

YOUR HEALTH ADVANTAGE

A magazine about your health
for BCN Advantage members
Spring 2021

**Know where
to go when
you need care**



**DODGING
DIABETES
FOOT AND
SKIN ISSUES**

**INCONTINENCE:
THE SECRET
YOU DON'T
HAVE TO KEEP**

Health and wellness or prevention information.



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Dear Member:

Spring is almost here! As the weather starts to warm up and the days get longer, we have some great information to share with you in *Your Health Advantage*. This edition comes with a spring veggie recipe, tips to stay connected with family, ideas for moving your mind and body and important health and wellness stories.

Our member profile on **Pages 4-5** focuses on Raymond Rossell and his journey to better health. We give you some tips on how to stay active on **Pages 24-25**. See **Pages 20-21** for ways to help your memory. On **Page 18**, we give you suggestions about staying connected to family and friends, even though you may not be able to see them.

We also want to know what you think and what's on your mind. We've included some feedback questions in the tear-out business reply card. We hope you'll take the time to fill it out and mail it back to us. Earlier this year, we asked you to share your favorite movies with us. Here are just a few of your responses:

The Sound of Music and Lassie — Melvin W.

The Blind Side — Peggy R.

Saving Private Ryan and Dances with Wolves — Al S.

Any James Bond movie — Vivian M.

The Dirty Dozen — Martin G.

The Green Mile — Wiletta B.

As always, we love hearing from you. We hope you enjoy this issue of *Your Health Advantage*.

Wishing you good health,
The *Your Health Advantage* editorial team

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SPRING 2021

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Back cover

The Blue Cross mobile app securely connects you to your health info

LOSING WEIGHT MAY HAVE SAVED RETIREE'S LIFE

BEFORE



*Raymond Rossell
dropped multiple
clothing sizes
during his weight-
loss journey.*



AFTER



A

s a retired funeral director, Raymond Rossell, 75, of

Flushing, Michigan, knows how quickly life can be taken away from us. That's a big reason why he decided to turn his life around and get healthier.

In 2017, Ray's wife, Elaine, grew concerned as she watched him getting out of breath after walking. Being nine years younger than Ray and a retired dancer, Elaine knew her husband was going down a road that might leave her a young widow.

When Elaine came home with a new extra-large shirt for Ray and it didn't fit, he knew he had to do something to make sure he would be around for as long as possible. That's when he remembered a book that Elaine had read called *The 3-1-2-1 Diet: Eat and Cheat Your Way to Weight Loss* by Dolvett Quince, a celebrity trainer and star from NBC's *The Biggest Loser*.

Starting a program

The program says to eat clean for three days, have one treat day, eat clean for two days, then have one more treat day. By just the second week of following the program, Ray says his 44-inch pants were starting to feel loose. With a lot of work and prayer, he kept going and had to move to 40-inch pants, then 38-inch pants, which he hasn't worn since high school.

Ray visited his doctor, and the doctor said once Ray lost 40% of his body weight, he would be able to stop taking his blood pressure medication. That motivated him to continue on the program and add walking to his daily routine. He downloaded a health app to keep track of his steps and started walking 10,000 to 12,000 steps each day. Eventually, Ray

got down to 32-inch pants and medium-size shirts.

A new way of life

Ray says he feels so much better now. He encourages others to lose weight as well, and that's been the best part. "If I could do it, someone who never believed in changing the way I ate, anyone can do it," he says.

He loves eating right and doesn't want unhealthy foods anymore. He even says after he eats something unhealthy, he really doesn't feel like it was worth it. "Your body becomes so happy that you're eating correctly, and when you don't, you end up feeling miserable," Ray notes.

"I've probably sold hundreds of these books for the author, because diets just don't work," he continues. "Other people have done diets and they lose weight but then put it back on because they don't eat the right foods. This book shows you how to eat healthier."

In addition to eating better, the health app Ray started using to count his steps literally saved his life. "Elaine went to get a flu shot, and I wasn't feeling well. I used the app to take my heart rate and called my wife to tell her I thought something was wrong," he recalls.

They went to the emergency room, and the next day he was diagnosed with sick sinus syndrome and had a pacemaker put in.

Living his best life

Ray sees the benefits of living a healthier lifestyle. He looks at other people his age with all their prescriptions and is so thankful that he lost the weight. "When you lose weight, you feel good. Your life becomes more vital to you, and I want to spend as much

time with my wife as I can. I feel like if I kept eating the way I had, I would be dead," he says.

"Dr. (Elisabeth) Kübler-Ross, who dealt with death and grief, said, 'Once you realize that you will die, you can begin to live your life rather than just pass through it.' I always think, if this was going to be my last day, how would I want to live it? This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it."

*Raymond Rossell
with his wife, Elaine.*



“

**If I could do it,
someone who
never believed
in changing
the way I ate,
anyone can do it.**

— Raymond Rossell,
Flushing, Michigan

”

Strength and balance exercises:

Your secret weapons against falls



Falling is a significant problem as you age; it can cause broken bones or disability. By taking these simple yet powerful steps, you can decrease your risk of falling and continue your level of activity without fear or anxiety.

Choose your moves

Exercise is good for overall health, but two types are especially helpful in preventing falls: balance and strength exercises. Both help you control your body's position and movement while promoting strength and endurance.

Get balanced

Balance is important, whether dancing, playing sports or staying on your feet when stepping on an icy patch in a parking lot. Here are some ideas that can help:

- **Heel-to-toe walk.** Choose a flat surface. With your arms raised out to your sides, walk forward placing the heel of one foot directly in front of the toe of your other foot, as if you're walking on a balance beam. Repeat for 20 steps.
- **Stand on one foot.** Using a sturdy chair for support, practice standing on one foot at a time. Hold this position for about 10 seconds on each side and repeat 10 to 15 times.
- **Tai chi.** This type of exercise uses slow, precise movements to help balance your body. Whether performed seated or standing, tai chi offers benefits for all. There are tai chi classes and groups you could check out for the future, but during the COVID-19 pandemic, a DVD or online video can help.
- **Chair yoga.** Search online for chair yoga poses, such as cat/cow and side bend.

Add strength

Try to do strength exercises at least twice a week but plan a rest day in between. Include a few of these moves in your routine:

- **Leg raise.** Hold the back of a sturdy chair. Keeping your back straight, slowly lift one leg straight back. Try not to lean forward. Hold for one second and slowly lower your leg. Repeat 10 to 15 times on both sides.
- **Overhead arm raise.** While sitting or standing, hold weights at your sides and at shoulder height with palms facing forward. Raise both arms up over your head, keeping your elbows slightly bent. Hold the position for one second, then slowly lower your arms. Repeat 10 to 15 times.
- **Arm curl.** Sit in a chair or stand with your feet shoulder-width apart. Hold weights down at your sides, palms facing forward. Slowly bend your elbows and lift weights up toward your chest (elbows should stay at your sides). Hold the position for one second, then slowly lower your arms. Repeat 10 to 15 times.
- **Climb stairs or go for a brisk walk.** These types of weight-bearing exercises help improve bone and muscle strength.

