

thrive.

FALL 2023

 BlueCross
BlueShield
Minnesota

a magazine for healthy choices and your best life

Page 8

ENDURANCE
ATHLETE
KATE ELLIS, 67,
SHARES HER
COMPETITIVE
PASSIONS

Life in Motion

Staying healthy
through active living

Also inside

Breast cancer screening myths
Managing high blood pressure
Seasonal vaccine advice

bluecrossmn.com/thrive

WELCOME

Fall is in full swing, and we want to extend a warm welcome to our members. The air is cool, the colors are changing, and we hope this edition finds you healthy and in good spirits. First and foremost, we want to thank you for trusting Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota — the #1 Medicare plan chosen by Minnesotans.*

Autumn is one of the most beautiful times of year in our state, and there are so many ways to stay active this season. One great way to get outside and enjoy the weather is through fall gardening, and on page 5 you can find a variety of strategies to help your perennials grow.

Our cover story on page 8 features someone who is always on the move. At age 67, Kate Ellis is a competitive Nordic skier and canoeist — and she loves staying active outdoors. She talks about some of her traveling adventures and how she has continued to stay fit and active throughout her life.

As the year comes to a close, we want to hear from you. If you'd like to share your feedback on **thrive.** and the healthcare you are receiving, email us at **thrivemagazine@bluecrossmn.com**. Thank you for being a valued member.



Jeff Snegosky
Vice President, Medicare and Individual
at Blue Cross and Blue Shield
of Minnesota

BEHIND THE SCENES

Photographer Joe Treleven shoots cover subject Kate Ellis in her canoe on Eagle Lake. Do you have a compelling story for the pages of **thrive.**? We'd love to hear it! **thrivemagazine@bluecrossmn.com**.



Care From the Comfort of Home

As we near the end of the year, it's important to stay up to date on prevention measures. One key benefit we hope you will take advantage of this season is your ability to have an In-Home Wellness visit with Signify Health.

This benefit offers you the opportunity to receive a wellness visit at home with a doctor or nurse practitioner. The clinician will review your health status and medical history, check your vitals and help you take prevention measures to support your health.

You can schedule your wellness visit by calling Signify Health at 1-844-226-8218 (TTY 711), 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., Monday–Friday or you can request an appointment online by visiting **schedule.signifyhealth.com/home**.

responsibly
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*Based on enrollment data from CMS December 2022.

CONTENTS

ON THE COVER

8

COVER FEATURE

Living Free

Blue Cross member Kate Ellis shares her adventures in active outdoor living.

14

5 Myths of Breast Cancer Screening

Explaining the importance of early detection.



2

HEALTH BITES

Power of Plants

The benefits of eating a plant-based diet.

4

ASK THE DOCTOR

Under Pressure

How high cholesterol impacts blood flow.

5

TAKE ACTION

Growing Your Garden

Tips for planting in the fall.

6

AS WE AGE

Understanding Hypertension

Measuring and managing high blood pressure.

18

PLAN PERKS

Doctor On Demand

Convenient video visits with healthcare professionals.

20

ASK THE PHARMACIST

Flu and COVID-19 Vaccines

Important advice for fall vaccines.

22

CAREGIVER CORNER

Mapping Out Transportation

Finding ride assistance for your loved one.

24

IN OUR COMMUNITY

Investing in Communities

Blue Cross partners with Indigenous organizations.

HEALTH BITES



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

PLANT POWER

The benefits of eating a plant-based diet

Your diet is an essential part of your personal health and wellness. If you are looking to improve your eating habits, following a plant-based diet can help boost your nutrition and provide you with a variety of health benefits.

A plant-based diet, according to the American Heart Association, is one that excludes meat, fish, dairy and other animal products. When you decrease the amount of meat you eat, you also decrease your risk for conditions like heart disease, strokes, diabetes and many cancers.

Whether you are looking to follow an entirely plant-based diet, or just incorporate more vegetables and fruits into your meals, changing your eating habits can seem challenging. Harvard Health offers several ways to make this transition easier, including:

- ❑ Incorporating a variety of leafy greens like kale, spinach and collards
- ❑ Enjoying healthy, plant-based snacks like hummus or salsa
- ❑ Eating whole-grain breakfast foods, such as oatmeal or quinoa
- ❑ Choosing fruits as your desserts instead of sugary sweets



Prior research sponsored by the National Institutes of Health has shown that certain healthy food choices can help people lose weight, reduce their medications, and sometimes eliminate their medications completely.

If you have type 2 diabetes, you might have the opportunity to participate in a new study through the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine. Participants learn about healthy foods, get one-on-one consultations with a registered dietitian and take part in weekly virtual classes, at no cost.

