

A young girl with brown hair, wearing a red dress, is playing in a water fountain. She has her eyes closed and a joyful expression, with water spraying around her face. The background is a blurred green, suggesting an outdoor park setting. A dark blue horizontal band is overlaid across the middle of the image, containing the text and logo.

# Healthy MercyCare LIVING

*A wellness newsletter for MercyCare members*

# A new way of healthy living for our members

MercyCare Health Plans is pleased to introduce a new format for and distribution of *Healthy Living*, a health and wellness newsletter for our membership.

As a benefit of your membership, you can access this and future issues online at your convenience at [MercyCareHealthPlans.com](http://MercyCareHealthPlans.com) and on our Facebook page.

Our goal is to keep our members healthy, happy and informed. That's why you'll find the same helpful articles about how to maintain a healthy weight, stay active, quit smoking, prevent illness and injury, eat healthier and more in a fresh, new format.

## About MercyCare

Our membership has continued to grow as we grow. We now have over 50,000 members located throughout southern Wisconsin and northern Illinois.

MercyCare, together with Mercyhealth, offers a complete continuum of health care services to its membership.

MercyCare also offers contracted providers with additional specialties and services in outlying areas. This means our members can receive care at over 68 locations in 23 communities.

Our mission and vision are based on our Culture of Excellence: Quality (best practices), Service (world-class patient/customer satisfaction), Partnering (highly qualified and superior workforce), and Cost (cost-effective services/continued growth).

MercyCare offers a variety of plans and products. We provide affordable, attainable health care for seniors, individuals and area employers and their employees.

If you have questions about your insurance, wellness or want to talk to a MercyCare representative, please call (800) 895-2421 in Wisconsin or (877) 908-6027 in Illinois.

We hope we can make healthy living a priority in your family today and every day.



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Healthy Living is published by MercyCare Health Plans to inform its members of current health issues and improve the use of MCHP services. This publication should not replace the care and advice of your doctor. Always talk to your health care professional about your personal health needs. MercyCare Health Plans is a Qualified Health Plan issuer in the Health Insurance Marketplace.

# Making family fitness fun

Balancing your child's school day, homework and other activities can be hectic, but making small changes can lead to big rewards. Before you know it, your family will become a more active and healthier bunch!

Parents are role models for their children—when your children see you eating right and being physically active, there's a good chance they'll do the same. Living a healthier, more physically active lifestyle doesn't require expensive sporting equipment or memberships. There are fun, creative ways to improve your family's physical activity habits. Here are ideas to get you started:

- **Play a game of tag instead of watching TV.** Tag provides fun and physical activity. Children love it—especially if they can chase their parents—and it increases everyone's heart rate all at once.
- **Start a family garden.** Begin getting the soil ready to plant flowers and vegetables. If you have limited space, try growing herbs in pots. Homegrown vegetables and herbs are great money savers and ensure you'll have something available for healthy summer meals and snacks.
- **Go old school.** Help your children draw hopscotch or four square courts on the sidewalk. Sidewalk chalk is a colorful and inexpensive way for children to create their own activity space.
- **Plan a nature scavenger hunt.** Pick up small nets and mason jars for kids to use to catch butterflies or interesting insects. Collect wild flowers around the neighborhood or at a local park.
- **Help your children organize a game.** Try getting a neighborhood softball or kickball game together with their friends. Pitch in by planning healthy snacks and drinks to keep everyone energized during games.



# Tips for healthy summer eating

As the days get longer, we think about firing up the grill and gathering with friends to enjoy all the great food available during the summer season. Don't let grazing on big spreads get out of hand. Instead, follow these simple tips to eat healthier this summer:

**Reach for the vegetables.** Try adding avocado to your sandwich, wrap or taco. Or, the next time you're cooking fish, meat or poultry, sauté peppers, onion, garlic and tomatoes to serve as a topping. Choose raw vegetables over chips. (Just remember to take it easy on the dip!)

**Pay attention to portions.** Your clenched fist is a close measure of one cup of food, which you can use when dishing up a helping of potato or pasta salads. And, your thumb is a close measure to one tablespoon, which you can use for dressings or spreads to help your calorie counting. (Dressings usually have around 50-100 calories per tablespoon.) Eating in moderation and recognizing when you're full are also key to maintaining a healthy weight.

**Get the most out of your salad.** Not all salads are healthy, especially when you eat out. Salads loaded with dressing, cheese or fried meat are also loaded with calories and fat. The good news is healthy salads don't have to be boring. You can pick salads with a lot of different vegetables for more disease-fighting nutrients. Or, top salads off with a lean protein like grilled chicken, fish or beans.

**Don't overdo it at summer BBQs.** Resist the temptation to overeat by filling up your plate with healthy foods first, including fruits and green salads. Once you've finished, get moving! Play with the kids or get everyone together for a game of volleyball, basketball or tag.

**Cook at home.** There are a lot of benefits to eating at home. Not only will you save money, but you'll know exactly what goes into your meal. Research shows that people who eat home-cooked meals on a regular basis consume less sugar and processed foods, which can result in higher energy levels and better mental health.

