

# thrive.

SUMMER 2023

 BlueCross  
BlueShield  
Minnesota

a magazine for healthy choices and your best life

Page 8

**BILL SALO,**  
71, IS AT HIS  
BEST ON THE  
SHUFFLEBOARD  
COURT

## Aim for Activity

The health benefits of  
an active lifestyle

*Also inside*

Ways to boost  
bone health

Tips for staying  
safe in the sun

# WELCOME

With summer in full swing, I hope this edition of **thrive.** finds you in good health and great spirits, enjoying this brief, but beautiful season.

There are many ways to get out and active this time of year, from walking with friends to hitting the golf course, or spending time out on a lake with your fishing pole and tackle box. Did you know fishing actually offers a variety of health benefits? Check out the Take Action section on page 5 to learn more.

At Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota, we believe leading an active lifestyle is important to your overall wellness. Staying active can help to manage weight, prevent chronic conditions, and boost your brain power. Physical activity also offers a great reason to get together with friends and family, or to meet new people.

Our featured member, Bill Salo, is a great example of how staying active leads to a healthier and more enjoyable life. He found success — and fun — on the shuffleboard courts later in life. It's never too late to try something new and discover an activity you love.

As always, we encourage your feedback on **thrive.** and the healthcare you are receiving. If you have comments, suggestions, or a story you think should be told in the next edition, email us at [thrivemagazine@bluecrossmn.com](mailto:thrivemagazine@bluecrossmn.com).

*Christine Reiten*

Christine Reiten  
Vice President, Medicaid



## Building Better Care

Each year, Blue Cross and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) send surveys to members. Depending on the survey, they might include questions about your experience with your health plan or ask more specific questions about your clinical activities. These surveys do not affect your benefits, and serve an important purpose.

Member responses to the questions are used to hold us accountable to both you and the government, to drive changes to your health care and ultimately to improve patient outcomes and overall health. Please keep an eye out year-round for surveys from us and CMS. If you receive one, we hope you take the time to complete it.

### BEHIND THE SCENES

Cover subject Bill Salo poses on Ann Latendresse's backyard shuffleboard court in Eagan. Do you have a compelling story for the pages of **thrive.**? We'd love to hear it! [thrivemagazine@bluecrossmn.com](mailto:thrivemagazine@bluecrossmn.com).



responsibly  
printed with:



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COVER AND TOP PHOTO BY JOE TRELEVEN

# HEALTH BITES



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

## BEAT THE HEAT

Staying safe in the sun this summer

Getting outside and enjoying summer in Minnesota is important for your physical and mental well-being.

But as temperatures rise, so does the risk of heat-related illnesses like heat exhaustion. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), people ages 65 and older have an increased risk for heat-related illness. It is important to stay proactive in preventing dehydration and overheating when outside. Here are a few tips:



❑ **Wear light weight clothing** to help keep your body heat down, and your comfort level up. If it is too hot for long sleeves, be sure to apply sunscreen regularly to any exposed skin.

❑ **Carry a water bottle** when spending time outside, so you can stay hydrated throughout the day. You should be drinking water when you are thirsty, with meals, and before, during and after exercise.

❑ **Eat foods with high water content**, such as watermelons, cucumbers and strawberries. These foods are also healthy, delicious, and perfect for the summer.

It is also helpful to be aware of heat exhaustion symptoms, which include:

- Dizziness
- High body temperature
- Profuse sweating
- Irritability
- Nausea
- Decreased urine output
- Confusion or altered mental state

If you begin experiencing any of these symptoms, seek medical attention immediately. Having a friend or loved one with you during activities on hot days is also a good way to make sure you stay safe.

# STUFFED PEPPERS

This colorful and healthy meal from the American Heart Association is packed with protein and flavor, and is an easy way to get your daily serving of vegetables.

## INGREDIENTS

- 4 bell peppers (any color)
- ¾ lb. lean, ground turkey
- ½ medium onion (chopped)
- ½ cup uncooked brown rice
- 14.5 oz. canned diced tomatoes, no-salt added
- 1 clove fresh, minced garlic (or 1 teaspoon garlic minced from jar)
- 1 tsp. reduced-sodium Italian seasoning
- 8 oz. canned, no salt added tomato sauce
- ¼ tsp. red pepper flakes (optional)

## DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Cook rice to package instructions (without salt).
2. While the rice is cooking, in a skillet over medium heat, brown the ground turkey. Add the chopped onion and cook for 3 minutes more (until onion becomes translucent).
3. Wash the bell peppers and remove the tops, seeds and membranes. Set peppers in a 9x9 baking dish or line them up in a loaf pan, so they stand upright.
4. In a medium mixing bowl, mix turkey, rice, tomato, garlic, Italian seasoning, and pepper. Spoon into each pepper.
5. Spoon tomato sauce evenly over the top of the 4 peppers. Bake for 1 hour in the oven, until the peppers are tender.





