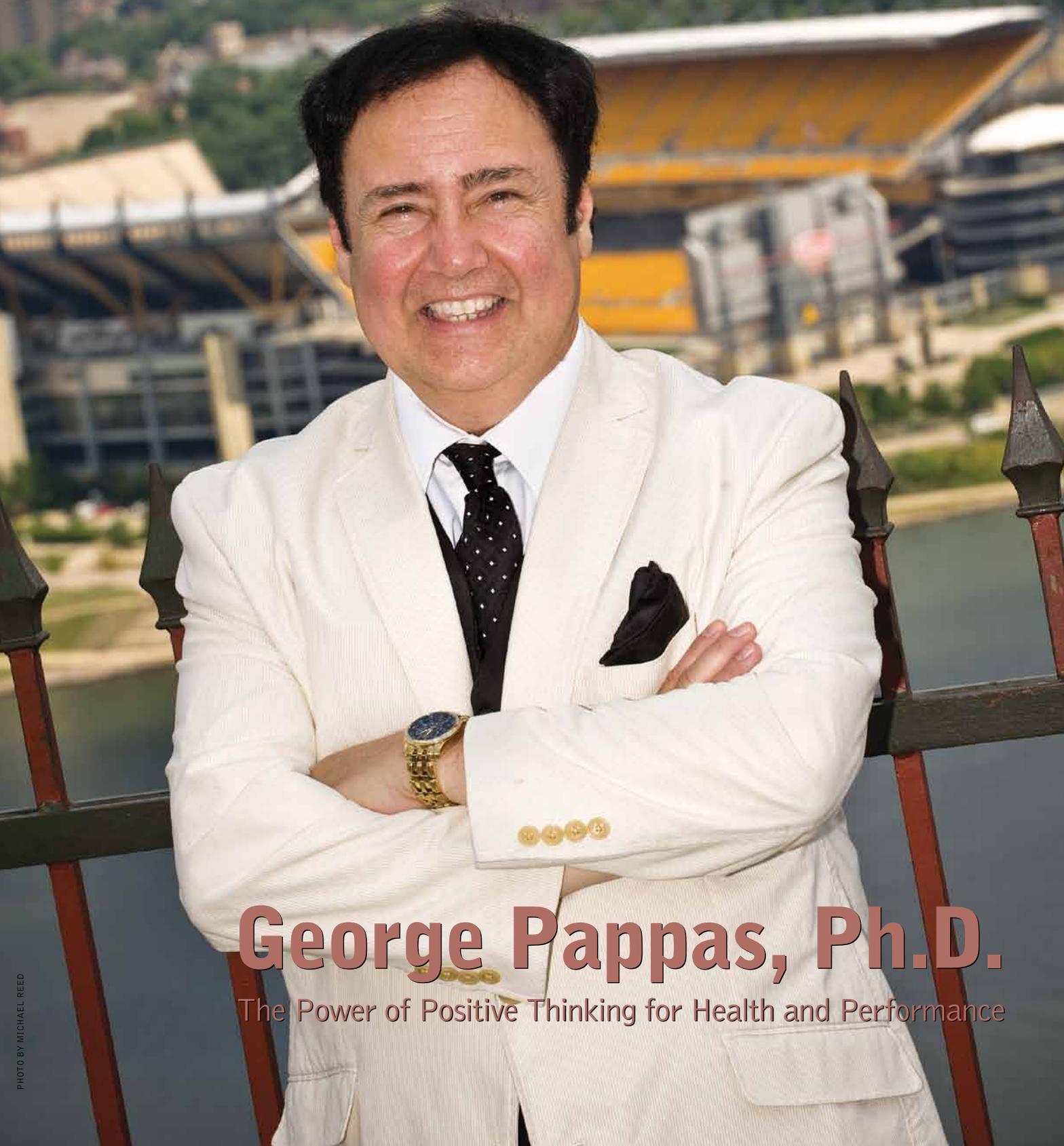


# M.D. NEWS

A BUSINESS AND LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE FOR PHYSICIANS



## George Pappas, Ph.D.

The Power of Positive Thinking for Health and Performance

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## The Power of Positive Thinking for Health and Performance

By Jean B. Edwards, APR

Through hypnosis and cognitive therapy, George Pappas, Ph.D., of Hartwood Sports Medicine & Wellness Center, helps patients reach their goals, whether the goal is to win the Super Bowl, lose weight or quit smoking. Well known in sports circles, Dr. Pappas has worked with many athletes, including boxers; football, basketball, hockey and tennis players; gymnasts; runners; and weekend golfers to increase their concentration and focus. He's also helped people regain their health when lack of mental discipline sabotages their bodies through weight gain, obesity and stress.

