

# thrive.

SUMMER 2022

 BlueCross  
BlueShield  
Minnesota

*a magazine for healthy choices and your best life*

Page 8  
PICKLEBALL  
PARTNERS  
**MARTY HULL &  
DONNA POWELL**  
ARE QUEENS OF  
THE COURT



## Stay Strong

### *Also inside*

How your health plan can help after a hospital stay

Keys to managing hearing loss

Genetic testing for breast cancer risk

The fast-growing sport of pickleball offers a fun way to keep fit

[bluecrossmn.com/thrive](http://bluecrossmn.com/thrive)

# WELCOME

We happily extend a warm welcome to you, as summer has finally arrived in Minnesota.

For me, this season is best enjoyed outside. In Minnesota, most of us savor these few months of warmth and enjoy the beauty of the natural world around us. I hope you experience good weather, good company and good health this season.

At Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota, good health is our goal, and we are always working to improve the health of our members. One way we do that is by making sure you know about and how to use your plan benefits. On page 14 of this edition, we explore the numerous benefits available to members after being discharged from a hospital stay, so you can recover quickly and get back to good health.

We can't express enough that a healthy life is an active life. In our cover feature on page 8, Marty Hull and Donna Powell tell the story of how pickleball kept them active and social — even through the pandemic. We hope they inspire you to find an activity you enjoy.

As always, we encourage your feedback on **thrive.** and on the health care you are receiving. Email us at **thrivemagazine@bluecrossmn.com**. Thank you for being a valued member.

Victoria Losinski  
Vice President, Center of Excellence  
for Star, Quality and Risk Adjustment



## COVERAGE FOR OTC COVID-19 TESTS

Over-the-counter (OTC) COVID-19 tests are now available at no cost to Medicare members. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) will pay for up to eight tests each calendar month.

## ELIGIBILITY

Medicare will cover any member who has Part B.

## WHERE TO GET A TEST

Check with your pharmacy or, for a partial list of participants, go to **medicare.gov/medicare-coronavirus**. Bring your red, white and blue Medicare card to get a test. For questions about OTC COVID-19 tests, call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227), TTY 1-877-486-2048, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. You can also call us with questions by calling the phone number on the back of your Blue Cross member ID card.

## BEHIND THE SCENES

Photographer Tim Gruber captures cover subjects Marty Hull and Donna Powell. Do you have a compelling story for the pages of **thrive.**? We'd love to hear it! **thrivemagazine@bluecrossmn.com**.





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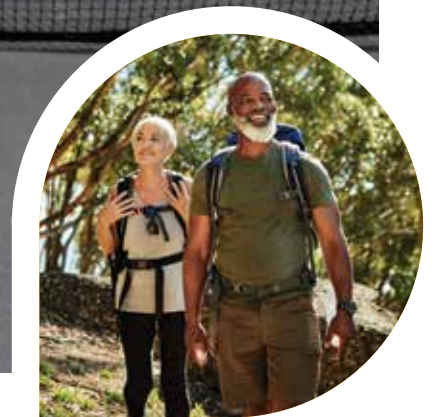
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# HEALTH BITES



Easily digestible tips, recipes and advice to feed your healthy lifestyle.

## PREVENTING DIABETIC RETINOPATHY

The key is good blood sugar management

One in three people living with diabetes will develop diabetic retinopathy, a complication that can lead to vision loss, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). If you have diabetes, you should have an eye exam that includes dilation each year. To prevent or slow diabetic retinopathy:

- Eat healthy
- Get daily exercise
- Monitor your blood sugar
- Control your blood pressure and cholesterol
- Take the medications that your doctor prescribes
- Follow up with your doctor regularly
- Take vision changes seriously

## ¡COMAMOS! LET'S EAT

When the weather gets hot, chill out with Gazpacho, a classic Spanish soup served cold

Gazpacho is a healthy way to cool down when the temperature goes up. With ingredients easily found at the grocery store or in your garden, make this healthy soup for two.



