all in that packet. I take a couple as I go along throughout the day."

In their book, Klatz and Goldman urge individuals to seek the advice of a medical professional to make the appropriate selection for their particular medical situation. They caution that proper dosing with nutraceuticals is highly variable and is based on sex, age, and whether you're well or chronically or acutely ill.

They admonish, "Just because a product is natural doesn't mean it's safe for you. A small portion of the general population may react adversely to components in nutraceuticals, especially herbal products. Make your physician aware of any and all 'natural' interventions you use regularly, and seek medical consultation before starting any others."

Higgins said anti-aging and regenerative medicine impacts everybody's life. "I don't care who or how old you are. You don't have to be a diabetic, obese, or smoker to benefit. Everyday citizens can learn to improve their sense of well-being. Everybody's looking to feel better, to be focused verses foggy."

"This is everyday life," Higgins said. "This isn't waiting to have arthritis in order to be included in something. This is about life and longevity and how to make the most of whatever years you have left."

"We're going to age gracefully," added Privitera. "That's what we're going to do."