Ask people what they would most like to change about themselves and they'll tell you their weight. Physicians say they repeatedly struggle with how to help patients shed pounds. Many feel poorly equipped to help patients, and their success has often been limited. That's when they call upon Dr. Pappas, who uses hypnosis, along with cognitive therapy, to help patients successfully lose weight and get healthier.

### A MENTAL TRAINER

"Some people work with a physical trainer to help get into shape. I think of myself as a mental trainer that helps people develop mental discipline, so they can give up bad habits for good and reach their goals. I also help people feel better about themselves. When people start to

feel good about themselves, weight control, health and happiness often follow," says Dr. Pappas.

"Most people with weight issues have learned behavior patterns. Losing weight is about breaking old habits," Dr. Pappas explains. "I help patients develop a new self-image and to be more relaxed about weight loss and weight management. Stress is often a contributing factor in poor diets and comfort eating. Positive thinking about weight and diet and looking forward to losing weight and achieving your goals is essential."

### CHANGING BEHAVIOR

When you think negative thoughts, negative things happen. "Negative thinking is a barrier that prevents you from getting where you want to go. It's a self-fulfilling prophecy and a learned habit," explains Dr. Pappas. He believes negative thinking often comes from past experiences with teachers. "They always focused on how many answers you got wrong, not on how many you got right. Patients and society, in general, have the same focus, and people carry on what they see. They don't realize how important it is to train your brain to think positively. We have a tendency to not use our brain and work to our full capacity."

Dr. Pappas has helped many patients lose weight. Some were obese,

Dr. Pappas sees clients at his Squirrel Hill office where he has one of the largest collections of personalized sports memorabilia in the area.





**Dr. Pappas takes the time to help patients retrain their thoughts to be more positive and healthier.**

and many just simply wanted to lose 10-20 pounds. He starts with an assessment of their eating patterns, determines what type of foods they eat, whether they eat alone or with others and if they read while eating. He says that today, many people are fast eaters. "With no time for leisurely meals, they often eat on the run and quickly gulp down their food. This causes people to eat more than they really need in order to feel satisfied. It actually takes 20 minutes for the brain to register that there is food in the stomach. Eating too fast, like other bad habits, is a learned behavior and can be changed."

He encourages many fast eaters to take longer pauses between each bite until eventually they feel satisfied with less food. He also recommends drinking more water so people consume less food. "The real key is retraining a person's behavior. It only takes two or three sessions for me to help most people. They're intelligent, and they know that eating too much is not what they desire. These are not conscious, logical issues. Successful weight loss is as much about re-educating your subconscious mind as it is about dieting."

## USING HYPNOSIS

Through the use of hypnosis, Dr. Pappas helps patients reach their goals, and his methods are highly respected throughout the physician community.

Some are skeptical of hypnosis and tend to associate it with stage performances or bad sitcom episodes, but the medical community

has approached the topic in a different vein. Hypnosis has undergone tremendous amounts of scientific testing in modern times.

According to the American Medical Association, hypnosis is proven to be an effective tool in the management of pain and pain perception. It's been approved by an independent panel convened by the National Institutes of Health as one of several relaxation methods for treating chronic pain. According to a study published in *Regional Anesthesia and Pain Medicine*, hypnosis can actually change the way the brain processes pain signals, even while the pain sensations continue to be received.

There are various misconceptions about hypnosis, such as the belief that people lose all sense of consciousness, but Dr. Pappas is quick to point out that patients are always in total control and fully aware of their surroundings. "It's a very safe, effective way to retrain the mind and break bad habits.

"Hypnosis creates a state of deep relaxation and quiets the mind. When you're hypnotized, you can concentrate intensively on a specific thought, memory, feeling or sensation, while blocking out distractions. You're more open than usual to suggestions, and this can be used to change your behavior and improve your health and well-being," says Dr. Pappas.

During hypnosis, Dr. Pappas makes a tape recording of his sessions, so his patients can listen to the messages for 21 days in a row. "I help people reprogram their subconscious, so it sends positive messages to their brain. It takes 21 days to break a habit. For some patients, it may take longer, but 21 days is the norm," he says.

Dr. Pappas also works with cancer patients to help them tolerate the pain and fear that comes with the disease. During hypnosis, he helps patients concentrate on healing their bodies by visualizing their white blood cells attacking the cancer.

