

Healthy MercyCare

LIVING

A wellness newsletter for MercyCare members

Summer 2021



The Benefits of Getting a COVID-19 Vaccine

COVID-19 vaccines are safe.

- COVID-19 vaccines were developed using science that has been around for decades.
- COVID-19 vaccines are not experimental. They went through all the required stages of clinical trials. Extensive testing and monitoring has shown that these vaccines are safe and effective.

COVID-19 vaccines are effective.

- The vaccines can keep you from getting and spreading the virus that causes COVID-19.
- COVID-19 vaccines can also help keep you from getting seriously ill, even if you do get COVID-19.
- Getting vaccinated yourself may protect people around you, particularly people at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19.

Once fully vaccinated, you can do more.

- After you are fully vaccinated, you can resume many activities you did before the pandemic without wearing a mask or staying six feet apart, except where required by federal, state, local, tribal or territorial laws, rules and regulations, including local business and workplace guidance.

COVID-19 vaccination is a safer way to help build protection.

- Get vaccinated regardless of whether you already had COVID-19. Studies have shown that vaccination provides a strong boost in protection in people who have recovered from COVID-19.

People are not considered fully vaccinated until two weeks after their second dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna COVID-19 vaccine, or two weeks after a single-dose of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. You should keep using all the tools available to protect yourself and others until you are fully vaccinated.

COVID-19 is still a threat to people who are unvaccinated. Some people who get COVID-19 can become severely ill, which can result in hospitalization, and some people have ongoing health problems several weeks or longer after getting infected. Even people who do not have symptoms when infected can have these ongoing health problems.

To find a location near you to get a COVID-19 vaccine, visit [vaccines.gov/search/](https://www.vaccines.gov/search/) or call Mercyhealth at (608) 756-6100.



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WHAT TO EAT FOR BREAKFAST

- Plain oatmeal made from rolled oats with fruit; avoid flavored instant oatmeal which often has added sugar
- Whole grain toast/English muffins and hummus, or peanut or almond butter
- Poached or boiled eggs with tomatoes, mushrooms, spinach, salmon, cheese and/or avocado
- Fresh fruits and raw nuts
- Smoothies made from fresh fruit or vegetables, yogurt and low-fat milk
- Whole grain cereal with low-fat milk

Make Breakfast a Part of Your Routine

Did you know ... breakfast literally means to break a fast? It replenishes the energy and nutrients stored in your body after fasting for 8-10 hours during sleep. What's more, studies have shown that eating breakfast improves your energy level and ability to concentrate, and can help with better weight management, reduced risk of type 2 diabetes and heart disease over time. Despite the benefits of breakfast for your health and well-being, many people often skip it for a variety of reasons. The good news is there are ways to make it easier to fit a healthy breakfast into your day. Morning is a busy time for everyone, so, take 10 minutes to prepare for breakfast the night before. Chop up fruit to layer in a yogurt parfait or add to cereal. Cut up vegetables for an omelet. Mix up muffin or whole-grain waffle batter, cover it and store it in the fridge. Get out a pan for pancakes or a blender for smoothies. Put a bowl of nut-and-fruit trail mix on the table for kids to grab a handful as they walk out the door. Keep healthy foods on hand and you're sure to make breakfast fit into your routine.



How to Protect Your Skin Against the Sun

Spending time outside is a great way to be physically active, reduce stress and get vitamin D naturally. You can work and play outside without raising your skin cancer risk by protecting your skin from the sun. Most skin cancers are caused by too much exposure to ultraviolet (UV) light. UV rays are an invisible kind of radiation that comes from the sun, tanning beds and sunlamps. UV rays can damage skin cells. **Protection from UV rays is important all year, not just during the summer.** UV rays can reach you on cloudy and cool days, and they reflect off of surfaces like water, concrete, sand and snow. UV rays tend to be strongest from 10 am to 4 pm daylight saving time (9 am to 3 pm standard time) in the continental US. The UV forecasts the strength of UV rays each day. If the UV index is 3 or higher in your area, protect your skin from too much exposure to the sun.