### INGREDIENTS

- ½ can (15 ounces) chickpeas (also called garbanzo beans), rinsed and drained
- 3 cups unsalted vegetable juice
- ½ cup (about 8) cherry tomatoes, quartered
- ¼ cup chopped, seeded cucumber
- 2 tablespoons chopped red onion
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro or parsley
- 1 dash hot pepper sauce
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 2 tablespoons lime juice
- 3 lime wedges

### DIRECTIONS:

1. In a large bowl, add the chickpeas, vegetable juice, tomatoes, cucumber, onion, cilantro, hot pepper sauce, garlic and lime juice. Stir well.
2. Cover and place in the refrigerator for at least one hour or until well-chilled.
3. To serve, ladle the cold soup into chilled bowls and garnish with a lime wedge.



# SHOULD I GET A GENETIC TEST?

The Doc is in. Dr. Amy Fendrich answers your health, medical and wellness questions



**Member:** My mother had breast cancer and I know it can run in the family. Should I have a genetic test done to see if I'm at risk? —*Melanie, St. Paul*

**Dr. Fendrich:** Thank you for the question, Melanie. It's true that family history is a common risk for breast cancer. In fact, having a first-degree relative, such as your mother, with breast cancer almost doubles your risk for the disease.

If you also have a second first-degree relative who also had breast cancer, the risk is greater — but developing cancer is still far from a certainty.

Most hereditary (from your family) breast cancer comes from an abnormality in the basic unit of life (genes). The most common of these are BRCA1 and BRCA2, though there are many others. A BRCA gene test — conducted as a blood test — can determine whether harmful changes have occurred in either of these genes. However, results are not always definitive.

A positive test would mean there's an increased breast cancer risk because of a gene abnormality (mutation), but a negative test doesn't always mean that you do not have a risk of developing breast cancer. If you have a gene mutation that hasn't been

discovered yet, or you have a gene variant that doctors are unsure of, you could still be at risk.

So, should you get tested? It's possible that a test could be beneficial, but ultimately the decision is best made with your doctor, based on your specific risk factors. If you think you might have an increased risk of developing breast cancer, discuss this with your doctor. Your doctor might refer you to a genetic counselor who is a specialist in genetic abnormalities. It's also a good idea to check with your health plan to make sure tests are covered.

For others thinking about genetic testing for breast cancer, it should be noted that about eight out of 10 women diagnosed have no family history of the disease.

The best preventive measure against breast cancer is still the routine mammogram — every two years or annually, if your doctor recommends it.



To submit a question for Ask the Doctor, email [thrivemagazine@bluecrossmn.com](mailto:thrivemagazine@bluecrossmn.com).



**Q&A WITH**

# SARA MULDER

Public Relations Manager

Sara Mulder says the simplest explanation of her role in public relations is that she works in the “department of why” at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota. As the public relations manager, she is a storyteller — proactively sharing Blue Cross initiatives and member experiences that educate, engage and ultimately help Blue Cross to better serve its members. She also works with media professionals when they have questions about the business.

**thrive.:** Tell us a little more about how you work with the media.

**Sara Mulder:** When questions get directed to us, we coordinate the response with the right business partners and executives to provide timely, accurate information with the appropriate context.

## Fun Facts

### WHAT SHE DOES FOR SUMMER FUN:

Gardening and golf

### FAVORITE PLACE TO VISIT:

Sara was born in Holland, Michigan, and travels there with her family regularly.

One of the reasons why I really enjoy working for Blue Cross is that we’re a mission-driven organization. Our members are our number one stakeholder.