**Don't forget the fruit!** Summer is a great time for fresh fruit. Add your favorite berries to your morning cereal, oatmeal or salad. Keep a bowl of apples, oranges and bananas on the table. Choose watermelon or cherries for dessert instead of cookies or ice cream.



## Know your storage limits

These short, but safe, time limits for home-refrigerated foods can keep them from spoiling or becoming dangerous to eat. (Note: The guidelines for freezer storage are for quality only. Frozen foods remain safe indefinitely.)

Category	Food	Refrigerator	Freezer
Salads	egg, chicken, ham, tuna and macaroni salads	3-5 days	1-2 months
Hot dogs	opened package unopened package	1 week 2 weeks	1-2 months 1-2 months
Lunch meat	open package or deli-sliced unopened package	3-5 days 2 weeks	1-2 months 1-2 months
Bacon	unopened package	7 days	1 month
Ground meat	ground beef, turkey, veal, pork, lamb	1-2 days	3-4 months
Fresh beef, lamb, pork	steaks chops roasts	3-5 days 3-5 days 3-5 days	6-12 months 4-6 months 4-12 months
Fresh poultry	chicken or turkey, whole chicken or turkey, pieces	1-2 days 1-2 days	1 year 9 months
Soups and stews	vegetable or meat	3-4 days	2-3 months
Leftovers	cooked meat or poultry chicken nuggets/patties pizza	3-4 days 3-4 days 3-4 days	2-6 months 1-3 months 1-2 months

# Reach for lettuce for lunch

Did you know ... the potato is the only fresh vegetable that is more popular than lettuce in America? According to the USDA, the average American eats 33 pounds of lettuce a year!

Lettuce is extremely low-calorie and perfect as a weight-loss food. One cup of raw leaf lettuce has only nine calories, one gram of protein and 1.3 grams of fiber. There are dozens of lettuce varieties but these can be categorized into four main types: butterhead, crisphead, looseleaf and romaine. If you want to maximize the health benefits of eating lettuce, choose leaves that are darker in color as they contain more nutrients.

Even though iceberg lettuce is the most popular choice for a salad, it is extremely low in nutrients compared to others. To get the most out of your salads, try adding a few new lettuce varieties to maximize the overall nutritional benefits.

## Why lettuce is good for you

Depending on the variety, lettuce is a good source of vitamins C and K, and folate (a form of vitamin B9).

Lettuce also contains potassium (which helps regulate blood pressure), manganese (which helps regulate brain and nerve functions), and copper and iron (which are essential for red blood cell formation).

## Choosing the right lettuce

At the grocery store, choose a lettuce that is firm and has crisp leaves. Avoid lettuce with wilted leaves or those that have brown, dark or slimy leaves. Iceberg and butterhead lettuce should feel heavy for their sizes and not have brown or decayed stems.

And, when making a salad, avoid heavier dressings and toppings such as croutons or bacon that are loaded with calories. Instead, top your next salad with fresh vegetables and try a light olive oil and balsamic vinegar dressing with a dash of salt and pepper.

Looking for a healthy alternative for lunch? Try a lettuce wrap. If you replace your tortilla or sandwich bread with lettuce, you'll increase your daily intake of vitamins and minerals and reduce your calories.



Butter or butterhead, including Boston and Bibb, lettuce has large green leaves that are soft and sweet. Speckled butterhead lettuce has splashes of purple on its green leaves.



Romaine has one of the highest nutritional values in the lettuce category with more vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium, phosphorus and potassium per serving than iceberg lettuce.



Most loose leaf lettuces have a mild flavor and are very pliable, despite their crunchy stems. Their uneven, ruffled surfaces add layers of texture to salads. Because the leaves are so large, it's best to tear them up into bite-size pieces for salads.

# Habits that harm a good night's sleep

It can be tough to make time for sleep, especially when you're trying to juggle family, friends and work commitments. But sleep is worth prioritizing.

Recent scientific advances reveal that sleep plays a role in the health of nearly every cell in our bodies. Irregular sleep schedules, not getting enough sleep, and poor-quality sleep also interfere with how well our cells and organs work together.

Frequent lack of sleep can affect our ability to fight off infections, cope with stress and regulate metabolism. Sleep also contributes to brain health by shaping memories and restoring emotional energy that can influence relationships and motivation.

Adults need a regular schedule of seven to eight hours in bed each night, and they need good quality sleep. Scientists have discovered that while many people may feel awake after getting less sleep, sleeping for shorter periods of time or following an irregular sleep schedule does not help your organs work together at their best. How long you sleep, your schedule and the quality of your sleep all contribute to achieving your best health.

To achieve the best sleep, avoid the following:

**Caffeine** can interfere with the natural chemistry

of feeling sleepy, even if you had a cup of coffee five hours before bedtime.

**Drinking alcohol** before bed can disturb the pattern and quality of your sleep.

**Watching TV, texting and reading in bed** are habits that can get in the way of going to sleep. Focusing on these activities can become a mental routine that interferes with how the brain transitions from being awake to sleeping. Light from these activities also weakens your body's ability to release hormones that prepare you for sleep.