# SKIN CARE ADVICE

The Doc is in. Dr. Michelle Hill answers your health, medical and wellness questions



**Member:** I've been noticing more spots and moles as I age. I'm curious — what is your best advice for skin protection and overall skin health? —*Francis, Maple Grove*

**Dr. Hill:** Thank you for the question, Francis. The skin changes that you described are common. Most of the time, new moles or skin spots are not a cause for concern, but sometimes new or changing moles are cancerous or precancerous.

There are different types of skin cancer, but all are most often caused by exposure to the sun's UV rays.

The good news is that skin cancer is preventable. Here are some ways to prevent skin cancer and protect your skin:

## **1. Avoid direct sunlight**

The sun's UV rays are the strongest between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. During that time, stay in the shade as much as possible.

## **2. Apply sunscreen that has a Sun Protection Factor (SPF) of at least 30**

Using sunscreen is an excellent way to protect your skin. Apply sunscreen every two hours or more frequently if you are in water or are sweating.

## **3. Cover your skin with clothing and a sun hat**

Even the best sunscreen cannot block all the

sun's rays. Covering your skin and wearing a sun hat offers additional protection.

## **4. Do skin self-checks**

Early detection is key. Each month, do a thorough scan of your skin from your scalp to your toes. Any new growth, mole, spot or open sore that won't heal needs to be looked at.

## **5. See your doctor about any changes to your skin**

Not every mole or skin spot is cancerous. See your doctor if you have a concern.

Your plan makes it easy to keep your skin healthy. Products like sunscreen and aloe vera gel or spray are available to you by using your over-the-counter (OTC) benefit at participating CVS stores or via the OTC catalog. View available items **here**. Reach out using the number on the back of your member ID card if you have questions about how to use your OTC catalog, or if you need help locating an in-network dermatologist.



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



**M**innesota is the land of 10,000 lakes, so it's no surprise that fishing is a favorite pastime for many across the state. While at first glance it may seem like a sedentary activity, fishing provides a variety of benefits for your health and wellbeing.

### The basics

Whether you are new to fishing or getting back into the activity, all you really need to start is a rod and reel, tackle, bait and a fishing license. Fishing licenses can be purchased online, in-person or over the phone. In many Minnesota state parks, you do not need a license to fish, according to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, but be sure to check before you go.

There are also hundreds of fishing docks and piers in communities across the state for you to check out. To find out more about fishing locations and regulations, visit [dnr.state.mn.us](http://dnr.state.mn.us).

### The benefits

While fishing, you'll enjoy some of the well-documented health benefits of spending time in nature. Being outside on the water