**thrive.:** Can you talk about some of those efforts and how your team is involved?

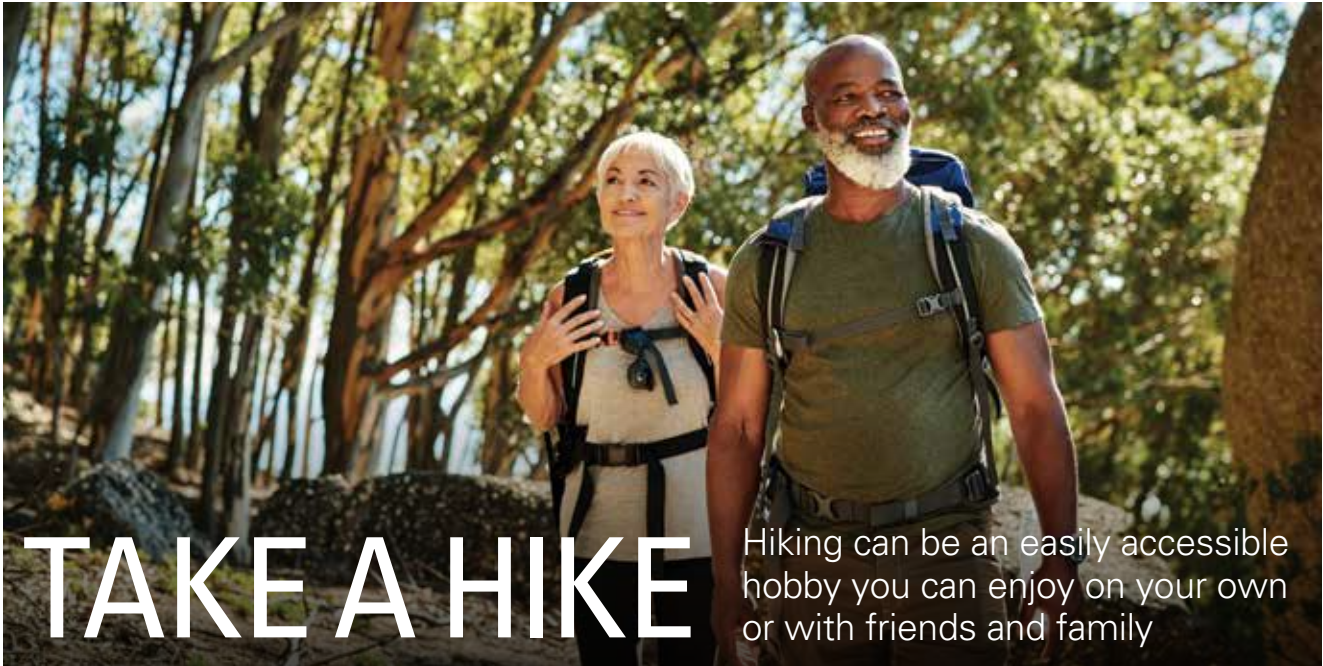
**Sara:** Last year we conducted a poll among Minnesota’s seniors to see how they were doing during the pandemic.

We worked with former radio personality John Hines, along with Dr. Mark Steffen, our senior vice president and chief medical officer, to share the poll with news media and engage members through social media.

**thrive.:** What are other ways members can see your work?

**Sara:** We are always looking for ways to help our members with challenges they are facing. We recently saw data about a rise in fractures, which are primarily caused by falls. So we started producing content for our blog ([blog.bluecrossmn.com](http://blog.bluecrossmn.com)) to help raise awareness and prevent falls. We’re also always looking to share the health and wellness stories of our members.





# TAKE A HIKE

Hiking can be an easily accessible hobby you can enjoy on your own or with friends and family

**F**rom long treks along the prairie to adventurous jaunts up the rocky North Shore, Minnesota is home to seemingly endless hiking trails. Whether you're just lacing your first pair of hiking boots, or you're regularly taking in nature's beauty — hiking can be an excellent hobby for beginners and experts alike. It can boost your mood, improve your cardiovascular health and build muscle strength.



## Gear up

Be sure you wear sturdy sneakers or hiking boots, and take note of the weather to dress appropriately. Wear layers you can easily remove, and bring a rain jacket if the forecast looks dreary. Wearing a hat, sunscreen and bug spray will also protect you from the elements.



## Find a trail

Check out websites like [alltrails.com](https://www.alltrails.com) to find hiking trails near you, or try visiting a local or state park. If you're new to hiking, start with a trail that's short and flat. Gradually increase the length and intensity of trails once you become more comfortable.

You can also find paved trails that are accessible to wheelchairs.



## Stay safe

Before you hit the trails, make sure your doctor has given you the green light to exercise. Bring water and an energizing snack. If you're alone, you should also tell someone where you're headed and what time you expect to get back.