To learn more about the study and find out if you are eligible, go to pcrm.org/study, or call 202-527-7363 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday–Friday, Central Time. Voicemail is available after hours.

HEALTHY MAC AND “CHEESE”

Committing to a plant-based diet doesn't mean you have to sacrifice great meals. Warm up for fall with this Vegan Butternut Squash Mac and “Cheese” recipe. This is an easy plant-powered dish. Makes 3 servings.

INGREDIENTS

½ of butternut squash
1½ cups (350 mL) low-fat non dairy milk
1 tbsp (15 mL) cornstarch
2 tbsp (30 mL) nutritional yeast
½ tsp (2.5 mL) ground mustard
½ tsp (2.5 mL) garlic powder
½ tsp (2.5 mL) smoked paprika
8 oz (227 g) elbow pasta, uncooked
¼ cups (27 g) panko breadcrumbs
⅛ tsp (0.6 mL) hot sauce (optional)

DIRECTIONS

1. Cut the butternut squash into large pieces and remove the seeds. Steam the butternut squash until tender. You can also use an electric pressure cooker: Place on the trivet and add 1½ cups of water. Use the steaming setting for 10 minutes.
2. Once the butternut squash is cooked, scoop the flesh out of the skin with a spoon. Reserve 1 cup for the sauce. Set aside another ½ cup of the squash and dice it.
3. To make the sauce, combine the 1 cup of just-cooked butternut squash, milk, corn starch, nutritional yeast, ground mustard, garlic powder, and smoked paprika in a blender. Process until smooth.
4. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil and cook pasta according to directions on the package.

5. Pour the sauce into a large pot set to low-medium heat. Stir often. As soon as the sauce comes to a simmer, add the cooked pasta and ½ cup of diced butternut squash. Mix to combine.
6. Place the macaroni and “cheese” into a 8-by-8-inch baking dish and top with panko breadcrumbs. Place under the oven broiler set to low for 2–5 minutes to brown the top of the dish. Add small drops of hot sauce across the top if desired. Serve hot.

Note: It may seem like there's a lot of sauce, but the pasta will absorb the sauce as it cools. Find this recipe at bluecrossmn.com/thrive for nutrition information.





UNDER PRESSURE

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

Member: I was surprised to learn at my last exam that I not only lowered my cholesterol, but I lowered my blood pressure, too. Are these two conditions related? If so, what's the connection? —*Michelle, Bemidji*



Dr. Hill: That is excellent news, Michelle! High cholesterol and high blood pressure are common conditions that increase the risk of heart disease and stroke. They can occur separately or together, but as you suspected, there is a connection. It's possible that many of the lifestyle changes that helped you to lower your cholesterol may have helped lower your blood pressure, too. Let's take a look at these two conditions and how they're connected.

High cholesterol

Cholesterol is a waxy, fat-like substance that your body needs to build cell walls. Cholesterol is found in animal products such as meat, dairy products, eggs, baked goods and fried foods.

Cholesterol is carried in the blood. Too much cholesterol can cause a plaque build-up inside the body's blood vessels. This can narrow arteries, making it harder for blood to flow through your body.

High blood pressure

High blood pressure affects the body's arteries. It occurs when the blood's force

against the artery wall is too high, and it means that the heart is working harder to pump blood throughout the body.

High blood pressure is caused by two things: how much blood the heart needs to pump, and how difficult it is for the blood to flow through the blood vessels. If you have arteries that have been narrowed — due to high cholesterol, for example — it is harder for your heart to pump blood, which can increase your blood pressure.

Treatment and prevention

The only way to know if you have high cholesterol or high blood pressure is by getting your levels checked annually. Both conditions can be caused by genetics or other health issues, but most frequently they are caused by lifestyle choices.

Sometimes treatment involves medications, but more commonly, treatment — and prevention — include adjustments to your diet and physical activity. Eating a healthy diet low in saturated fats and sodium, getting regular exercise, maintaining a healthy weight, limiting alcohol and quitting smoking are all part of prevention and treatment.



GROWING YOUR GARDEN

Tips for planting in the fall



When you think of gardening you may think of planting pansies in the spring or hydrangeas in the summer. But tending to your garden in the fall is a great way to get outside and continue growing your plants and flowers.

Gardening offers a variety of benefits to your overall health and wellness. It provides the perfect opportunity for you to get outside and connect with nature, and can improve your mental wellbeing.

"It's interesting to garden and it's fun to watch plants grow," says Julie Weisenhorn, Extension horticulture educator and associate professor at the University of Minnesota. "It's a challenge and helps keep your brain problem solving."