## What you can do to sleep better

Go to sleep at the same time each night. Set aside time to prepare for sleep, and give yourself seven undisturbed hours in bed.

Taking time to relax, such as with a warm bath, can help your body prepare for sleep.

Sleeping in a dark, quiet, cool room can also help.

Like eating well and exercising, getting plenty of sleep can help you achieve your best for your family and career, and it can improve your well-being for years to come. Sleep health is a fundamental requirement of life. It's not an option.



**coffee & tea**



**alcohol & cigarettes**



**eating**



**horror movies**



**gadgets**



# Schedule a summer skin checkup

Skin cancer is the most common type of cancer in the US. Some are more common or deadly than others. Basal and squamous cell carcinoma are the most common types of skin cancer and they make up over 98% of all cases of skin cancer. They can be treated and rarely result in death—less than 0.1% of patient deaths are caused by basal and squamous cell carcinoma skin cancers. However, another type of skin cancer is melanoma. It is much less common than the other types of skin cancer but it is more likely to result in death. Like many cancers, the risk of melanoma increases with age. Skin cancer of any type occurs more commonly in men than women and among individuals who have:

- Blonde or red hair, light eye color, and fair skin that freckles and sunburns easily
- A past history of sunburns or skin cancer
- A family history of melanoma
- Abnormal moles or more than 100 moles
- Used a tanning bed

Clinicians screen for any type of skin cancer is through a visual examination that follows the ABCDE rule to look for:

**A = Asymmetry** (one half of a mole does not match the other)

**B = Border irregularity** (edges of the mole are ragged, notched or blurred)

**C = Color** (pigmentation of the mole is not uniform, with varying degrees of tan, brown or black)

**D = Diameter** of more than ¼" (about the size of a pencil eraser)

**E = Evolving** (the mole is changing over time)

If you are concerned or notice any skin changes, call your doctor. Tell him or her of any risk factors for skin cancer, any changes in appearance of moles, past history of sunburns or skin cancer, family history of melanoma, and use of tanning beds.





## Camp safely this summer season

Camping is a fun way to get family and friends together to enjoy the outdoors. Take a few minutes to help ensure your camping trip is safe and healthy with these smart tips:

- Make sure you are up-to-date on recommended vaccinations before your camping trip.
- Pack healthy snacks, water, adequate clothes and a first-aid kit.
- Never leave a campfire unattended. Before you leave a campsite, be sure to put it out completely.
- Put on protective gear, such as helmets, sturdy shoes and life jackets, depending on the activity.
- Prevent carbon monoxide poisoning. Never use fuel-burning equipment, such as gas stoves, heaters, lanterns and charcoal grills, inside or near a tent, camper or other enclosed shelter.
- Put on insect repellent containing 20% or more DEET.
- Wear light-colored clothing so you can see ticks better. Check yourself, your family and your pets for ticks, and remove them promptly.
- Protect yourself from the sun. Put on sunscreen with at least SPF 15 and cover up with clothing, a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses.

# Put your health first

Staying healthy is important for you and your family. Follow these simple tips to ensure you have a safe and healthy summer:

- Maintain a healthy lifestyle at home, at work and in the community. Make time for physical activity, healthy eating, relaxation and sleep.
- Take an active role in your health. Learn more about what you can do to stay healthy and share what you learn with your family.
- Keep all of your health information in one place. Keep it up to date, and carry a copy with you in case of an emergency.
- Get your recommended health screenings and manage any chronic conditions.

## Understand your health coverage

- Call (800) 895-2421 or visit [MercyCareHealthPlans.com](https://www.MercyCareHealthPlans.com) to see what services are covered.
- Be familiar with your costs (premiums, co-payments, deductibles and co-insurance).
- Know the difference between in-network and out-of-network.

## Know where to go for care

- Know the difference between primary care, urgent care and emergency care.
- Primary care is preferred when it's not an emergency.
- Use the emergency department for a life-threatening situation.

## Visiting the doctor soon? Get ready for your doctor's visit.

- Always bring your insurance card with you.
- Know your family health history. Share with your doctor any family health history and medical records, if you have them.
- Make a list of any medicines you take. Make sure to tell your doctor the dosages.
- Bring a list of questions and things to discuss. Write down your questions or concerns in advance. You may want to bring a friend or family member with you to be a part of the conversation with your doctor.
- Take notes. Jot down any questions that come up during your appointment. Don't leave until all of your questions have been answered and you understand what to do next.

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## Is your child getting enough exercise?

Make sure your child or adolescent does three types of physical activity for 60 or more minutes each day to maintain good health:

1. **Aerobic activity** should make up most of your child's physical activity each day. This can include either moderate-intensity activity, such as brisk walking or vigorous-intensity activity, such as running. Be sure your child includes vigorous-intensity aerobic activity at least three days a week.
2. **Muscle strengthening activities**, such as gymnastics or push-ups, at least three days every week.
3. **Bone strengthening activities**, such as jumping rope or running, at least three days every week.



**MercyCare Health Plans**

PO Box 550  
Janesville, WI 53547  
WI (800) 895-2421  
IL (877) 908-6027  
[MercyCareHealthPlans.com](http://MercyCareHealthPlans.com)