Wear sunscreen with a minimum of SPF 15. SPF refers to how long a person will be protected from a burn. (SPF 15 means a person can stay in the sun 15-times longer before burning.) SPF only refers to UVB protection. To protect against UVA, look for products containing: Mexoryl, Parsol 1789, titanium dioxide, zinc oxide or avobenzone. Sunscreen performance is affected by wind, humidity, perspiration and proper application. Throw away sunscreens after two years (they lose potency). Apply liberally (minimum of one ounce) at least 20 minutes before sun exposure. Apply to ears, scalp, lips, neck, tops of feet and backs of hands. Reapply at least every two hours and each time you get out of the water or if you perspired heavily. Some sunscreens may lose their effectiveness when applied with insect repellents, so you may need to reapply more often.

Skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in the US. The most common types of skin cancer include basal cell carcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma, and melanoma. Indicators of skin cancer may include:

- Colors that are not uniform throughout
- Moles that are bigger than a pencil eraser
- Itchy or painful moles
- Moles with irregular borders or blurred edges
- Moles that are not symmetrical (one half doesn't match the other)
- New moles
- Sores that bleed and do not heal
- Red patches or lumps



WHEN YOU CAN'T SLEEP

If your sleep problems continue or interfere with how you function during the day, talk to your doctor. Keep a diary of your habits for 10 days to discuss at the visit, including when you:

- Go to bed
- Fall asleep
- Wake up
- Get out of bed
- Take naps
- Exercise
- Drink alcohol and/or caffeine

Also, mention if you are taking any type of medication or supplements as they may make it harder for you to sleep.

Get Your Sleep Patterns on a Better Path

Did you know around one third of Americans are sleep-deprived? Spending more time at home this past year didn't do much to improve our sleep habits either—the pandemic actually created more sleep challenges for most of us. Establishing habits like these can help improve your sleep health:

- Keep your night-time routine consistent. Go to bed at the same time each night and get up at the same time each morning, including on weekends and even while on vacation.
- Make sure your bedroom is quiet, dark, relaxing and at a comfortable temperature (60-68° F).
- Remove electronic devices (such as TVs, computers and smart phones) from your bedroom.
- Avoid large meals, caffeine and alcohol before bedtime.
- Reduce the amount of liquids you drink at least an hour before bedtime.
- Stay active. Getting regular exercise during the day can help you fall asleep more easily at night.
- Set a bedtime that is early enough for you to get at least seven to eight hours of sleep.
- Don't go to bed unless you are sleepy.
- Turn off electronic devices at least 30 minutes before you turn in.

If you don't fall asleep after 20 minutes, try doing a calming activity outside of your bedroom without a lot of light exposure that doesn't involve your electronics. If you still have problems getting a good night's sleep, talk to your medical provider.



Gardening and the Power of Plants

In addition to providing nutritious food for your dinner table or colorful flowers to decorate it, gardening offers many health benefits:

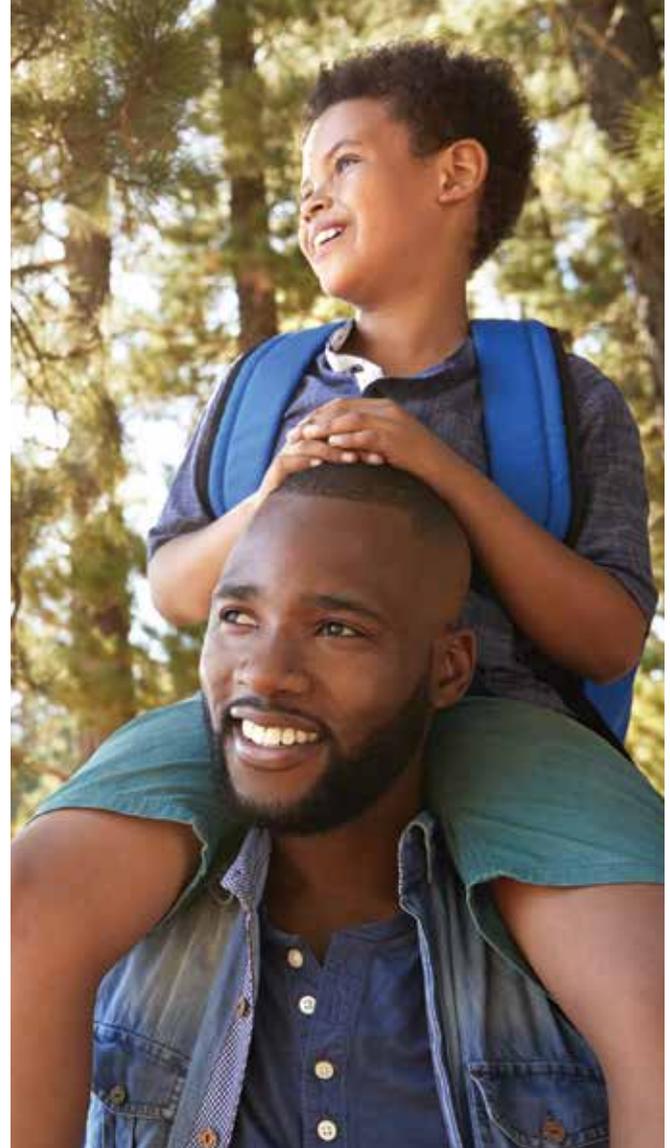
- It combines physical activity with social interaction and exposure to nature and sunlight. Sunlight lowers blood pressure as well as increasing vitamin D levels in the summer, which can help your body absorb calcium to strengthen your bones.
- It restores your dexterity (skill in performing tasks, especially with your hands) and strength.
- It can burn the same number of calories as exercising in a gym. Aerobic activity like digging, raking and mowing are particularly calorie intense—there is a gym right outside many a window!
- It can help control and prevent high blood pressure. The National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute recommends gardening or raking for 30-45 minutes most days of the week to achieve the recommended amount of exercise needed to lower your blood pressure.
- It can help you eat healthier. Along with the physical activity you get when tending to a garden, you'll also enjoy fresh, healthier vegetables and fruit that can have a positive impact on your diet.
- It can be done with family and friends. The social interaction provided by communal and therapeutic garden projects can counteract social isolation. Furthermore, it has also been reported that the social benefits of such projects can delay the symptoms of dementia (an effect that may be due to the beneficial effects of exercise).

Time for A Tick Check

When enjoying time outdoors, it is important to be aware of ticks and take steps to protect yourself. You can take several steps to prevent illnesses spread by ticks, including using personal protection, removing ticks as soon as possible and getting rid of ticks in your yard. Ticks are typically most active in Wisconsin from May to September, but it is still important to use caution year-round. Follow these tips to prevent tick bites:

- **Use repellent on skin and clothing:** Use insect repellents with 20%–30% DEET, 10–20% Picaridin, 15–20% IR3535, or 30–40% oil of lemon eucalyptus on exposed skin and clothes.
- **Wear appropriate outdoor clothing:** Wear long sleeves, long pants and long socks keep ticks on the outside of clothing. Light-colored clothing makes ticks easier to spot. Tuck shirts into pants and pants into shoes or socks to keep ticks on the outside of clothing if outdoors or in the woods for any length of time.
- **Check for ticks after being outdoors:** Check all parts of the body carefully, especially armpits, behind the knees, the scalp, in and around the ears, and inside the belly button and groin. Make sure your clothing, gear and pets don't have ticks before going inside. Kill any ticks that may still be on clothing by putting clothes in a dryer on high heat for 10 minutes. If clothes are damp, use high heat for 60 minutes.