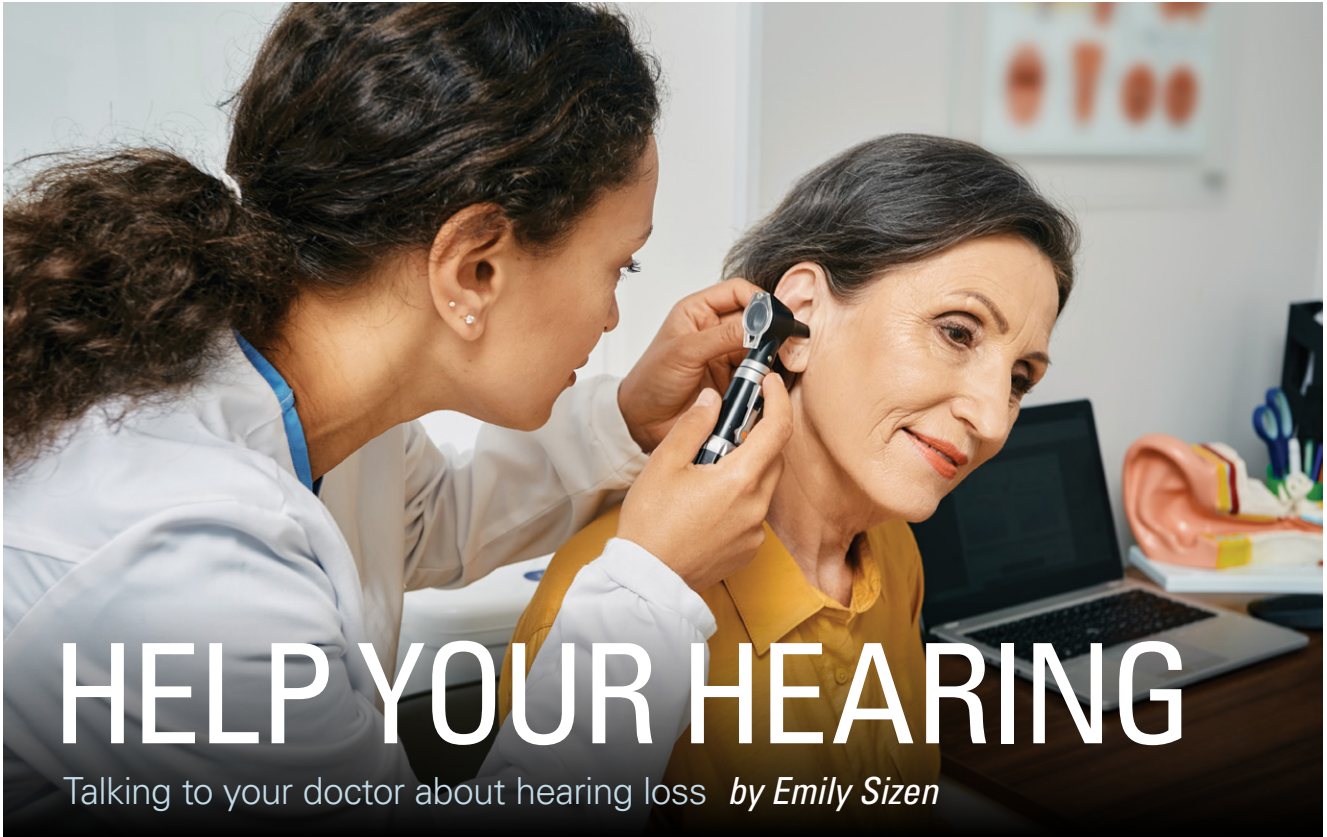
can increase vitamin D levels, reduce stress and improve mental health. Fishing with friends and loved ones can also combat loneliness and depression. And even reeling in small fish can provide a workout for your hands, arms, shoulders and core.

### Get involved

There are fishing groups and programs throughout Minnesota that aim to bring people together through the activity. Let's Go Fishing ([lgfws.com](http://lgfws.com)), for example, is a volunteer-based organization whose mission is to provide an opportunity for veterans, seniors and disabled adults to experience nature through fishing. Operations director Darci Mohr says she has seen first-hand the healing and community that fishing provides.

"When you're connected with nature you feel like you're alive, and like you're a part of the world," Mohr says. "Outings spark fond memories for people who've had a lifelong love of fishing."

To learn more about fishing opportunities in Minnesota, visit [dnr.state.mn.us/gofishing/learn-fish.html](http://dnr.state.mn.us/gofishing/learn-fish.html).



# HELP YOUR HEARING

Talking to your doctor about hearing loss *by Emily Sizen*

**H**ealthy hearing is an important part of your overall wellbeing, and it is normal for your hearing to change as you get older.

Whether you are noticing a ringing in your ears or an increased difficulty understanding others, hearing loss naturally occurs with age. In fact, age-related hearing loss is the third-most common medical condition in the U.S. for adults over 65, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

While you may not be able to completely prevent hearing loss, it is important to stay proactive in protecting your hearing, managing hearing loss, and seeking treatment.

## Protecting your ears

Hearing loss prevention should be a lifelong effort. Though according to the Mayo Clinic, there is no proven way to cure hearing loss naturally brought on by aging.

However, there are steps you can take to prevent further hearing loss caused by noise. Those include:

- Wearing ear plugs or other ear protection to loud public events, like concerts and sporting events
- Keeping the volume low while listening to the radio, your TV or other electronics
- Knowing if you are at a higher risk for hearing loss. Groups at greater risk include veterans and those who have a family history of hearing loss.
- Talking to your health care provider about hearing testing and hearing aids



Dr. Ian Malm, an ear, nose and throat specialist at Allina Health, says that studies have shown hearing loss can increase the risk for older adults to develop other medical conditions.

“There’s a lot of research with dementia and hearing loss,” Dr. Malm says. “Researchers have noticed that if you have hearing loss, you’re more likely to develop dementia. They think it’s because people with hearing loss tend to self-isolate so there’s not as much stimulation to the brain.”

The Mayo Clinic also notes that hearing loss can lead to increased levels of depression, cognitive decline and create an increased risk for falls.

### When to see a doctor

When it comes to gradual hearing decline, Dr. Malm says it is important to talk to your doctor if you notice one ear declining faster than the other, or if your hearing

loss is interfering with your daily life. Hearing tests are easy, non-invasive, and will identify if you need treatment.