## Bring a friend

Bring a friend with you, or check out hiking groups at [dnr.state.mn.us/hiking/organizations.html](https://dnr.state.mn.us/hiking/organizations.html). You can find groups fit for beginners or experts.



# HEALTHY HEARING

Take measures to protect and manage your hearing  
*by Elizabeth Boger*

**H**ealthy hearing is important for maintaining a good quality of life. Whether you're listening to the birds in the park, having a conversation with a friend, or enjoying your favorite song — hearing is a powerful connection to the world around you.

Many of us will experience changes in hearing as we age. Nearly 25 percent of people over the age of 65 have some sort of hearing loss, and about half of people over the age of 75 experience hearing loss, says Dr. Erin Voye, an Audiologist with Allina Health.

It's never too late to protect the hearing you have. Instead of cranking up the volume or drawing back from conversations, you can take steps to manage hearing loss and protect your ears.

## Why it happens

Hearing loss can happen for a variety of reasons. One of the most common causes is presbycusis, which is age-related hearing loss. Hearing loss can also happen because of exposure to loud noises, or simply because of genetics or family history. If you have diabetes or cardiovascular disease, you may also be more prone to hearing loss.

"Typically, hearing loss occurs because the hair cells in the cochlea — which is a hearing organ — start to degenerate as we get older," Dr. Voye says. "That's something that can't be regenerated" (the cells do not grow back).

Common signs and symptoms of hearing loss can include the inability to hear high-pitch sounds, frequently asking others to speak more loudly or clearly, or consistently



turning up the volume on your TV or radio.

### Protect your hearing

Some changes in hearing can be inevitable, but there are actions you can take to care for your hearing.

“It’s never too late to start protecting your hearing,” Dr. Voye says.

#### Four tips from Dr. Voye:

##### 1. Turn it down

Decrease the volume to a comfortable level.

##### 2. Walk away from it

Distance yourself from loud noises.

##### 3. Limit time of exposure

Don’t use something noisy for an extended period of time.

##### 4. Use hearing protection

Consider using ear plugs, earmuffs or custom hearing protection in loud environments.

#### Get tested

Hearing loss may be obvious for some. But for others, it can be difficult to detect right away.

The American Speech Language and Hearing Association recommends a hearing test every three years for those over the age of 50. Dr. Voye recommends asking your primary care physician for a referral to see an audiologist (hearing specialist).

“It’s nice to get that baseline hearing test before issues start, and then we can kind of track your hearing from there,” Dr. Voye says.

If hearing loss is detected, it’s important to take action right away. If left untreated, hearing loss can contribute to feelings of depression and isolation, and may also cause balance issues.

“Even a mild amount of hearing loss can definitely have effects on the brain and cognitive decline,” Dr. Voye said. “One of the easiest modifiable things that you can do for your hearing is to wear and benefit from hearing aids. There are lots of different hearing aid options out there that we can provide to patients.”



### DID YOU KNOW?

Your audiologist can help fit you with custom hearing protection.



## MEANINGFUL CONVERSATIONS

Oftentimes, individuals with hearing loss may miss certain sounds or words. If you’re communicating with someone who has hearing loss, you can apply effective communication strategies. Have conversations face-to-face if you can, and within three to five feet of each other. It’s also helpful to turn off distractions, such as a TV or faucet, and speak slowly and clearly.

# REASON TO RALLY

Pickleball keeps Marty Hull and Donna Powell active, social and purpose-driven

*by Kelsey Hanson*







**M**arty Hull, 70, sits in her south Minneapolis home, telling the story of

her highly active life — tennis, basketball, volleyball, rowing, racquetball, and badminton are a few sports she has played through the years.

But she focuses on one sport that she took up more recently. The sport with a funny name, that she credits for keeping her social and active throughout the pandemic: pickleball.

Pickleball kept Hull moving while she was battling joint pain caused by arthritis, and it helped her safely interact with others during the pandemic. It's no surprise that pickleball, and the community she's built because of it, have become an important part of her life.

"I really missed competition," Hull says. "I couldn't play basketball or row competitively anymore. Pickleball is the perfect sport because you get to compete every time you play."