Don't panic if you find a tick embedded on your body. Simply remove it as soon as possible: Grasp the tick with a narrow-bladed tweezers as close as possible to the skin. Pull upward and out with a firm and steady tension. Don't use petroleum jelly, a hot match, nail polish or other products. Don't squeeze, crush or puncture the body of the tick. Don't twist, as this can cause the mouth parts to break off and stay in the skin. After removing the tick, use rubbing alcohol to clean the bite site and wash your hands. It is important that a tick be properly removed as soon as it is discovered. Visit your doctor if you have a rash or fever within 30 days of removing a tick or after possible tick exposure.



Cancer Screenings You Need Now

Screening tests can help find cancer at an early stage, before symptoms appear. When abnormal tissue or cancer is found early, it may be easier to treat or cure. By the time symptoms appear, the cancer may have grown and spread. This can make the cancer harder to treat or cure. It is important to remember that when your doctor suggests a screening test, it does not always mean he or she thinks you have cancer. Screening tests can be done when you have no cancer symptoms. Some of the cancer screening tests you should ask your health care professional about include:

| BREAST CANCER | COLORECTAL CANCER | PROSTATE CANCER | CERVICAL CANCER | LUNG CANCER |
|--|---|---|---|--|
| <p>Mammograms, X-rays of the breast, are the best way to find breast cancer early, when it is easier to treat. Women who are 50-74 years old and at average risk for breast cancer should get a mammogram every two years. Women who are 40-49 years old should talk to their doctor about when to start and how often to get a mammogram. Additionally, being familiar with how your breasts look and feel can help you notice symptoms, such as lumps, pain or changes in size, that may be of concern.</p> | <p>A colonoscopy can find precancerous polyps that can be removed before they turn into cancer. Screening tests also can find colorectal cancer early, when treatment works best. Adults age 45-75 should be screened for colorectal cancer. Adults age 76-85 need to ask their doctor if they should be screened. If you think you may be at increased risk for colorectal cancer, ask your doctor when to begin screening, which test is right for you, and how often to get tested.</p> | <p>A blood test called a prostate specific antigen (PSA) test measures the level of PSA in the blood. PSA is a substance made by the prostate. Levels of PSA in the blood can be higher in men who have prostate cancer. PSA levels may also be elevated in other conditions that affect the prostate. Men who are 55-69 years old with a family history of prostate cancer, or African American (who are at increased risk), should ask their doctor for guidance about when to get a PSA test.</p> | <p>A Pap test can find abnormal cells in the cervix which may turn into cancer. The HPV test looks for the virus (human papillomavirus) that can cause these cell changes. Women should start getting Pap tests at age 21. If your Pap test result is normal, your doctor may tell you to wait three years between tests. If you are over a woman age 65 with normal screening test results, or you had your cervix removed as part of a total hysterectomy for non-cancerous conditions, you may not need to be screened anymore.</p> | <p>Yearly lung cancer screening with a low-dose computed tomography (CT) scan is recommended for people who have a history of heavy smoking, smoke now, or have quit within the past 15 years, and are between 50-80 years old. The best way to reduce your risk of lung cancer is to not smoke and to avoid secondhand smoke. Lung cancer screening is not a substitute for quitting smoking. If you are thinking about getting screened for lung cancer, talk to your doctor for advice.</p> |



NOT ALL STRESS IS BAD

Some stress in your life is okay. However, long-term stress can lead to health problems.

Preventing and managing long-term stress can lower your risk for other conditions like heart disease, obesity, high blood pressure, and depression. You can prevent or reduce stress with these helpful tips:

- Plan ahead
- Decide which tasks to do first
- Prepare for stressful events

Some stress is hard to avoid. Find ways to manage stress:

- Notice when you feel stressed
- Take time to relax
- Get active and eat healthy
- Talk with friends and family

Emotional Wellness Check: Stress Reducers

Stress is a reaction to a situation where a person feels threatened or anxious. Common reactions to a stressful event can include feeling sad, frustrated, and helpless; difficulty concentrating and making decisions; headaches, back pains, and stomach problems; or smoking or use of alcohol or drugs. Learning healthy ways to cope and getting the right care and support can help reduce stressful feelings and symptoms.