## HELPING PEOPLE WITH ANXIETY

Dr. Pappas was once called to Presbyterian Hospital to help a patient who needed his expertise in hypnosis.

Michael B. had received a liver transplant and had lost 60 pounds. Unable to swallow much food because of a painful throat infection, Michael couldn't take medication, including the life-saving cyclospo-

**As an avid sports fan who played football when he was younger, Dr. Pappas has a very effective approach for assisting athletes with mental preparation for optimal performance.**



rine, a common drug used to prevent organ rejection. “Dr. Pappas didn’t use any gimmicks, and there was no watch swinging back and forth. He just started to talk in a very low, soft voice,” says Michael. “The bottom line was it worked. I’d never met a hypnotist before, but I’m here to tell you that I’m a believer now,” says Michael.

Dr. Pappas had Michael close his eyes, take a deep breath and exhale. “I had him do this three times to relax his respiratory system. Then, I worked on relaxing his muscle groups from his toes to his scalp, telling him he was feeling a warm sensation all the way to his scalp.”

Dr. Pappas then got Michael into an even more restful state by having him picture his favorite place of relaxation. “At this point, Michael was completely under hypnosis. What followed was the key to unlocking his fear of swallowing.

“Three times I repeated that his throat muscles were warm and relaxed because warmth expands. I told him that he was able to swallow easily and freely, and he would be relaxed when eating, swallowing or taking medication. I simply tied everything together,” explains Dr. Pappas.

Michael went on to successfully recover from his liver transplant and today lives in Mercer Island, WA. Dr. Pappas still keeps the letter the patient wrote to him to express his thanks and appreciation.

### HIS FIRST LOVE: FOOTBALL

One look at Dr. Pappas’ office and you know he’s an avid sports fan, especially of the Pittsburgh Steelers. He’s also one of the psychologists for the team.

“Football is my first love — always has been,” says Dr. Pappas. He was a running back at Taylor Allderdice High School, and he once scored a touchdown play where he ran for 65 yards.

Today, he helps many athletes gain mental clarity and has worked with various professional football players, including the Pittsburgh Steelers’ Bryant McFadden. He has also appeared as a guest on *The Charlie Batch Show*, *The Jeff Reed Show* and other local news and sports talk programs. In addition, Dr. Pappas brings his sports psychology expertise to the entire industry. DeJuan Blair, a professional basketball player, and Monty Meza-Clay, a professional boxer, among many others, have sought the aid of Dr. Pappas to help them relax and sharpen their concentration skills.

“We go through different exercises from positive affirmations to hypnosis sessions. I developed a program called Spartan Mental Training for whatever sport they play, whether they’re a professional athlete or a weekend warrior,” explains Dr. Pappas. “Athletes have a physical trainer who helps them prepare for the game, and I help train them to be at their peak performance mentally. Optimal athletic performance is a result of intense mental exercise.”

Dr. Pappas initially wanted to be a surgeon or a primary care physician. He was accepted at Hahnemann Medical College in Philadelphia, but it was not to be. “I was needed at home to help care for my father, who was dying



PHOTO BY MICHAEL REED

**Whether by hypnosis, cognitive therapy, mental conditioning or relaxation techniques, Dr. Pappas of the Hartwood Sports Medicine & Wellness Center is helping clients and athletes improve their lives and performance.**

of cancer at the time.” After taking courses in sports psychology, Dr. Pappas realized he could combine his love of sports with psychology and graduated from the University of Pittsburgh with a degree in clinical psychology. He went on to complete a fellowship in psychology at Stanford University and an internship at Mayview State Hospital. “While at Mayview, I realized I could never work in forensic psychology. Many of the patients I saw were diagnosed with schizophrenia, and I really didn’t see much progress in their behavior. I knew that sports psychology would be far more rewarding for me.”

Dr. Pappas is a religious man and ends every therapy session with a prayer. “I owe everything I am to God,” he says. His kindhearted, gentle approach toward people undoubtedly comes from his Greek upbringing. Both his grandfather and great grandfather were priests. His father opted to become a painter but “was a true Christian in every sense of the word,” says Dr. Pappas.

In addition to his busy practice, Dr. Pappas cares for his 85-year-old mother, who suffers from Alzheimer’s and his 50-year-old brother, Nicky, who has Down syndrome. “Nicky is amazing, and he really pushes himself every day. He’s truly the glue of our family.”

*Dr. Pappas can be reached at (412) 421-0446. ■*

DAY/EVENING/WEEKEND HOURS



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BY APPOINTMENT

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