Hesitant about starting a new fitness program? Ask your doctor about modifications you may need to make. With a little help, you'll find plenty of ways to stay fit for life.

Other considerations: In addition to exercise, you can make changes in your home environment to reduce your risk of falling. Here are some suggestions:

- Install sufficient lighting on stairs.
- Remove slippery throw rugs from tile floors.
- Add grab bars in the bathroom to help you get in and out of the bathtub.
- Avoid clutter on floors, such as electrical cords that might cause you to trip.

Talk with your doctor for additional ways to minimize your chances of falling.

Sources include: American Heart Association; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; National Institutes of Health; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Step up your fitness



Looking to kick your exercise routines up a notch? If you have the SilverSneakers® fitness benefit as part of your plan, you can attend workout classes in person, watch classes online or get an in-home exercise kit. For more information and to verify your eligibility, visit www.silversneakers.com.

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BE PREPARED:

Know where to go when you need care

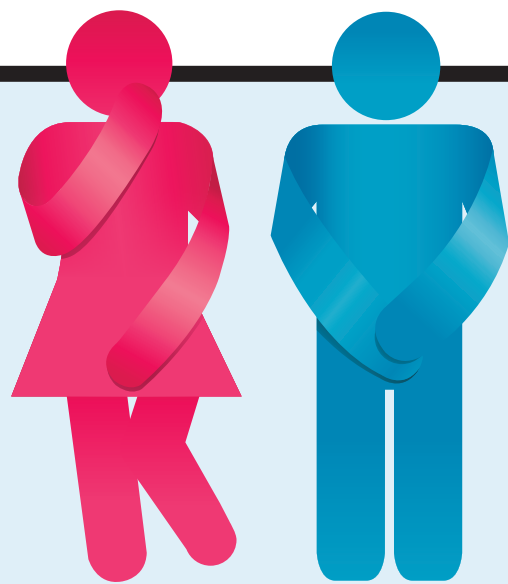
Where's the best place to find the health care you need? The answer depends on why you're looking. The chart below can help you choose the right health care setting for your situation.



Setting	What you'll find there	What sets it apart
Primary care provider's office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Screenings and advice on lifestyle changes to help you stay healthy • Diagnosis, treatment and management of a wide range of health problems 	A provider who understands all your health needs and coordinates your care
Specialist's office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specialized care for complex medical issues • Often, advanced treatments and procedures 	A provider who has additional training and experience in caring for patients with the same condition as you
Urgent care center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quick access to care for minor injuries and illnesses when your regular doctor isn't available • Often, basic lab tests and X-rays on-site • Typically open some evening and weekend hours 	Treatment for common conditions such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minor cuts that need stitches • Nausea and diarrhea • Sinusitis • Skin rashes • Sore throat • Sprains and strains
Emergency room	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expert care for sudden, severe conditions • Access to a variety of lab tests and imaging methods • Open 24/7 — but expect long waits if you don't need this high level of care <p><i>Call 9-1-1 for life-threatening emergencies such as chest pain or severe bleeding.</i></p>	Treatment for serious symptoms such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coughing or vomiting blood • Drooping face • Head trauma • Loss of consciousness • Severe shortness of breath • Sudden weakness in an arm or leg • Chest pain
Telehealth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health care visits with a provider by video chat or phone • Access to care from anywhere, including home 	Convenient option when you can't get to your provider's office or see an out-of-town specialist

Sources include: American Academy of Family Physicians; American Board of Medical Specialties; American College of Emergency Physicians; American College of Physicians; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Incontinence: The secret you don't have to keep



Bladder control problems, also known as urinary incontinence, can be embarrassing. But, if you don't talk with your doctor about it, you won't know about possible remedies. If this condition causes you to limit social activities because you're afraid of losing bladder control when out in public, it may be time to address it. Your doctor can prescribe many things that can help. The treatment, of course, will depend on the cause and severity, and must be tailored to the individual.

Here are some things you can expect from your doctor:

- **A physical and review of your medical history, which will differ based on gender** — For instance, women's bladder control issues may stem from pelvic floor problems and changes related to childbirth. For men, especially as they age, problems may be related to enlargement of the prostate.
- **A check for other medical problems** — For example, diabetes causes some people to urinate more frequently. Talking with your doctor about your bladder control problem may uncover an undiagnosed condition.

- **Medication check** — Some medications, such as diuretics (water pills), can lead to frequent urination. Diuretics are used to treat high blood pressure and some heart and kidney problems. Taking diuretics in the morning when you're fully awake may be easier because you can get to the bathroom. Taking them before bedtime may prevent restless sleep.

Remedies may include:

- **Bladder training** — This teaches you to resist the urge to urinate and expands time between urinating.
- **Diet changes** — These changes include avoiding caffeine and alcohol later in the day, reducing fluid intake and preventing chronic constipation.
- **Kegel exercises** — Regular daily exercise of pelvic muscles can make the bladder muscles stronger and improve control.
- **Biofeedback** — Used with Kegel exercises, biofeedback helps you gain awareness and control of your pelvic muscles.

- **Pelvic floor electrical stimulation** — Mild electrical pulses stimulate muscle contractions and can help control bladder problems.
- **Medicines** — These include pills, liquids or patches to relax your bladder.
- **Surgery** — This is an option if the incontinence is related to problems such as an abnormally positioned bladder, a blockage or, in men, enlargement of the prostate. Surgery may be needed if other treatments don't work.

Take back control

Understandably, some people feel embarrassed to bring up bladder problems at a medical visit. Remember that these are common problems that your doctor can help you with either directly or by referring you to a specialist. Don't hesitate to share your concerns. Once you take that crucial first step, you'll be on your way toward getting the help you need.

Sources include: National Institutes of Health



Dodging diabetes foot and skin issues

High blood sugar sometimes results in foot issues for people with diabetes. By knowing three of the most common foot issues, you can help prevent serious wounds from developing.

1. Calluses

To keep calluses under control, use a pumice stone to file away dead skin. Apply lotion afterward. If a callus develops, tell your doctor so that he or she can remove it. Never try to get rid of calluses, corns or warts yourself. Over-the-counter products can burn or damage your skin.

2. Foot ulcers

Ulcers (sores or wounds) on the sides of the foot are a sign that your shoes don't fit right. Choose a comfortable pair that lets your toes move, and break in new shoes gradually. If you have trouble finding shoes that fit, see a foot specialist.

3. Neuropathy

Nerve damage, also known as neuropathy, can cause you to lose feeling in your feet. You might not notice a foot injury, so remember to look at your feet daily. Check for cuts, bruises, bumps and infections. Use a mirror if necessary.