Hull also entered several pickleball tournaments, where she met and befriended pickleball partner Donna Powell. Like Hull, Powell prioritizes physical activity. Both women have a competitive streak and decided to compete together in doubles not long after they met.





## “PREHABILITATION”

Patients who prioritize getting in shape before a surgery have statistically better post-surgery outcomes.



PICKLEBALL WAS INVENTED IN 1965, BUT HAS RECENTLY BECOME ONE OF AMERICA'S FASTEST-GROWING SPORTS.

## HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED IN PICKLEBALL?

Gearing up for pickleball is easy — all you need is a paddle, a ball, comfortable shoes and clothing, a partner and a place to play.

With indoor and outdoor courts popping up all over the state, a quick search around your city's parks or an inquiry to local gyms is an easy place to start. With your SilverSneakers® membership, see which gyms you can visit at no additional cost. Pickleball Minnesota, a Facebook group, is another way to get started.

The duo is among a growing number of older adults who have taken up the sport to safely stay in shape and stay connected with others.

### Pickleball basics

With indoor and outdoor courts all over the state, pickleball clubs and a large Minnesota pickleball Facebook group, you've likely heard of the sport by now. If you haven't, it's played with a paddle, a small Wiffle ball, a net, and two or four players.

Pickleball is similar to tennis and other racket sports. The rules are easy enough — the serving side must serve the ball diagonally, the ball is hit back and forth until someone faults, and the winner is the first player or team who scores 11 and leads by at least two points.

The badminton-size court and short paddle make it a perfect second act for older, active adults. The smaller court size means less running back and forth — particularly



“Pickleball is the perfect sport because you get to compete every time you play.”

— Marty Hull



**DID YOU KNOW**

Social connections reduce your risk of depression, high blood pressure and an unhealthy Body Mass Index (BMI).

true if you're playing doubles — and the short paddle causes less joint stress on the shoulder and elbow compared to a tennis or badminton racket.

This low-impact sport is the perfect way to get cardio exercise, build strength and socialize.

Dr. Heather LaBere, a family medicine physician at North Memorial's New Hope clinic, says older adults should aim for 30 minutes of low-impact exercise at least five

days per week, but there's flexibility within those recommendations.

"Really, it's about the minutes," Dr. LaBere says. "The American Heart Association recommends a minimum of 150 minutes of moderate activity per week, and you can break that down however works best."

Routine activity yields physical benefits like improved cardiovascular strength and mobility — but that's not all.

“What it comes down to is improved overall quality of living and daily functioning,” Dr. LaBere says. “Older adults who are routinely active drastically reduce their risk of falls and increase their ability to maintain independence.”

Activities that are enjoyable and socially engaging — like pickleball — make it easier for people to get in those recommended exercise intervals, she adds.

### **Pickleballing through the pandemic**

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Hull and Powell played pickleball indoors and outdoors at a variety of locations — Roseville, Apple Valley, Eden Prairie and Richfield. They were able to play in so many locations thanks to a health plan benefit.

“The SilverSneakers® program is totally wonderful,” Hull says. “You get to go to all of these different gyms.”

The women still use the benefit, but the last couple of years have looked different. The pandemic hit Minnesota just as Powell was returning from her retirement home in Arizona. She and Hull had plans to train together for a tournament in May, but it was canceled due to restrictions.

For many people who play pickleball, it’s not just a great source of exercise, it’s also a primary way

to socialize. So when the courts were shut down during this time, several people lost their means of physical activity and socialization.

When the outdoor courts opened up, Hull and Powell formed a bubble, and they continued to play. They had a foursome that met frequently, and that’s how they kept going during COVID.

Being able to play pickleball not only provided a safe way to socialize and exercise outdoors, but it also gave Hull and Powell something to focus on and look forward to.

“When Donna came back from Arizona, we did a lot of singles, and we did a lot of drilling, which was good for our games,” Hull says.

Dr. LaBere encourages social activities, like pickleball, because they have several health benefits — especially after enduring the past couple years.