“You can always get a hearing test without getting hearing aids, it’s always good to just know where you’re at,” Dr. Malm says. “A lot of people are very hesitant to get hearing aids because of the stigma associated with it.”

If you are diagnosed with hearing loss, hearing aids are often the best way to manage it. They are fitted to your outer ear and work to amplify sound within your ear. Dr. Malm says hearing aids can make a big difference not only within patient’s ears, but also in their lives.

“They’ll be able to hear their grandkids or talk at the dinner table with their family or go to a restaurant and be able to communicate with people,” Dr. Malm says. “That’s really important for the quality of a patient’s life.”

## Hearing Aid Benefits

You have access to hearing aid benefits through TruHearing®. You can contact a hearing consultant by calling 1-844-570-1828 to schedule an appointment with a TruHearing provider. At your appointment, your provider will conduct a hearing exam and recommend the best hearing aids based on your budget and lifestyle. TruHearing provides follow-up care as well, to ensure your hearing aids are working properly and comfortably.



### DID YOU KNOW?

Hearing loss is the third most common medical condition in the U.S. for adults over 65.

SOURCE: CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION



by  
*Jake Weyer*

# AIM FOR ACTIVITY

Staying active and engaged with others  
can help you live a healthier life

**F**OR BLUE CROSS MEMBER BILL SALO, SHUFFLEBOARD  
BEGAN AS A FAMILY AFFAIR LATER IN LIFE.

He picked up the sport — which involves using a cue to push weighted discs down a narrow court — at a Senior Games event in his 50s, after an invite from his parents. During the last two decades, he's played in doubles with his father, cousins, his former wife, and friends, earning



medals at events throughout the Midwest and nationally. He's also found success in individual competition, winning five gold medals, a bronze and a silver at the national Senior Games since 2003.

"Shuffleboard is a pretty easy sport to get into and I love the competition, the challenge of it," says Salo, now 71. "I also enjoy the camaraderie. I've made a lot of friends and we all want each other to do well."

**INSPIRING  
OTHERS:**

FIND A VIDEO INTERVIEW  
WITH BILL SALO ABOUT HIS  
PASSION FOR ACTIVE LIVING AT  
[BLUECROSSMN.COM/THRIVE](http://BLUECROSSMN.COM/THRIVE).



# GET MOVING

Getting active shouldn't have to be a chore. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) suggest a couple of ideas to get started:

**Break up sedentary activities.** Lift weights or walk in place while watching TV, for example.

**Add more activity to your routine.** You might use the stairs instead of the elevator, or park farther way from the grocery store door to help get more steps in.

**Walk the dog.** Research has shown that dog owners get in more steps. In one study, dog owners on average walked 22 minutes more each day than those who didn't own a dog.

SALO HAS FOUND  
SUCCESS IN LOCAL  
AND NATIONAL  
SHUFFLEBOARD  
COMPETITIONS  
FOR 20 YEARS.

Salo, also a competitive bowler, regular walker, and gym user through SilverSneakers® credits active living for helping him stay healthy and happy into his 70s. Research backs up the benefits of regular physical activity. It can help manage weight, reduce the risk of disease, strengthen bones and muscles and even improve brain health, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Dr. Jennifer Forsyth, a board-certified geriatrician at Winona Health, says regular physical activity can take many forms.

“It could be intentional exercise, or it could be gardening, walking, going to get groceries — any of those things are healthy activities,” Dr. Forsyth says. “Try to make a habit of those things that make you move. The more you move, the better your body works and the healthier you’ll be.”

### Well-rounded workouts

Though all movement is beneficial, Dr. Forsyth says there are three categories of physical activity that everyone should try to cover regularly: aerobic, strength and balance.

To get in your aerobic activity, you might try walking, swimming, cycling or playing pickleball. You should aim for 30 minutes of sustained aerobic activity a day, five days a week. Aerobic activities can be moderate and should increase your breathing and heart rate, but they do not have to be intense. It’s important to do what you feel is comfortable.



SALO WITH SHUFFLEBOARD ENTHUSIAST ANN LATENDRESSE ON HER COURT IN EAGAN.

Strength training is especially important for maintaining muscle mass and strong bones, which can help us get around safely and perform daily activities. Exercises might involve lifting weights, using resistance bands, or even doing vigorous yardwork. Try to work different parts of your body — doing squats as one exercise and arm extensions for another, for example. If you don’t have weights or bands, cans of vegetables or similar household items can work. Strength exercise should be done twice a week, for 20 to 30 minutes. The CDC suggests one-to-three sets of eight to 10 repetitions each for each exercise you do.