Stay healthy from head to toe

Diabetes doesn't just affect your feet — it can cause skin problems, too. Avoid infections by:

- Managing your blood sugar (high levels can lead to dry skin)
- Avoiding very hot showers
- Using mild shampoos
- Moisturizing frequently
- Putting talcum powder (not lotion) between your toes to keep those areas dry

A little foot and skin self-care can make a big difference in preventing diabetes complications. But stay vigilant: If you notice any concerning changes, call your doctor right away.

Sources include: American Diabetes Association; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

THE ABCS OF HEART HEALTH

Know the fundamentals of improving your heart health. Here are four things that can make a big difference.

Appropriate aspirin use

Many heart attacks and strokes are caused by blood clots. Aspirin thins the blood, which helps prevent blood clot formation.

What you can do

Ask your health care provider if taking a daily low-dose aspirin is right for you. But don't start on your own. For some people, the risk of aspirin side effects may outweigh the heart-health benefits.

Blood pressure control

Keeping your blood pressure in a healthy range takes strain off your heart, blood vessels and kidneys.

What you can do

- Reach and maintain a healthy weight.
- Be physically active.
- Avoid excessive alcohol.
- Don't smoke.
- Take blood pressure-lowering medication, if prescribed.

Cholesterol management

Maintaining healthy cholesterol levels can lower your risk of developing heart disease or having a stroke.

What you can do

- Follow the lifestyle tips listed under "blood pressure control."
- Limit foods high in saturated fat.
- Choose foods naturally rich in fiber and unsaturated fats.
- Take cholesterol-lowering medication, if prescribed.

Smoking cessation

Smoking plays a role in about one-fourth of deaths from heart disease. But within a year of quitting smoking, your risk of getting heart disease falls by half.

What you can do

Talk with your provider about tips and tools to help you quit. Consider tobacco cessation coaching with Blue Cross. It's a 12-week phone-based program to help you kick the habit. To enroll, call 1-855-326-5102. TTY users, call 711.

Sources include: American Heart Association; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; National Cancer Institute



MAKE MEATLESS MEALS A HABIT

You don't have to go vegan to reap the rewards of eating less meat. Just one meatless meal a week can put you on the path to better health — and save you money. Meat is often more expensive per pound than other types of protein and a big culprit of calories, sodium and saturated fat.

Along with lowering your grocery bill, cutting back on meat reduces the risk for:

- Heart disease
 - High blood pressure
 - High cholesterol
 - Obesity
 - Some cancers
 - Stroke
 - Type 2 diabetes
- Make chili with lentils or kidney or pinto beans instead of ground beef. Sprinkle on shredded fat-free or low-fat cheese, not regular varieties.
 - Stir-fry broccoli and other vegetables with tofu or toasted peanuts or cashews.
 - Sprinkle unsalted nuts or seeds on salads instead of bacon pieces or luncheon meat. Try pumpkin seeds, almonds, walnuts and pecans.

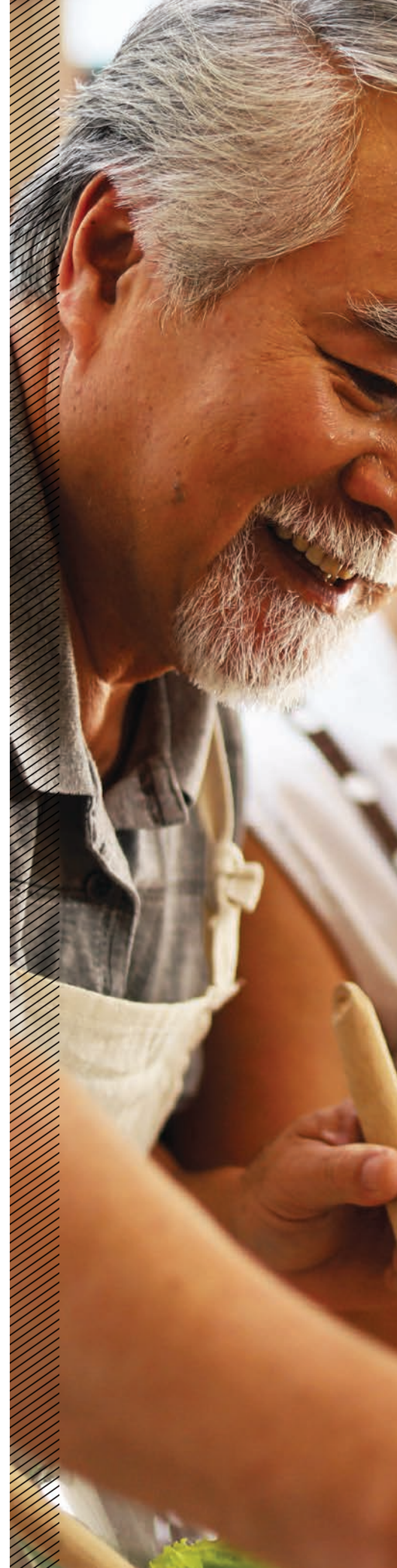
Updating dishes you already serve may make the change to your routine seem easier. Be sure to pick new ingredients that are healthy, not just meatless. They should be lower in sodium and fat, for example. So, don't rely heavily on processed foods, such as packaged veggie burgers.

Here are ways to make over popular meals:

- Replace a beef burger with a grilled portabella mushroom burger.
- Fill tacos, burritos and enchiladas with black beans, red peppers, Brussels sprouts and other beans and vegetables.

In no time, you'll no longer be asking "Where's the beef?" Or chicken. Or pork. You'll be enjoying the wide variety of options a meatless meal can bring.

Sources include: Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics; American Heart Association; U.S. Department of Agriculture; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs



Healthy recipe

Clip & save



Zucchini noodles with mushroom marinara sauce

Servings: 2

Olive oil spray

¼ cup diced yellow onion
(about ½ small)

1 garlic clove, minced

4 oz. mushrooms, sliced

1 cup crushed tomatoes, no
salt added

½ tsp. salt-free Italian
seasoning

⅛ tsp. sea salt

⅛ tsp. black pepper

⅛ tsp. cinnamon

4 oz. zucchini noodles

1 Tbsp. minced fresh basil

1. Heat a medium-sized pot
over high heat for 1 minute.
Remove from heat, spray
with olive oil spray, then
return to heat for 1 minute.

2. Add onion and garlic, reduce
heat to medium high, then
sauté for 1 minute.

3. Add mushrooms, sauté for 1
minute or until mushrooms,
onions and garlic are cooked
through.

4. Add crushed tomatoes,
Italian seasoning, salt,
pepper and cinnamon;
reduce heat to medium
low and cook, stirring
occasionally, for 10 minutes.