“Feeling socially isolated can be very depressing,” she says. “By having a social group, like this pickleball group, you get accountability to show up and play. Camaraderie and friendship are beneficial to everything — not just for mood, but for an individual’s sensation of happiness and overall health.”

### **Overcoming arthritis**

Although staying active has always been a priority for both women,



it hasn't always been easy. Hull started experiencing multiple joint problems, which made activities, including pickleball, difficult to keep up with.

Her joint issues started in her fingers and wrists and traveled to her shoulders. At one pickleball tournament, her shoulders were so bad she almost couldn't play the second day.

"I felt like I was in my late nineties instead of in my sixties," she recalls. She ended up going to see her doctor, and she learned that she had rheumatoid arthritis, an autoimmune disease that attacks the joints.

The new diagnosis meant staying active was an even more important priority for Hull.

Physical activity maintains your mobility and strength, and it can actually ease some of the joint pain, Dr. LaBere says.

"With rheumatoid arthritis," she adds, "activity is often part of the non-pharmacologic treatment course. Staying active greatly reduces the fatigue that many people with rheumatoid arthritis have."

### Rebounding from surgery

To help with her arthritis, Hull recently underwent two hip replacement surgeries. So for now, her pickleball paddle is packed away, but as soon as she's cleared to play again, she will.



“

*Camaraderie and friendship are beneficial to everything*


— Dr. Heather LaBere

”

And for her, the surgeries are no excuse to stop being active. She has spent much of her recovery time walking with friends.

Powell overcame an operation of her own — a meniscus surgery. She has worked closely with a physical therapist and an orthopedic doctor in order to heal properly, but she emphasizes physical activity as a way to avoid arthritis in the future.

For both women, surgeries and joint issues won't stop them from staying active, and pickleball has been an important way that they have prioritized their physical and social activity.

"Being retired, you need to get out of the house," Powell says. "And pickleball, it gives you goals and something to work towards. It gives you a sense of purpose." 



## ARTHRITIS PAIN

The most effective way to reduce joint pain and stiffness associated with arthritis is daily physical activity.

# HEALING AT HOME

Take advantage of these Blue Cross member benefits when transitioning home after a hospital stay



**F**rom a broken bone to a serious illness, stabilizing an acute medical condition or situation is the purpose of an inpatient hospital stay.

When you are discharged, that means you no longer need services that can only be provided in a hospital setting. Often, you do not need to stay in the hospital until your condition is completely improved. Follow-up appointments with your care provider will generally be needed to stabilize, manage, and/or treat new and existing conditions.

The path to getting the post hospital care you need can feel overwhelming. Blue Cross aims to support members with the transition between care settings and to prevent a hospital readmission. Kim Winter, senior product consultant, and Amy Wald, senior product specialist, explain Blue Cross's robust member benefits available after a hospital stay.

## **What counts as a hospital stay?**

First, it's important to understand what exactly is meant by "hospital stay."

“In the context of benefits available after discharge,” says Winter, “a hospital stay is any inpatient hospital admission or skilled nursing facility (SNF) stay.”

### Member benefits

Our goal at Blue Cross is to ensure positive health outcomes for all of our members. We could not reach that goal without our care coordinators.

“Anytime a member transfers from home to a hospital or care facility, and then back home, the care coordinator is required to do a ‘transition of care’ discussion,” explains Winter. She goes on to say, “During that discussion, they will tell the member about their benefits.”

If you haven’t heard from your care coordinator and don’t know how to get in contact with them, call the member services number on the back of your member ID card for assistance.

There are three main benefits universally available to members after a hospital stay — meal delivery, medication reconciliation and review, and a community companion.

### Meal delivery

Blue Cross has meal delivery available at no additional cost for our members after a hospital stay. Our hope is that our members take advantage of nourishing food, delivered to their door to help build back their strength during recovery.

Meals are tailored to any individual dietary requirement, so if you have a special diet — if you have diabetes, for example — our meals will be made specifically to address your nutritional needs.

### Medication reconciliation and review

A hospital stay typically results in additional medications or altered doses. Because new medications can be confusing, we offer a medication review for all of our members post-hospital stay.