Dr. Forsyth says balance exercises should be done three times a week, for 30 minutes at a time. Examples include yoga, tai chi, or even walking sideways or repeatedly standing up



### DID YOU KNOW?

Shuffleboard was introduced in the U.S. around 1913. The National Shuffleboard Association, founded in the 1930s, standardized the rules and court sizes.

SOURCE:  
BRITANNICA.COM

from a seated position. Balance activities can help improve coordination and prevent falls.

Before starting any new exercises or activities, be sure to talk to your doctor about a routine that might be best for you. It is important to consider your health history, including injuries or chronic conditions, and what activities will provide improvement without causing or worsening symptoms. For the most part, however, physical activity has been shown to alleviate symptoms associated with many chronic conditions, such as joint pain from arthritis. Exercise can also help to prevent conditions from surfacing in the first place.

“Anytime you’re doing an exercise and keeping that as part of your routine, you’re lowering your risk of chronic disease,” Dr. Forsyth says. “Especially as people get older, more activity means lower risk. People who are active are also stronger, can do more for themselves and be more independent.”



### Brain benefits

Exercise has been shown to improve oxygen to the brain, lessening risk of cognitive problems, such as memory loss. The CDC says it can help you think, learn, problem solve and balance emotions.

**“Anytime you’re doing an exercise and keeping that as part of your routine, you’re lowering your risk of chronic disease.”**

— Dr. Jennifer Forsyth, Winona Health



“You will also get those endorphins going, those positive hormones flowing in your body, which can help to avoid depression,” Dr. Forsyth says.

People who are sedentary are also at higher risk of sudden confusion or a lack of awareness of their surroundings, known as delirium.

“Delirium is one of those things that we really don’t want to see if we can avoid it and exercise helps mitigate that,” Dr. Forsyth says.


She also suggests getting friends or family involved in your exercise routine. Making exercise a social habit can help keep you on track and make it something to look forward to.

## Getting started

Beginning a physical activity routine might seem daunting for some, but you don’t have to go all-in overnight. Start small, with light activity at shorter intervals, and build gradually. Pain is a common reason for putting off exercise, but done properly, it should actually help to lessen many symptoms. She emphasizes that it’s never too late to start.

“You might even just start with one or two days a week, 10 minutes at a time,” Dr. Forsyth says. “And just increase it very slowly so that you can handle it. Then incorporate different activities that are more fun. Finding something you love doing will help you make it sustainable.”

A passion for shuffleboard and bowling competition keeps Salo looking forward to regional and national Senior Games each year, along with the fellowship he’s developed with other athletes. When he’s not competing, he spends time walking in his neighborhood, using his local gym membership, bowling and keeping up with family and friends. He lost his mother about a decade ago and his father earlier this year, but he’s grateful for the healthy example they set for him. He aims to do the same for his daughter.

“Hopefully she’ll be competing as my doubles partner,” Salo says. “We’re going to keep the family thing going.” 



## STAY SHARP

The strategy and score keeping involved in shuffleboard and other games are a good way to exercise your mind as well as your body.

SHUFFLEBOARD PROVIDES A VARIETY OF HEALTH BENEFITS INCLUDING INCREASED FLEXIBILITY, IMPROVED HAND-EYE COORDINATION, AND STRESS REDUCTION.



# BUILDING BETTER BONE HEALTH

Take steps to protect your bones from osteoporosis *by Emily Sizen*





**A**s you age, your bone density naturally decreases, meaning your risk for osteoporosis becomes greater over time.

A common disease with serious implications, osteoporosis is so prevalent that an estimated 50 percent of women and 25 percent of men over the age of 50 will experience a bone break due to

low bone density in their lifetime, according to Claire Gill, CEO of the Bone Health & Osteoporosis Foundation (BHOFF).

Gill joined the BHOFF over a decade ago, and around the same time she saw firsthand the negative impact low bone density can have on overall health.

“My mom had fallen and broke her hip at 81,” Gill says. “I found statistics about the recovery rate from hip fractures and there were some very scary statistics. This cause really was important to me.”

Osteoporosis often shows no symptoms until a bone fracture happens, so it is essential to stay proactive and get tested to protect your bones. Here are the osteoporosis essentials:

### **What is osteoporosis?**

Osteoporosis is a chronic disease that weakens bones over time. When osteoporosis occurs, your bones become less dense, so you become more prone to bone fractures. These fractures can happen from falling or from something as simple as sneezing or coughing, depending on the progression of the disease.

Both men and women can develop osteoporosis. However, women — particularly post-menopausal women — are more likely to develop it due to hormonal changes. Those with autoimmune disorders, people with a family history of low bone



### **DID YOU KNOW?**

Individuals typically reach peak bone mass between age 25 and 30, and will begin to slowly lose bone mass around age 40.