5. While sauce is cooking, heat
a nonstick pan on high heat
for 1 minute. Remove from
heat, then spray with olive
oil spray and return to heat
for 1 minute.

6. Add zucchini noodles and
sauté until just barely cooked
through, about 2 minutes.

7. Toss zucchini noodles into
the sauce, then cook for 1
minute.

8. Turn heat off, add minced
basil, stir and serve.

Nutritional information per

¾ cup serving: 69 calories,
0.7 g fat, 0.1 g saturated fat,
0 g trans fat, 0 mg cholesterol,
180 mg sodium,
15 g carbohydrates, 4 g fiber
3 g sugar and 4 g protein.



5 online resources to support your mental health

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 20% of people ages 55 or older experience some type of mental health concern, such as anxiety or depression. Blue Cross and Blue Care Network know that mental health is just as important as physical health when it comes to overall well-being. That's why we offer resources on the Blue Cross® Health & Well-Being website, powered by WebMD®, to help support your mental health:

1 The **Feel Happier Digital Health Assistant program** helps you engage in pleasant activities to maintain a positive mood. The four-week goal is to use the online Mood Tracker and record

a "Happy" or "Okay" mood for 21 out of 28 days. Along the way, you'll get tips from WebMD health coaches to help you reach your goal.

2 Listen to **mental health podcasts** on a variety of topics, including anxiety, financial stress, insomnia, coping with life changes, relationship stress and suicide. New topics are added regularly.

3 Use the **Mood Tracker** to monitor your mood level from day to day. One of the best ways to measure mood is to compare it with moods experienced before.

4 **WebMD Health Topics** helps you find detailed information about a variety of mental health topics, such as anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, eating disorders and insomnia.

5 Use **WebMD Interactives** to take a quiz to rate your risk of depression.

To access these online resources, log in to your member account at www.bcbsm.com, click on the *Health & Well-Being* tab, then *WebMD*.

Or, open the Blue Cross mobile app and tap *Health & Well-Being*. Click on *Resources* to find the Feel Happier Digital Health Assistant program, Mood Tracker, WebMD Health Topics and WebMD Interactives. The mental health podcasts are on the home page.

WebMD Health Services is an independent company supporting Blue Care Network by providing health and well-being services.

WORD SEARCH PUZZLE

Find the following words included in this issue in the puzzle below. See answers on Page 25.

Active
Balance
Cholesterol
Diabetes
Emergency room
Exercise
Falls
Feet

Heart
Incontinence
Independent
Meatless
Mental health
Mobile app
Preventive
Primary care

Skin
Specialist
Statin
Strength
Telehealth
Urgent care
Weight loss

Q W G H N X G T F S C O L T S U H U Y U
E E I N D E P E N D E N T S Z B E F K I
R I S K R W B I D I C L Y I N F O L F N
A G P B S H K S M K D K A L V G C O K C
C H A B A S S U O U T M Z A H E A R T O
Y T C N Z L D R O Z Z E N I G E W E P N
R L T G O N A P R E R J D C R E B T P T
A O I E H V P N Y A H B O E T U I S A I
M S V B C M F D C S M T E P A M A E E N
I S E L W N I T N E I M G S E R N L L E
R T G K Q A N S E S C Q E N I T V O I N
P S E M B E J M G N T F T Y E C Q H B C
C W O E G U E W R Z O A P N N R R C O E
Z E T R F A Z R E J L W T C V Y T E M P
S E U K T K P J M H T D U I U X O S X Y
S Q M L P I X I E Y R O F N N Q G K M E
G Z E F B G F A K F L B C O V P M I V X
Z S Z R V T L D G D N V X V T F A L L S
S V M I S T D E V I T N E V E R P Y X O
T E L E H E A L T H V Y C T E Z F O K N



Dr. K's corner

Marc D. Keshishian, M.D., is senior vice president and chief medical officer of Blue Care Network.



Which kind of preventive health care visit do you need?

You want to protect your health and prevent disease. Knowing which type of preventive health care visit to schedule helps you get the care that's right for you. Here's what you need to know about the three types of visits.

Welcome to Medicare visit

During the first 12 months that you have Medicare, you're entitled to one Welcome to Medicare preventive visit. It includes a review of your health history but isn't an actual physical exam. You'll also receive information and advice about preventive services, such as screenings and vaccines. If you need further care, you'll get a referral.

Your visit may also include:

- Height, weight and blood pressure measurements
- A simple vision test

- A review of any potential risks for depression
- A discussion of advance directives — legal documents that record your wishes about medical care, in case you're ever unable to make decisions for yourself in the future

Yearly wellness visit

After you've had Medicare for longer than 12 months, you get one wellness visit per year. At this visit, you'll fill out a questionnaire called a health risk assessment. Based on your answers, your provider will create or update a personalized plan to help you stay healthy.

Your provider may also do a cognitive impairment assessment — a quick check for possible signs of Alzheimer's disease or dementia. In addition, your provider will review which screenings and vaccines are due and make any referrals you might need. This isn't an actual physical exam.

Routine physical exam

This type of exam is a hands-on checkup. The provider examines your body to determine the state of your health using touch, sight, listening and other techniques. Unlike the previous two kinds of visits, however, routine physical exams aren't covered by Medicare.

You pay nothing for a Welcome to Medicare visit or yearly wellness visit alone. But if your provider combines one of these visits with a physical exam, you may be charged a copay or coinsurance. When you make your appointment, be specific about the type of visit you're scheduling.

Sources include: Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services



Ask the pharmacist

Laura Cornish, Pharm.D., is Pharmacy Manager, Medicare Part D, Senior Health Services.

Statins do more than just lower cholesterol

About 40 million people in the U.S. take a statin. Statins are typically used to lower cholesterol in the blood. But they have other important benefits, too. In fact, they may be prescribed for people with diabetes even when their cholesterol level is normal.

The names of these medications are easy to recognize: They all end with “-statin.” Examples include atorvastatin (Lipitor), pravastatin (Pravachol), rosuvastatin calcium (Crestor) and simvastatin (Zocor). Here’s a look at how statins work and why you might need one.

What statins do in the body

Cholesterol is a fat-like substance in the blood that can build up inside blood vessels and cause problems. Statins help keep the liver from producing cholesterol. This reduces the amount of LDL

(“bad”) cholesterol in the blood. To a lesser extent, statins also help lower triglycerides (blood fats) and raise HDL (“good”) cholesterol levels.

But there’s more. Statins also help:

- Lessen inflammation in blood vessels, which works against the buildup of fatty deposits
- Reduce the risk of having a heart attack or the most common type of stroke
- Decrease the chance that people with heart disease will need a cardiac procedure

Who needs to take a statin?

For certain adults up to age 75, experts recommend statins as the first-choice drug treatment to:

- Lower high LDL cholesterol
- Prevent cardiovascular disease in people with diabetes, regardless of their cholesterol level

Statins may be helpful for many people older than age 75, too. Talk with your provider about whether a statin could be beneficial for you.

