25 WINTER STAYCATIONS
Your guide to exciting, relaxing and interesting adventures close to home

TIPS TO CUT CLUTTER, WORKOUT FASHION AND HEALTHY CHEF RECIPES
One in 20 Americans will be diagnosed with an autoimmune disease in their lifetime and there appears to be a heightened risk for people living in the Pacific Northwest, and for women in particular.
Autoimmune conditions include multiple sclerosis (MS), type 1 diabetes (T1D) and inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), to name a few. With 16 million Americans currently suffering from an autoimmune disease (there are about 80 diseases identified) chances are you know someone with such a disease — or perhaps you have been diagnosed.

The Benaroya Research Institute at Virginia Mason is an internationally recognized leader in autoimmune disease research and is located right in our own backyard, at Seattle’s Virginia Mason Medical Center.

The institute, which includes a team of 275 staff members, performs groundbreaking research in immune-system and autoimmune-disease research, works with Immune Tolerance Network, one of the largest government-funded research institutions in the nation. Benaroya Research Institute stands as a world leader in the field.

Benaroya Research Institute hosts six Science Friday events each year, in which people with autoimmune conditions and their loved ones come together at Seattle’s Virginia Mason Medical Center to spend an educational morning learning about the latest research. About 40 people attended a recent event. There was a meet and greet and then attendees put on white lab coats and got tours of the lab to see the research being done. That was followed by a presentation and Q&A session. Not only is Science Friday a valuable educational tool for folks who want to learn more, but it’s also valuable for the doctors and researchers to connect with the public. For the list of 2014 Science Friday dates, visit Benaroya Research Institute’s website.

WHAT IS AN AUTOIMMUNE DISEASE ANYWAY? Autoimmune diseases occur when the immune system misidentifies the body’s own healthy tissue and organs as being invasive or harmful, and begins attacking itself. While the way in which the immune system attacks the body is the same in all autoimmune diseases, the tissue or organ that the immune system targets can vary. Because all autoimmune diseases function in the same way, when a cure for one autoimmune condition is found, a cure for all is found.

WHY ARE PEOPLE LIVING IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST MORE SUSCEPTIBLE TO AUTOIMMUNE DISEASE? While doctors and researchers are unable to attribute specific reasons as to why people living in the Pacific Northwest are more likely to develop autoimmune diseases opposed to people living in other parts of the country, a few educated theories have been made. Dr. Gerald Nepom, director of the Benaroya Research Institute at Virginia Mason, says “the Pacific Northwest and Scandinavian countries have some of the highest rates of genetic susceptibility for multiple sclerosis and type 1 diabetes” and that, “the incidence of many autoimmune diseases is increasing. With a similar heritage and frequent deficiency in vitamin D, there are both genetic and environmental factors likely contributing to this heightened risk for Pacific Northwesterners.”

WHAT ABOUT THE HIGHER SUSCEPTIBILITY IN WOMEN? Research is being conducted to determine why women suffer a greater chance of contracting autoimmune diseases than men, but current studies can only vaguely pinpoint a culmination of genetic and environmental factors as the cause. According to the American Autoimmune Related Disease Association, 12 million of the 16 million Americans living with autoimmune diseases
are women. Autoimmune disease is the fourth-largest cause of disability among U.S. women, and is one of the top 10 leading causes of death in women ages 65 and younger.

**YOU’VE BEEN DIAGNOSED WITH AN AUTOIMMUNE DISEASE — NOW WHAT?**

Being diagnosed with an autoimmune disease can be devastating. No matter the severity of your condition, learning to cope with an autoimmune disease is a scary transition. The Benaroya Research Institute hosts and participates in a variety of educational seminars, clinical studies and community events to make that transition easier, including Science Friday events, clinical studies and neighborhood MS walks, to name a few. Another great way to find strength in combating autoimmune disease is by joining a support group. Support groups in your area can typically be found by visiting the official website for the specific autoimmune disease in which you suffer from and either clicking on the support group link, or contacting a representative from the organization.

**HOW CAN YOU MAKE A DIFFERENCE?** From pledging a donation toward groundbreaking research or by participating in a clinical study, there are several ways individuals can support Benaroya Research Institute in its effort toward finding treatments and therapies that will reverse the harmful effects of autoimmune disease. The Benaroya Research Institute at Virginia Mason encourages individuals to join them in the fight against autoimmune diseases. benaroyaresearch.org

*Information provided by Benaroya Research Institute at Virginia Mason.*