SOURCE: AMERICAN ACADEMY OF ORTHOPAEDIC SURGEONS





## Rheumatoid Arthritis and Bone Health

Studies have shown that there is an increased risk of developing osteoporosis for people with rheumatoid arthritis. According to the Bone Health & Osteoporosis Foundation, this is because the steroids often prescribed for rheumatoid arthritis can cause bone loss. If you have rheumatoid arthritis or another autoimmune disease, talk to your healthcare provider to see what extra steps you can take to prevent osteoporosis.

density, and cancer survivors are also more prone to developing osteoporosis.

### Protecting your bones

There are steps you can take to reduce your risk of developing osteoporosis. Some of those include:

- Maintaining a healthy diet – Eating foods with high levels of vitamin D and calcium daily helps strengthen your bones and protect yourself from osteoporosis and other chronic diseases. Leafy greens, cheeses, yogurt, lean meats and beans, are all foods that promote bone health.
- Weight-bearing and muscle strengthening exercises – Gill says that these workouts include lifting weights, walking, dancing, tennis, or any type of exercise that requires you to be on your feet. Balance activities, such as tai chi, are also beneficial.
- Preventing falls – Finding ways to prevent falls reduces your risk of bone fracture. This can include removing rugs and clutter, fixing loose handrails, and adding grab bars in the bathroom.
- Get tested – The bone density exam, also known as a DXA test, is an easy and


non-invasive procedure. The test uses an X-Ray to measure the amount of mineral in your bone tissue, and will produce a T-score indicating bone density levels. Talk to your healthcare provider to see when you should receive a DXA test.

### Treating osteoporosis

Although there is no cure, you can still lead a normal life with osteoporosis. Treatment can depend on a number of factors including medical history and the severity of

bone density loss. Some of these options include taking supplements and medication, hormone treatments, and improving your diet and exercise regimen.

Gill says it is important to remember that when you have been diagnosed with osteoporosis, you are not alone.

“It’s always distressing and upsetting to get a diagnosis,” Gill says. “Be mindful that there is a great path forward and clinicians who can treat you. There’s a lot of support out there.” 



### DID YOU KNOW?

An estimated 54 million Americans are affected by osteoporosis and low bone mass.

SOURCE: BONE HEALTH & OSTEOPOROSIS FOUNDATION





# TRAVELING WITH MEDICATIONS

Tips for managing medications during trips



If you have travel plans this year — either in the U.S. or abroad — be sure to make prescription medications part of your checklist. Managing medications while on vacation can be challenging, but with the right preparation, you can avoid problems and concentrate on what's most important — having fun. Here are a few tips:

## Order in advance

Don't wait until the day before you travel to find out you need a prescription refill. Refill your medications at least a few days in advance and make sure you have enough for the length of your trip. It's also a good idea to bring enough for an extra week or two in case plans change. If you have Blue Cross Part D coverage and need an early fill of a prescription, call the number on the back of your member ID card.

## Pack medications in your carry-on

Never put medications in checked bags, even if they are not needed right away. You want to be sure that you have them with you at all times, for easy access and so they don't get lost should your bags be separated

from you. Checked bags can also be exposed to extreme temperatures that could alter or damage your medications.

## Clearly label and organize

Use a clearly labeled pill organizer to arrange your medications, to help keep track of medication type, dosage and your schedule. If it's helpful, bring original containers, so you have all of your prescription information.

## Review TSA rules

The U.S. Transportation Security Administration (TSA) allows you to bring unlimited amounts of prescription medication in pill form, but it does outline some qualifiers and tips, which you can find at [tsa.gov/travel](https://www.tsa.gov/travel). For example, you need to

tell a TSA officer at the start of a screening checkpoint if you have liquid medication.

### Know your destination's rules

Each country has its own laws related to medications. Those might be related to medication types, quantities or other factors. Be sure you have a good handle on what is allowed before you depart. It's also a good idea to carry a written prescription or medical certificate from your provider. If your medication is not allowed at your destination, talk to your doctor about alternatives.

### Get prior authorizations

If you have a prior authorization in place (usually for a Part B medicine) and you need to get a treatment while you're traveling, you have to get another prior authorization from the doctor or facility that will be administering the drug. If you don't, you might have to pay out of pocket, which can be a major expense.

### Know how to refill out of state

If you are a Blue Cross member with Part D coverage, you have access to a large network of pharmacies throughout the U.S. that can fill prescriptions if you have an unexpected need. But regardless of whether a pharmacy is in-network, you can explain your needs to the pharmacist and they should be able to help provide guidance. They may need to transfer the prescription from another pharmacy, or get approval from your doctor. It's a good idea to write down the hours and contact information of your primary pharmacy in case you need to reach them directly.