Discuss possible side effects with your provider as well. Most side effects are mild and go away as your body gets used to the medication. Some people report bothersome muscle pain. If that happens, your provider may switch you to a lower dose or a different statin.

These medications are known for lowering cholesterol, but the benefits don’t end there. For people who need a statin, research shows that the pros far outweigh any cons.

Sources include: American Diabetes Care; American Heart Association; National Institutes of Health

Stay connected for better health

Limiting in-person contact with others is an effective way to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and other infectious diseases. But skipping get-togethers with family, friends and neighbors to stay safe can get lonely. Even in the comfort of your home, you can nurture close bonds. Here are some ideas.

Chart your community

Begin by identifying your social support system. Ask yourself these three questions:

1. Who is important in my life?
2. Whom am I important to?
3. Is there someone I know in danger of isolation right now?

Can you list specific names? If so, you have a network of people to help you — and whom you can help in return.

Then, reach out

These days, there are many options for staying in touch, even when it's not safe or possible to do so in person. Sure, you can call or write. But you can also text, FaceTime, Skype, Zoom or chat on Facebook or WhatsApp. If you're not familiar with the new technology, ask a family member to help you learn about it.

Find a common purpose

In challenging times, recognize shared struggles. See whether you can spot the needs of those around you — for example, family members, friends, neighbors or strangers. Then, take a simple step to fulfill them. Having a common purpose and helping others helps you realize you're a part of something larger.

Sources include: American Heart Association; *American Psychologist*; *Heart*; National Institutes of Health; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services



WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT VACCINES



Over the past year, there's been a lot of talk about vaccines. But getting to the facts can sometimes be difficult. Because people of all ages need to be vaccinated to protect their personal health and the health of those around them, here's some information for you about vaccines.

How do vaccines work in the body?

Vaccines are often created from a weakened or dead form of a specific virus or bacteria that causes a disease. They can be given by an injection or nasal spray. Once it's in your body, the vaccine stimulates your immune system to produce antibodies that allow you to fight off the infection. For example, the flu vaccine can contain a dead viral strain, a live

viral strain or a nonviral strain. And it must be updated each year because the viruses that cause the flu constantly evolve.

How do vaccines protect people from illness?

Vaccines help protect people from carrying and spreading infectious diseases. When people get immunizations, there are fewer of them to be carriers of the disease. It makes it difficult for

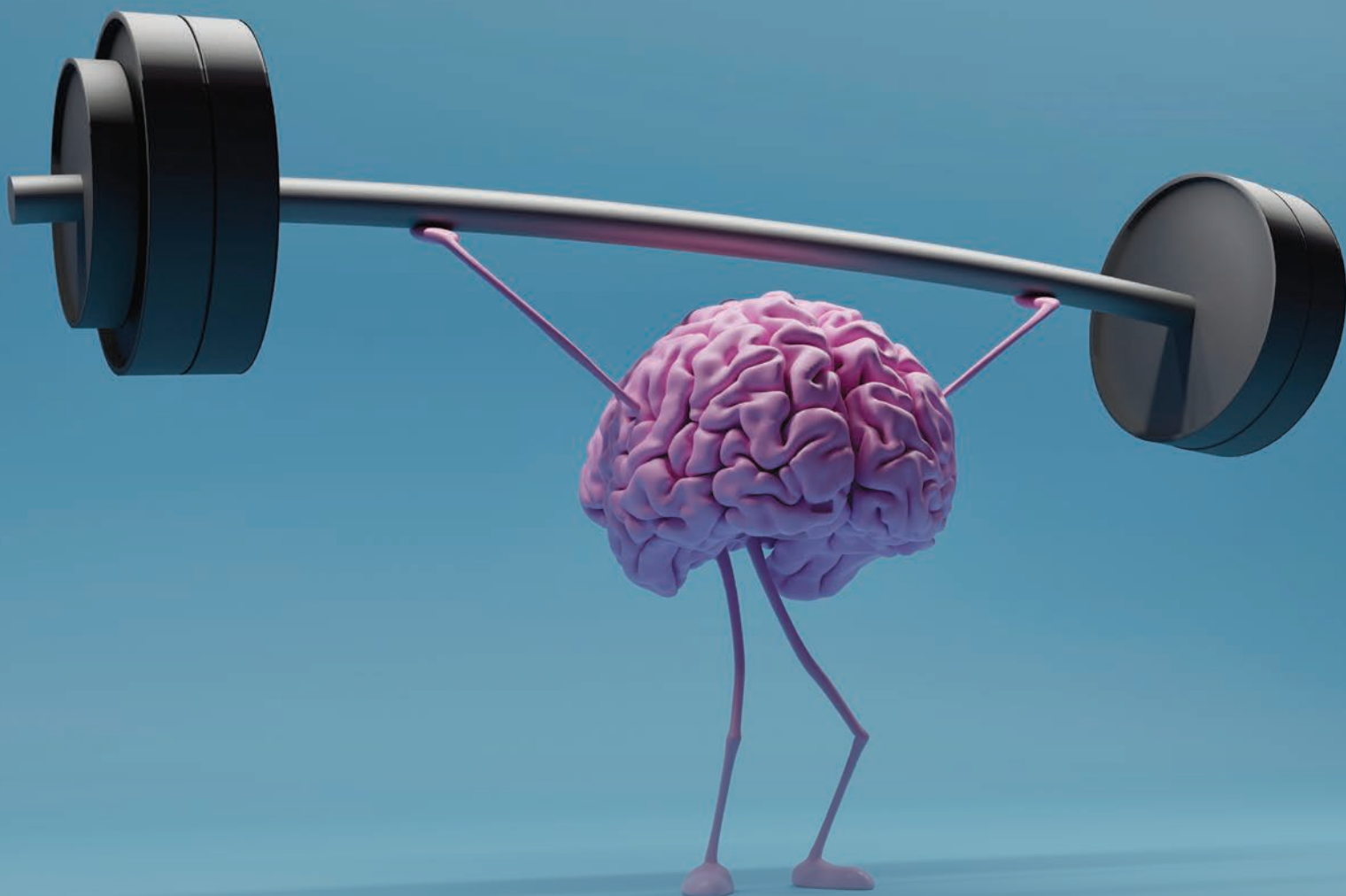
diseases to spread from person to person. Young children and seniors can be especially at risk for certain illnesses, and vaccines help protect them.

How do I know whether I need a vaccine?

Talk with your doctor. Doctors are aware of the latest information from credible sources about vaccines, like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Some

vaccines have schedules required to help you maintain immunity. Regularly scheduling annual appointments with your doctor can help you stay current on your vaccinations.

Those with health coverage typically have access to free routine vaccinations. Blue Care Network members can receive free treatment at participating providers.