Feeling emotional and nervous or having trouble sleeping and eating can all be normal reactions to stress. Here are some healthy ways you can deal with stress:

- **Take care of yourself.** Eat healthy, exercise, get plenty of sleep, take breaks if you feel stressed out and practice self-compassion.
- **Talk to others.** Share your problems and how you are feeling and coping with a parent, friend, counselor, doctor or pastor.
- **Avoid drugs and alcohol.** These may seem to help, but they can create additional problems and increase the stress you are already feeling.
- **Take a break.** If current events are causing your stress, take a break from the news and/or social media.
- **Recognize when you need more help.** If problems continue or you are thinking about suicide, talk to a psychologist, social worker or professional counselor.

Get Happy: Make a Bliss List

Have you ever stopped and thought about what makes you happy? Why not take time to write down all the people, activities and things that bring joy to your life? It's easy! Use pen and paper, or the notes app on your smartphone, to create a "bliss list" bulleting things that make you smile. You can start the list and come back to it, adding to it as you find the time.

Review your bliss list on a weekly basis. It is a great way to keep track of how many activities you're doing regularly that make you smile. It also helps you understand what you can add to make your life happier.

Share your appreciation with others. You can tell them in person, send a text or handwritten note, or even write a glowing review for a server or customer service representative with whom you interacted. Doing so can have a positive effect not only on that person's happiness, but also on your own emotional well-being.

In addition to your bliss list, try these tips to feel good about yourself and your life:

- **Get moving.** When you exercise, your body makes chemicals called endorphins that help you feel good.
- **Sleep tight.** Being tired can wreck your mood.
- **Eat right.** If your body isn't getting the fuel it needs from nutritious foods, you can feel sluggish or grouchy.
- **Build positive relationships.** Connecting with people who care about you can really boost your mood.
- **Help others.** Helping people in need can give you a sense of purpose and pride. It's great to do good in the world!
- **Stay true to you.** Try ways to keep track of your best traits and to boost your self-esteem. How you feel about yourself affects how you feel about life overall.



What You Eat Can Lower Your Inflammation

Inflammation is your body's response to an injury as it works to heal itself. However, inflammation can become problematic when it starts, even when there is no injury, or when it doesn't end. Chronic inflammation can increase your risk for health problems, including cancer and heart disease.

An Anti-Inflammatory Diet May Be the Answer

Some foods, such as those high in saturated and trans fat, are known to promote inflammation. Other foods are anti-inflammatory and can help fight inflammation throughout the body. Following a diet that includes fresh fruits and vegetables, lean meats, fish, beans, nuts and olive oil can help reduce your risk of inflammatory diseases. Try these healthy eating tips:

- Eat at least five servings per day of fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Replace saturated and trans fats with healthier unsaturated fat sources, such as olive oil or coconut oil.
- Eat fatty fish three to five times a week. Fish contains omega-3 fatty acids which can help to lower triglyceride levels. If you don't like fish, try a variety of plant-based sources, such as leafy greens, walnuts, flax and chia seeds, olive oil and avocado.
- Choose whole grains, such as oatmeal, whole grain bread and brown rice.
- Aim for smaller amounts of red meat, cheese, butter and other high-fat animal products. Choose lean meats and plant-based protein sources, such as nuts, seeds and beans more often.
- Eat more fresh and frozen foods and fewer processed foods.
- Substitute herbs and spices, such as cumin, garlic, ginger, cinnamon and turmeric, for salt to flavor your food.
- Regular exercise can also help reduce inflammation. Aim for about 30 minutes a day of moderate to vigorous activity.