If you will be gone for more than nine months, call the number on the back of your member ID to see if you can get coverage in the area. If you're traveling abroad, you will need to pay an additional coverage fee to fill prescriptions and you may need to pay full price and submit for reimbursement.

## Stay Ahead of Annual Health Plan Changes

This fall, you will receive your Annual Notice of Changes, or ANOC, that summarizes changes that will be made to your health plan for the upcoming plan year.

Your ANOC is a great resource. It details cost, benefit, provider and deductible

changes. As you read through your ANOC and note differences in your plan for the upcoming year, there may be some questions that come to mind. There are several resources you can access to help address any concerns or questions.

If you have Part D coverage

through Blue Cross, you can access your formulary — or the list of drugs covered by your plan — and a list of in-network healthcare providers at [bluecrossmn.com](http://bluecrossmn.com). You can also call the number on the back of your Blue Cross member ID card with any questions you have.



# UNDERSTANDING ASPIRIN



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

**Member:** Should I be taking a daily aspirin? —*Robert, Mendota Heights*

**Anita:** Hi Robert and thank you for this important question. It is not recommended to start taking a daily dose of aspirin without speaking to your pharmacist or primary care provider first.

Aspirin recommendations have changed dramatically in the last few decades, and it is no longer recommended for all older patients. There are two reasons why people may need to take a daily low dose of aspirin. There is primary prevention — which is preventing your first heart attack or stroke. Then there is secondary prevention — which means you've already had a heart attack, stroke, or are known to have some other heart, vessel or blood disorder.

Because aspirin is a blood thinner and prevents your blood from clotting too easily, it can also increase your risk of bleeding. This increased risk could include strokes caused by a burst blood vessel or developing a bleeding stomach ulcer. Some guidelines recommend that unless there is some known heart,

vessel, or blood disease, patients over the age of 70 should not use daily aspirin. Some guidelines go as far as saying patients over 60 should not be using aspirin for primary prevention due to this increased bleeding risk.

If you are over the age of 60, it is important to check with your doctor if you should still be on aspirin if it was previously recommended for you. If you are younger than 60 and have diabetes or other risk factors such as being a smoker or high blood pressure, it still may be a good idea for you to take aspirin.

Generally, nothing more than an 81 mg of daily aspirin (commonly called a baby aspirin) is recommended for preventing cardiovascular events. All in all, do not take a daily aspirin unless it is recommended by your health care provider.

## Common Side Effects

Aspirin's most common side effects are indigestion and stomach ache. Easily avoid this side effect by taking your aspirin with food.



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



**BlueCross  
BlueShield**  
Minnesota



# WE'VE GOT YOU COVERED

**Did you know?** Your plan provides a quarterly allowance for over-the-counter (OTC) health and wellness products. From cold remedies and vitamins to dental products and nicotine replacement therapy items, you have a wide range of covered products to choose from.

The allowance varies by plan and the benefit is available through OTC Health Solutions. You can get approved items through select CVS retail locations, over the phone at 1-888-628-2770, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. Central Time or online at [cvs.com/otchs/bcbsmn](https://cvs.com/otchs/bcbsmn). OTC Health Solutions can mail items directly to your home address.

For an OTC Health Solutions catalog of covered solutions, call 1-888-628-2770 (TTY: 711) 8 a.m.–10 p.m. Monday–Friday.



# NAVIGATING MEMORY LOSS

Talking to your loved one with dementia

Communication barriers caused by memory loss are common obstacles for those with dementia, and these challenges can take a toll on their caregivers.

According to a 2023 Alzheimer's Association special report, there are more than 11 million Americans that provide care for a family or friend with dementia. People with dementia can often experience confusion during conversations and experience other communication roadblocks.

Finding resources and tips for talking to your loved one with memory loss is important for not only your family or friend with dementia, but also for your own well-being.

Paula Chapman, an educator for the Alzheimer's Association Minnesota and North Dakota chapter, says that having patience and continuing to show your loved one respect is key when talking to your loved one. Provide them a space where they can feel comfortable talking openly, even when they are confused.

Providing distractions can be an important communication tool, particularly when a loved one is expressing fear, frustration, delusions or is engaging in unsafe behavior.

If you combat what your loved one is expressing, it can lead to further frustration. Instead, Chapman says to first validate their concerns, and then provide distraction by redirecting them to another topic or activity.

Other talking tips from the Alzheimer's Association include speaking slowly, refraining from asking a loved one if they "remember" a memory, encouraging non-verbal communication, and asking yes or no questions. Ultimately, creating an environment where your loved one feels they can communicate openly is important.