This medication review is done by a certified geriatric pharmacist. “Basically,” Winter says, “this is a discussion with the member.” The pharmacist will go over each medication and make sure that the member knows exactly what it’s for and when to take it. The pharmacist will also look for any interactions between medications that require attention.

These medication reviews can happen either in person or via telephone; we encourage an in-person visit. Our pharmacists follow all the necessary COVID-19 precautions and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations, but the method of medication review is based solely on member preference.

If you have a need for additional medication reviews, you can use the Medication Therapy Management (MTM) service. See the “Review



### REVIEW YOUR MEDS

A service available to our members — but especially important post-discharge — is Medication Therapy Management (MTM). This service provides our members with pharmacist review of medications and clinical advice.

Learn more by calling 1-866-873-5941 (TTY 711), Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Learn more at [bluecrossmn.com/mtm](https://bluecrossmn.com/mtm).



Your Meds” sidebar for more information.


### **Community companion service**

The community companion service is a brand new benefit for our members. Community companions are certified Community Health Workers (CHW) who offer individualized support and resources after leaving the hospital. A community companion works with you, individually, or alongside a caregiver. Community companions work together with your care coordinator and are aware of all your plan’s supplemental benefits.

Included with this benefit are two home visits and two telephone calls during the first 30 days after

discharge. During these visits, the community companion will work with you to develop goals, review medications, conduct a home safety assessment, discuss community resources, nutrition and upcoming medical appointments.

### **The goal: Get healthy at home**

Our post-hospital stay benefits are intentionally provided to support your health needs after a discharge. These benefits are universally available to members, and we encourage you to take advantage of them. We’re here to help. If you have questions about your benefits after a hospital stay, call us using the phone number on the back of your member ID card. 

## **Community Companions: How does the program work? What do they do?**

### **HOW IT WORKS:**

1. After discharge from the hospital, a specially trained and certified community health worker (CHW) contacts the patient to let them know what to expect.
2. Within 72 hours of discharge, the CHW calls the patient to schedule visits.
3. The patient and the CHW develop goals, review medications, conduct a home safety assessment and discuss community resources, nutrition and appointments.
4. The CHW communicates consistently with the care coordinator throughout the service to ensure a safe and healthy transition back home.

### **SERVICES PROVIDED:**

- Personal Health Record (PHR)
- Home safety assessment
- Nutrition review
- Community resources
- Communication with your care coordinator following each visit and as needed. If you don’t have your care coordinator’s direct number, you can call us using the phone number on the back of your Blue Cross member ID card and we can help connect you.





# UNDERSTANDING COVERAGE STAGES



Dr. Anita Sharma provides professional insight and practical tips to answer your medication questions

**Member:** I've heard the term "drug stages" in reference to my prescription drug coverage. What are these stages and how do they affect my coverage? — *Samantha, Eden Prairie*

**Anita:** Thank you for the question, Samantha. You aren't the first person to have questions about prescription drug stages. Generally, the stages affect how much you pay for your prescription medications throughout the calendar year. We usually talk about four stages of coverage, but for your health plan, there are only two stages you need to be aware of.

The first is the Initial Coverage stage. You begin this stage when you fill your first prescription of the year. While in the Initial Coverage stage, the plan pays its share of the cost of your drugs and you, or others on your behalf, pay your share of the cost.

You will usually stay in this stage until the amount of your out-of-pocket costs reaches \$7,050. Then you move into the Catastrophic Coverage stage.

In the Catastrophic Coverage stage, the plan will pay for all of your covered drugs. You do not have to pay anything for your prescriptions. Once you enter the Catastrophic Coverage stage, you stay in it for the rest of the calendar year.

Regardless of what stage you are in, it's important to be mindful of the medications you are taking. Talk to your doctor about whether generic drugs might be a good substitute for more expensive brand-name drugs. You can also arrange a Comprehensive Medication Review with your pharmacist, or a Blue Cross pharmacist, to get a better handle on all your medications. Call 1-866-873-5941, Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. You can also email **BCBSMN.Medicare.CMR@bluecrossmn.com** to learn more.



To submit a question for Ask the Pharmacist, email [thrivemagazine@bluecrossmn.com](mailto:thrivemagazine@bluecrossmn.com).