Smart habits for a healthier brain

To hear some people tell it, getting older always means losing your mental edge. Yet research tells a much different story. It shows that most people can remain mentally sharp well into their 60s, 70s and beyond.

Certain lifestyle habits can help protect the brain over time. These habits may reduce the risk for cognitive decline — a decrease in mental abilities such as learning, language and memory. The following strategies can help you take care of your brain.

Get regular physical activity

Physical activity that raises your heart rate is as good for your brain as it is for the rest of your body. It increases blood flow, which provides extra nourishment to your brain. Plus, it reduces potential risk factors for dementia, including diabetes, high blood pressure and unhealthy cholesterol levels. Talk with your doctor about which activities are best for you.

Give your brain a mental workout

Regularly exercising your mind also helps keep your brain in tip-top shape. Learn something new, such as how to play an instrument or cook a new cuisine. Play games that require strategy, like chess and bridge. Tackle puzzles, such as solving a crossword or putting together a jigsaw puzzle. Or take a class at your local community college, because formal education at any age helps reduce the risk for cognitive decline.

Consider-brain training apps

Digital apps feature games designed to keep your brain active. You can play them on your cellphone, tablet or laptop. Some are free; others charge a fee to subscribe. Look for an app with a variety of games you enjoy.

Pursue meaningful social activities

Staying socially engaged and active in your community is another way to support brain health. Plan activities with friends and family. And make new friends by joining a book club, walking group or faith-based organization. Consider volunteering for a cause you care deeply about.

Protect against head injuries

A brain injury can increase the risk for cognitive decline and dementia. So, buckle your seat belt when riding in a vehicle and put on a helmet when pedaling a bike. Reduce your risk of falling at home by making sure rooms are well-lit and floors are free of clutter.

Above all, don't buy into negative stereotypes about aging. There's a lot you can do to help keep your thinking sharp. And the more you believe in yourself, the more likely you are to take steps that promote a healthier brain.

10 foods that nourish your brain

Eating more plant-based foods and less saturated and trans fats is good for your overall health. In addition, studies suggest that certain foods may have specific benefits for your brain, like slowing cognitive decline and delaying your risk for Alzheimer's disease.

Even a relatively small change in your diet may make a difference. For example, just two servings of berries and one serving of fish per week may be beneficial.

Here's a top 10 list of brain-friendly foods:

1. Leafy green vegetables
2. Other vegetables
3. Berries
4. Nuts
5. Beans
6. Whole grains
7. Seafood
8. Poultry
9. Olive oil
10. Wine (no more than one drink per day, and only if you don't have a health condition or take a medicine that rules out alcohol)

Sources include: Alzheimer's Association; American Academy of Family Physicians; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; Harvard Health Publishing; National Institutes of Health



Taking a closer look at rheumatoid arthritis

Have you noticed that it's not as easy to button up your shirt? If so, the culprit may be rheumatoid arthritis (also known as RA). This long-term (chronic) disease causes inflammation of the joints, such as those in your fingers. Although there's no cure for RA, medical treatment and lifestyle changes can reduce your pain and help you stay active and independent.

Signs and symptoms of RA

RA most often affects joints in the hands, wrists, feet, ankles, knees, shoulders and elbows. It may cause deformities in the fingers, which makes moving your hands difficult. And lumps, known as rheumatoid nodules, may form anywhere in the body.

RA most often occurs in people ages 30 to 50, but it can develop at any age. Symptoms may include:

- Joint pain
- Stiffness, especially in the morning
- Swelling over the joints
- Decreased movement
- Pain that is worse with joint movement
- Bumps over the small joints
- Trouble doing activities of daily living

- Difficulty grasping or pinching things
- Tiredness and lack of energy (fatigue)
- Occasional fever

RA can also affect many nonjoint parts of the body, such as the lungs, heart, skin, nerves, muscles, blood vessels and kidneys. These complications can lead to severe illness and even death.

How treatment can help

Early treatment slows progression of the disease, so it's important to seek care quickly. If you're diagnosed with RA, medication can provide pain relief and help reduce inflammation. Medicines should be managed by a rheumatologist – a doctor who specializes in arthritis and rheumatic diseases.

Other treatment options include splints, physical therapy and surgery. Splints can protect your joints and strengthen weak joints, while physical therapy can increase strength and movement in the affected areas. Surgery is not a cure for RA, but it can help correct deformities caused by the disease.





Other ways to feel better

Lifestyle changes can improve your quality of life. They may focus on things such as:

- **Balancing activity and rest.** Exercise keeps muscles strong and preserves joint mobility; rest helps ease symptoms of pain and fatigue. Be sure to do both for the best benefits.
- **Using assistive devices.** Canes, crutches and walkers can help keep stress off certain joints and improve balance.
- **Using adaptive equipment.** Reachers and grabbers let you extend your reach and reduce straining. Dressing aids help you put on and take off clothing more easily.
- **Managing use of medicines.** Prescriptions for this condition have some risks. Work with your doctor to create a plan to manage and address side effects.

Finally, don't forget about your mental health. Because RA damages joints over time, it causes some disability, which can lead to problems such as depression and anxiety. It's helpful to find a support group so that you can better manage the effects of RA.

Sources include: American Academy of Family Physicians; Arthritis Foundation; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; National Institutes of Health



SIMPLE SOLUTIONS TO HELP YOU STAY ACTIVE AND INDEPENDENT

Over the years, you may have noticed that some of your daily activities have become more difficult. (Think about traveling up and down stairs or opening jars.) However, you can take steps to remain active, preserve your independence and get the most out of life. Below are just a few of the basic changes you can make around your home. For more ideas, talk with your doctor about activities you're struggling to do. He or she can offer solutions tailored to your specific health needs and concerns.

In the kitchen

- Keep the appliances you use most on the counter so they're within easy reach.
- Use rollout shelves in cabinets to make it easier to reach items you need.
- Trade heavy cookware for lightweight pots and pans, especially if you have arthritis.

In the bathroom

- Add safety bars to your bathtub or shower to help prevent falls. Make sure they're at an easy-to-grab height.
- Install grab bars to help you get on and off the toilet.

Around the house

- Wear shoes, not just socks.
- Remove throw rugs to prevent tripping.
- If a doorway is too narrow to accommodate your wheelchair or walker, install offset hinges to give the door extra clearance when it swings.
- Replace round doorknobs with lever-style handles that are easier to grip and open.

In the dark

- Place a flashlight next to your bed in case of a power outage.
- Plug in night-lights to guide you during nighttime trips to the bathroom.

Outside

- Wear low-heeled, supportive shoes.
- Walk on grass when the sidewalks are slippery. It will give you better traction.