An expert in the field, Weisenhorn works extensively with the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum and hosts Smart Garden on WCCO radio. She says that fall is the perfect time to get in your garden, as it is warm during the days but cools off in the evenings, helping to keep plants from drying out. Here are some tips Weisenhorn offers for fall gardeners.

Healthy soil, healthy plants

When preparing the soil for fall gardening,

adding mulch is an important way to make sure your plants will bloom beautifully. In the fall, dead leaves that fall from trees are great sources of soil mulch. Leaf mulch moderates soil temperature, holds in moisture, reduces weeds and adds nutrients and carbon to your soil.

Pick your plants

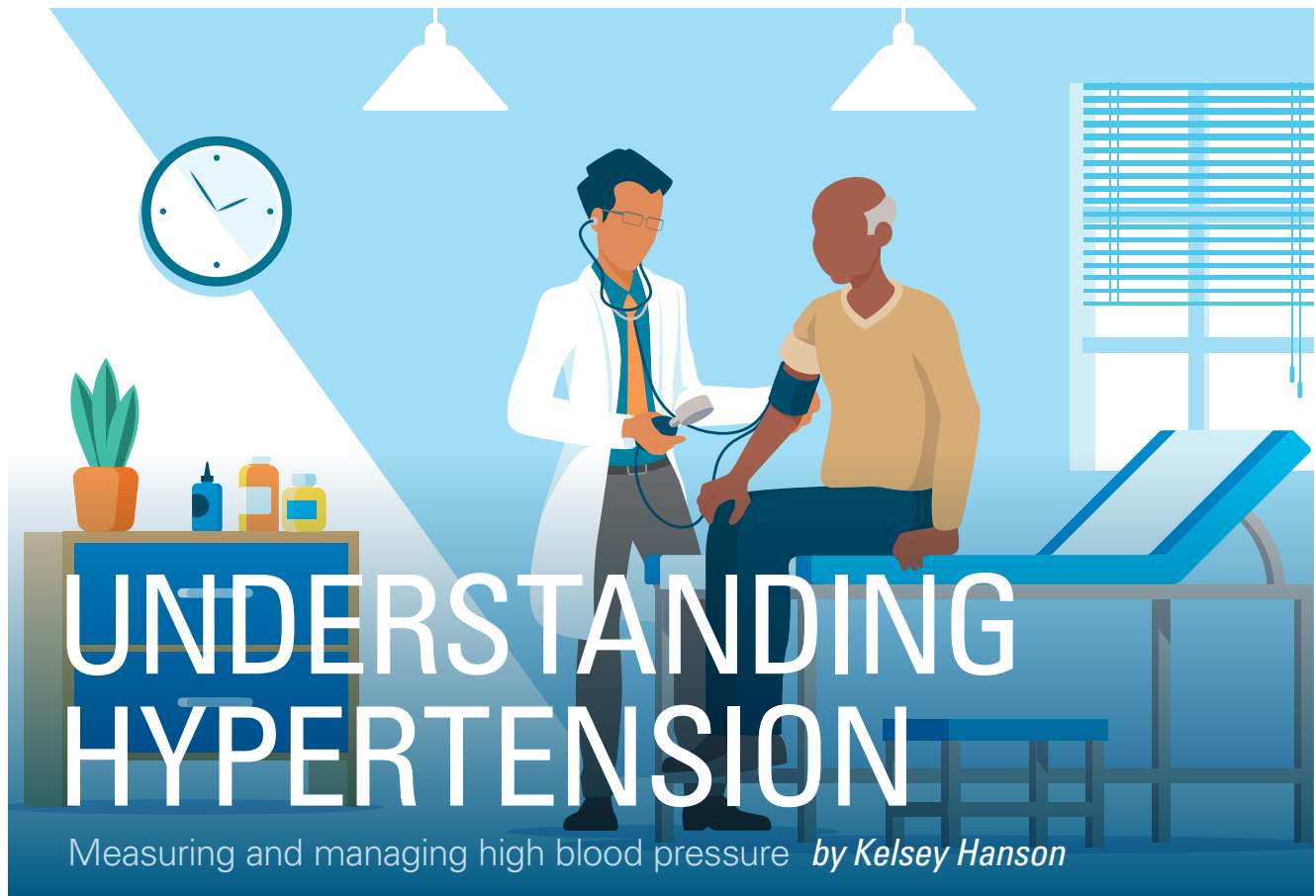
Late season blooming perennials are a great choice for floral fall gardening, and two types of perennials Weisenhorn recommends are Monardas and Asters. Monardas can be deadheaded for a second bloom before the season is over. Asters can provide a burst of color in your garden and thrive during autumn's shorter days.