# MANAGING CAREGIVER STRESS

Caring for your own health can help you provide better care for your loved one

**C**aring for a loved one can be equal parts rewarding and stressful.

In the midst of feeling fulfilled and grateful to provide care for someone who needs you, you can also feel overwhelmed.

As you care for a loved one, it's important to remember to also prioritize your own health. After all, you'll be able to provide the best care to others when you care for yourself, too.

## Acknowledge your stress

Anyone can be prone to caregiver stress, which can present itself in many forms.

Some common signs and symptoms of caregiver stress, according to the Mayo Clinic, include feeling isolated or alone, losing interest in your favorite activities, feeling tired much of the time, or becoming easily agitated. If you're feeling stressed, you might find yourself taking part in unhealthy behaviors, or even making mistakes when administering medications.

Long-term stress can lead to larger health problems. It's important to see your doctor for a regular yearly check-up, and to schedule a visit if you feel like your symptoms aren't improving.

## Manage your stress

There are a multitude of ways you can manage your stress. Here are a few tips from the Mayo Clinic.

**Get active:** Exercise has a profound effect on mental health. Try taking a 10-minute walk outside every day to get some fresh air and boost your mood.

**Stay organized:** Develop a daily routine that'll help you stay on track each day.

**Find a hobby:** Find something you enjoy doing outside of caregiving. Maybe it's signing up for a class, playing a sport or even calling a friend to catch up.

**Ask for help:** There are many places to look for help. Visit Caregiver Corner at [caregivercornermn.com](http://caregivercornermn.com) to find valuable resources.





# CULTIVATING COMMUNITY

Blue Cross volunteers donate vegetables to local food pantries grown from our Giving Gardens

**A**t Blue Cross, we know that the foundation of a healthy lifestyle is healthy eating. Unfortunately, the impact of the pandemic has increased financial burdens on many Minnesotans, leaving some families and individuals without the means to afford fresh produce.

We believe everyone should have access to healthy food, and our Giving Garden program is on a mission to make that a reality.

2022 marks the 15th year that Blue Cross associates will volunteer their time and skills in our community gardens located on our Eagan and Virginia campuses. Our goal is to nourish surrounding communities by donating garden-fresh vegetables to our local food pantries.

Last year we had over 100 associates work together to grow approximately 840 pounds of produce. Our crops included lettuce, kale, Swiss chard, tomatoes, potatoes, multiple varieties of squash, cucumbers, zucchini, eggplant, herbs, okra, celery, broccoli, peppers and green beans. We hope to have the same enthusiastic participation this year, too.

One of the Giving Garden founders, Magda Surrisi, director of implementation and strategic execution, was humbled by the work done by associates.

“Our associates came out in record numbers this year and last year because they



## HARVESTING HEALTH

Because most options at food pantries are non-perishable items, our associates are especially proud to give fresh food options to our community.

knew there was an even greater need during the pandemic for people to have access to healthy food,” Surrisi said.

This past year, our volunteers had to navigate extraordinarily hot and dry conditions. However difficult the work was, the result was worth it.

In the metro area, produce was given to the Open Door Food Pantry in Eagan and the Department of Indian Work in St. Paul. In northern Minnesota, produce was donated to Quad Cities Food Shelf and the Salvation Army.





# CRACK THE CODE

Take a moment out of your day to exercise your mind. Improved memory, brain function, and reduced stress are just a few of the benefits of doing games and puzzles, such as this cryptogram.

A cryptogram is a type of puzzle in which each letter of a phrase is replaced by a different letter. For example, in the puzzle below, "F" represents "A" in the answer. Cryptograms are a great way to practice strategy and logic with simple, everyday phrases. Use the key and your knowledge of words and sentences to solve this summer-themed puzzle.

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

E ' V E      E E      A V  
 T N    L N    A N N Y    B F L U Y I    J E Y  
 A                    M M E  
 F C C    Z E G G N W    C Q Y I

—The Beach Boys

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WE'VE BEEN HAVING FUN  
ALL SUMMER LONG

ANSWER:



# thrive.

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