Finding a community of support

If you need assistance, ask friends, family or neighbors to lend a hand. Maybe a loved one could pick up your prescriptions while doing their own shopping. You could even offer to trade favors. For instance, double one of your favorite dinner recipes and bring the extra dish to your neighbor in exchange for help mowing the lawn.

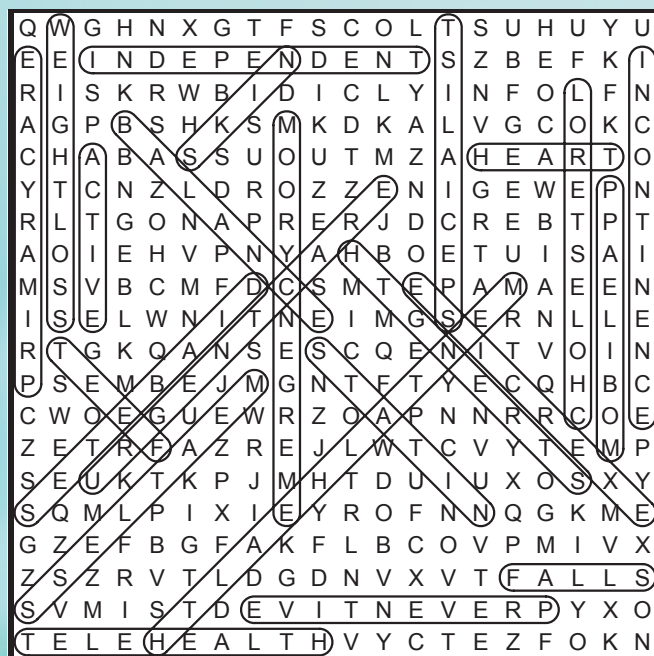
Need another useful resource? Your local Area Agency on Aging can help. These organizations address the needs and concerns of older adults, offering services to help you live independently and safely at home. Call 1-800-677-1116 or visit eldercare.acl.gov to learn more.

Remember, you have plenty of resources to help you with daily tasks. Friends, local groups and home improvements can help you maintain your quality of life and independence for years to come.

Sources include: Arthritis Foundation; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; Family Caregiver Alliance; National Institutes of Health; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

WORD SEARCH ANSWERS

From Page 15





Is it COVID-19 — or something else?



As the novel coronavirus continues to spread, it's important to know how it may affect you and how it compares with other illnesses. That way, if you begin to have symptoms of COVID-19, you can contact your doctor promptly. Your doctor can determine whether you have the coronavirus or whether it's actually the common cold, allergies or the flu.

Here's what we know about the coronavirus and how it stacks up against other illnesses.

Coronavirus

Coronavirus has a variety of symptoms, including coughing, fever, chills, shortness of breath and difficulty breathing. Other signs may include:

- Muscle or body aches
- Fatigue
- Headaches
- New loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat
- Runny nose or congestion
- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea

You may notice symptoms two to 14 days after being exposed to COVID-19. Most people are sick for a few days to a week.

If you think you were exposed to the coronavirus, contact your doctor immediately. Drink a lot of fluids and rest. Those with mild symptoms should stay at home in a room away from others. Acetaminophen and other over-the-counter (OTC)

medicines may help ease your symptoms.

The common cold

Unlike the coronavirus, the common cold doesn't usually cause a fever. Symptoms of a cold — such as a runny nose or sneezing — are usually mild and develop over time. You may also have the following symptoms:

- Slight body aches
- Sore throat
- Coughing
- Headaches

The common cold tends to last for about seven to 10 days. As you recover, you should get enough rest and stay hydrated. OTC medicines may also help you feel better.

Seasonal allergies

Allergies can cause symptoms such as a runny or stuffy nose, sneezing and coughing. Other signs of allergies include:

- Itchy eyes, nose, mouth or throat
- Headaches
- Watery eyes
- Pressure in the nose and cheeks
- Difficulty smelling

Symptoms usually last several weeks. Allergies are seasonal; meaning, they flare up in the spring, late summer and fall. Allergies don't cause muscle or body aches or fevers.

If you have allergies, it's best to avoid allergens that trigger your symptoms. OTC nasal sprays and other allergy medicines can be helpful.

The flu

The flu can be mild to severe, which can make it easy to confuse this illness with COVID-19. Flu symptoms, which can come on suddenly, include coughing, sore throat and a runny or stuffy nose. You may also experience the following symptoms:

- Muscle or body aches
- Headaches
- Fatigue
- Fever or chills
- Vomiting and diarrhea (more common in children)

The flu lasts for less than two weeks. During that time, you should get lots of rest at home, drink plenty of fluids and stay away from other people. Your doctor may prescribe medicines for you based on your situation.

Remember: As frightening as it may be to come down with COVID-19, the illness can be mild to moderate in severity. Many people don't require any special treatment. The more you know about its symptoms and the symptoms of other illnesses, the more you can reduce your stress about the coronavirus and take good care of yourself.

Sources include: American Academy of Family Physicians; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; National Institutes of Health; U.S. Food and Drug Administration; World Health Organization

Health Briefs



Are you due for a mammogram?

For women in the U.S., breast cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death. The good news is that breast cancer screenings can help detect this lethal threat at an earlier, more treatable stage. Even so, many people may avoid getting mammograms because of the coronavirus. In fact, breast cancer diagnoses have dropped by more than 50% during the pandemic.

Mammograms are your best defense against breast cancer. But the benefits and

limitations vary due to age and personal risk. Experts have different recommendations for this screening:

- The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recommends screening every two years for women ages 50 to 74.
- The American Cancer Society recommends a mammogram yearly for all women ages 45 to 54. Women ages 55 and older can choose to continue this schedule or switch to getting a mammogram every other year.

Talk with a doctor about your personal breast cancer risk factors. Together, you can decide when it's best to start getting mammograms and how often you should go back for screening.

Sources include: American Cancer Society; American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists; *American Family Physician*; *Annals of Internal Medicine*; *Cancer*

DON'T MAKE THESE 3 MEDICATION EXCUSES

Do you always take your medications as prescribed? If the answer is no, you're not alone — about three in four people make medicine mistakes. Here are three common medication excuses and how to overcome them.

1 It costs too much.

If your meds are pricey, ask your doctor about a generic or less expensive option. They may know of pharmaceutical assistance programs that help with the cost of drugs.

2 I forgot!

If you're not used to taking medicine, you may forget to take it. Make a note on your calendar or do it before or after something else you do regularly, like brushing your teeth.

3 It caused side effects I didn't like.

If you experience side effects, talk with your doctor or pharmacist about how to lessen them.



Sources include: American Academy of Family Physicians; American Heart Association; National Institutes of Health; U.S. Food and Drug Administration

Take action to control your asthma

Asthma is a chronic lung disease that inflames and narrows your airways. With your airways constricted, you are likely to experience shortness of breath, chest tightness, wheezing and coughing. Asthma has no cure, but avoiding triggers, taking medications and having an asthma action plan can help you keep it under control.