"Depending on where the person is in the stage of their dementia or Alzheimer's, have a conversation with them and try to have that honest discussion and interaction to know what your loved one really wants," Chapman says.

There are many resources available for those caring for patients with memory loss, and Blue Cross offers resources for caregivers at [caregivercornermn.com](https://www.caregivercornermn.com).





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**Always talk with your doctor before starting an exercise program.**

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3. 2021 SilverSneakers Annual Participant Survey

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# FEEDING EVERY STUDENT

Blue Cross helped promote legislation providing universal school meals

In Minnesota, one in six children are food insecure, and that number is continuing to rise. For many children, the food they eat at school may be the only reliable access they have to nutritional food. Yet the reality is many students throughout the state cannot afford to pay for these meals.

This reality will change beginning in fall 2023, when all K-12 Minnesota students will have access to free breakfast and lunch at school, after Minnesota lawmakers passed the universal school meals bill in March.

For years, Blue Cross has been a leader in advocating for greater access to free school meals; believing that health happens in communities and that no child should suffer the impact of food insecurity.

In 2020, Blue Cross got involved in the Hunger-Free Schools coalition as a co-chair and funder. The coalition is made up of 29 private, public, and non-profit organizations in Minnesota, whose belief is that eliminating student hunger creates a more equitable

school system and healthier children. By providing two free meals a day, schools can help increase academic achievement and decrease the racial and health equity gap in Minnesota.

Ultimately, Blue Cross and the Hunger-Free Schools' advocacy helped influence lawmakers to pass the universal school meals bill that will go into effect on July 1

when the new state budget year begins. Going forward, Blue Cross and Hunger-Free Schools will monitor effective implementation of the universal meals program in schools across the state and continue to look for more solutions to food insecurity.



“Hunger and food insecurity is still a significant problem in our communities,” said Janelle Waldock, Director of Racial and Health Equity Policy at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota. “The whole advocacy community came together to get this bill over the finish line. We’re super excited to figure out how we take that collective power and continue to work on this issue.”



# BRAIN GAINS

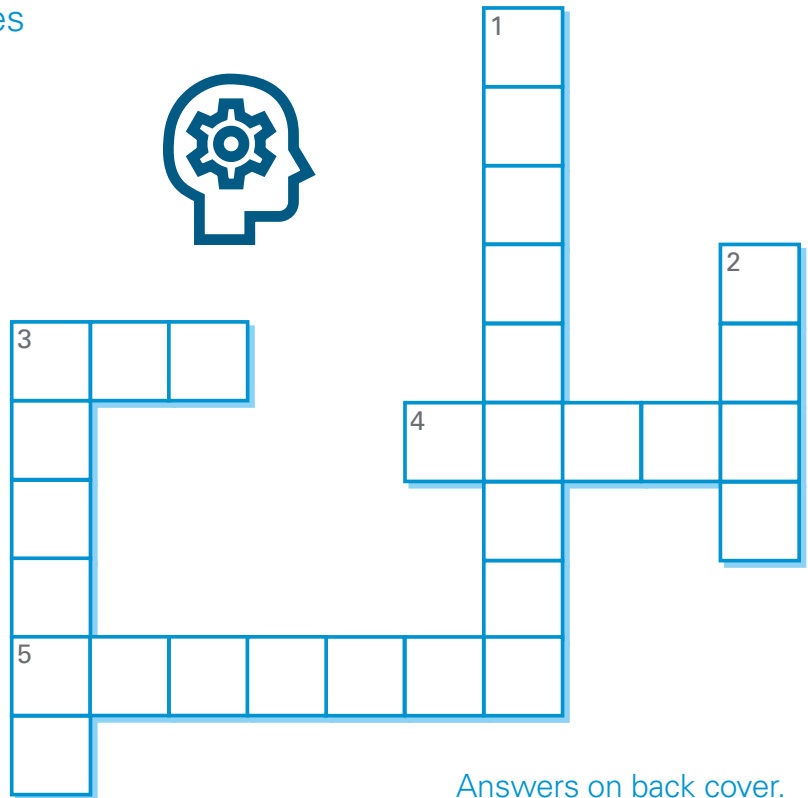
Build your brainpower with puzzles

## ACROSS

- 3. An abbreviation for Sun Protection Factor
- 4. A healthy way to cook outdoors
- 5. This over-the-counter drug reduces fever and relieves pain

## DOWN

- 1. This topical cream protects the skin from the sun's harmful rays
- 2. A low-impact outdoor sport that originated in Scotland
- 3. A summer accessory that provides shade



Answers on back cover.

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Yog tias koj hais lus Hmoob, muaj kev pab txhais lus pub dawb rau koj. Hu rau 1-800-793-6931. Rau TTY, hu rau 711.

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