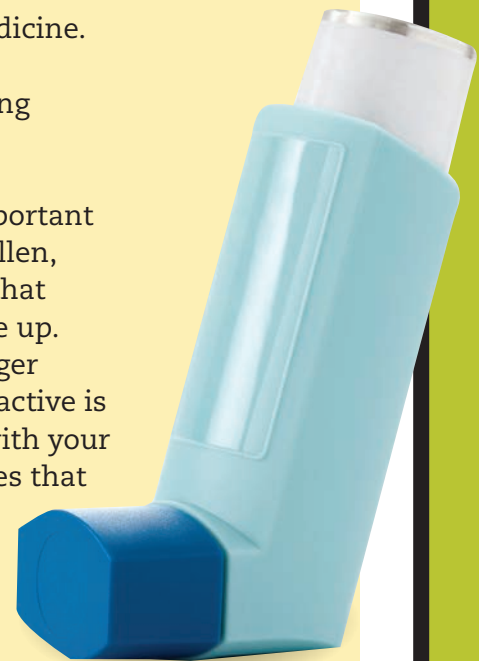
Here are goals every person with asthma should strive for:

- ✓ Go most days of the week without symptoms. Your asthma is under control when you have symptoms on two days a week or fewer.
- ✓ Maintain a normal activity level.
- ✓ Sleep through the night.

- ✓ Limit using quick-relief medicine.
- ✓ Prevent asthma attacks. These could result in needing emergency care.

To achieve these goals, it's important to avoid triggers — such as pollen, air pollution or animal fur — that can cause your asthma to flare up. Physical activity may also trigger asthma symptoms, but being active is vital to staying healthy. Talk with your doctor about asthma medicines that can help you stay active.

Sources include: National Institutes of Health



Young at heart — and muscles and bones and lungs ...



It's never too late to improve your health. The tips below help keep your body "younger" at any age. And that may help you live not only longer, but also better.

Move more and sit less. When people lose the ability to do things they once did, inactivity is often to blame rather than age. Being active in daily life — for example, by doing yard work and climbing stairs — helps preserve your independence.

Get a variety of exercise. Four types of activities help keep your body youthful:

- **Aerobic exercise** — such as walking briskly, bicycling and dancing — boosts your stamina.

It also improves the health of your heart, lungs and blood vessels.

- **Strength exercise** — such as doing push-ups, lifting weights and using elastic bands — helps build strong muscles. It also reduces your risk for weakened bones.
- **Flexibility exercise** — such as stretching — helps keep your body limber and your joints moving freely.
- **Balance exercise** — such as practicing standing on one foot — helps prevent falls, a major cause of disability.

Eat nutrient-rich foods. Research shows that a healthy eating pattern is tied to aging well. Choose foods such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean

meats, low-fat dairy, beans and nuts. Limit red and processed meats, fast food and sodas.

Quit smoking for good. There's no age limit on the health rewards of becoming a nonsmoker. Your circulation and lung function may improve within weeks. Quitting smoking also reduces your risk for heart attack, stroke, cancer and lung disease. If you need help, try tobacco-cessation coaching with Blue Care Network. The 12-week phone-based program can help you snuff out that last cigarette. To enroll, call 1-855-326-5102.

Sources include: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; National Institutes of Health; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Quality improvement program

Everyone wants quality health care, but how do you know you're getting it? BCN Advantage has a quality improvement program that provides a comprehensive, standard way for us to measure, evaluate and improve clinical care and services. The program identifies the important aspects of health care and continuously improves the quality and safety of the care and services we provide you. Two of the measurements used by BCN Advantage are the Healthcare Effectiveness Data and Information Set (also known as HEDIS®) and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services star rating.

HEDIS is the most widely used set of performance measures in the managed care industry and is just one of the tools BCN Advantage uses to improve the quality of patient care. HEDIS makes it possible to compare the performance of health plans throughout the nation.

Medicare evaluates plans based on a 5-star rating system. Star ratings are calculated each year and may change from one year to the next. The star rating system uses quality measurements that are widely recognized within the health care industry to provide an objective method for evaluating health plan quality.

BCN Advantage received an overall 4.0-star rating from CMS for the 2020 star rating (2018 measurement year). Clinical HEDIS measures finished with a star rating of 4.5, which demonstrates BCN Advantage's commitment to strong clinical quality for our members.

The following clinical measures received a 4-star rating or higher (2018 measurement year):

- Adult BMI assessment
- Breast cancer screening
- Colorectal cancer screening
- Comprehensive diabetes care — blood sugar controlled, eye exams and testing for kidney disease
- Disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drug therapy for rheumatoid arthritis
- Medication reconciliation post-discharge
- Osteoporosis management in women who had a fracture
- Plan all-cause readmissions

BCN Advantage will continue to focus on improving clinical HEDIS measures. Upcoming focus measures include:

- Statin therapy for patients with cardiovascular disease

Our quality improvement programs help doctors measure and improve care. *Your Health Advantage* and www.bcbsm.com/medicare give you information about these programs. For more information about our quality improvement programs or guidelines, please contact our Quality Management department:

- By email at BCNQIQuestions@bcbsm.com
- By phone at 248-455-2808, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday through Friday. TTY users should call 711.

Blue Care Network complies with applicable federal civil rights laws and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, or sex.

ATENCIÓN: si habla español, tiene a su disposición servicios gratuitos de asistencia lingüística. Llame al 1-800-450-3680 (TTY: 711).

ملحوظة: إذا كنت تتحدث العربية، فإن خدمات المساعدة اللغوية تتوافر لك بالمجان. اتصل برقم 1-800-450-3680 (رقم هاتف الصم والبكم: 711).

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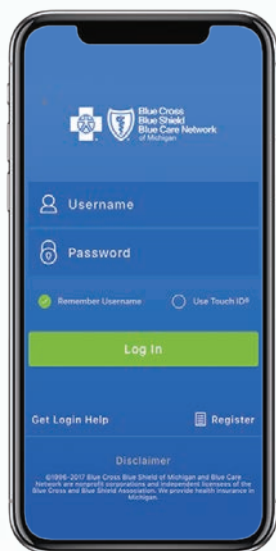
The Blue Cross mobile app securely connects you to your health info

Have you ever gone for an X-ray or blood test and accidentally left your member ID card at home? When you download the Blue Cross mobile app from the App Store or Google Play, you'll always have your virtual ID card on your smartphone or tablet.* The mobile app also connects you securely to other health plan information, such as your recent claims and copayments.

When you create an online account, you can view plan documents such as your *Explanation of Benefits* and sign up to receive many of your plan documents digitally, instead of in paper format.

For more information on how to download the mobile app, visit www.bcbsm.com/app.

Note: The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services requires us to mail paper copies of certain documents.



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