Consider raised beds

If you struggle getting low to the ground when gardening, Weisenhorn suggests using raised beds that are 24–30 inches high. A free-standing bed should be a maximum of 48 inches across, so you can reach all areas of your garden.

Get connected

To learn more about fall gardening or to ask a question from an Extension Master Gardener, visit extension.umn.edu/yard-and-garden.



Every visit to the doctor begins with a series of measurements: height, weight, temperature, pulse and blood pressure. All of these metrics provide insight about your overall general health, but your blood pressure test signifies important information about your heart health, specifically.

Blood pressure is the blood's force as it is pumped through the arteries. Arteries are the vessels that carry blood from the heart to other parts of the body. Hypertension, also referred to as high blood pressure, happens when the pressure against the artery walls is too high.

High blood pressure is very common — according to the Centers for Disease Control

and Prevention (CDC), this condition affects nearly half of adults in the U.S. Although this is a common condition, it is serious and can increase your risk for heart disease and other health concerns. Fortunately, it can be managed or prevented through healthy lifestyle choices.

How is blood pressure measured?

Blood pressure readings consist of two numbers: systolic blood pressure and diastolic blood pressure. Together, these two numbers form your blood pressure measurement.

- **Systolic blood pressure** measures the pressure the heart exerts when it pumps blood. This number is always the higher

number of the two and is read first. For example, in a blood pressure reading of 120/80 millimeters of mercury (mmHg), the systolic measurement is 120 mmHg.

- **Diastolic blood pressure**

measures when the heart rests between beats. This number is always the lower of the two and is read second. In the same blood pressure reading of 120/80 mmHg, the diastolic measurement is 80 mmHg.

When to see a doctor

Hypertension doesn't produce symptoms. A few people with severely high blood pressure may experience headaches, shortness of breath or nosebleeds. But the vast majority of people with hypertension will not experience any symptoms at all. Because of this, everyone aged 40 and over should have their blood pressure measured annually at your wellness visit.

Sometimes doctors recommend having blood pressure measured more frequently — or at home. If you take readings at home, be sure to share with your doctor. You should follow your primary care provider's guidelines.

Management

It is very important to manage your blood pressure. High blood

pressure increases your risk of heart disease, stroke, kidney disease, vision complications, and other medical conditions.

Depending on various factors, doctors may prescribe medications, called antihypertensives, to help lower blood pressure. There are several different types of blood pressure medications, and it is not uncommon to have two different prescriptions for hypertension. Taking medications exactly as prescribed is the only way to ensure the drug's effectiveness. As always, make sure to tell your doctor about every medication and supplement you take, as sometimes drugs have negative interactions.

Most of the time high blood pressure can be managed or prevented simply by making healthy lifestyle changes. Common ways to manage your blood pressure include:

- Losing weight
- Getting at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity daily
- Eating a heart healthy diet
- Reducing salt intake
- Limiting alcohol
- Quitting smoking
- Getting enough sleep

Whether your doctor prescribes lifestyle changes alone or with medication, taking action to control high blood pressure increases your overall health and longevity.



DID YOU KNOW?

Nearly half of all U.S. adults have high blood pressure.

SOURCE: CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION

LIVE F



IRING REFE

JUST AWESOME. That's how Blue Cross member Kate Ellis describes the feeling she gets whenever she dips a canoe paddle in the water, glides across the snow on her cross-country skis, or carves her way through a mountain trail on her bike.


"It's freedom. It really and truly is," says Ellis, 67. "Your heightened senses of everything around you, especially in this age where people are on their phone all the time and connected. It's a way of being disconnected, but being connected to the environment that you're in."

For Ellis, that environment is always changing. The masters-level world champion Nordic skier and long-distance canoe racer retired from ski instructing at a Twin Cities high school five years ago. She and her husband sold their home in Roseville, customized a camper van and hit the road. They live in the van six months out of the year and in a home in British Columbia during the winter to take advantage of the skiing.

During the warm months, Ellis and her husband travel the country to canoe, bike, hike and explore new areas. They also paddle competitively — and still race on their skis in the winter. Staying active has helped Ellis stay fit and healthy into her 60s. Though she knows not everyone is eager to adopt her lifestyle, she serves as inspiration to others her age to get out and try new things, and develop healthy habits.

Blue Cross member Kate Ellis shares her adventures in active outdoor living

by Jake Weyer



“It’s a way of being disconnected, but being connected to the environment that you’re in.”

— Kate Ellis

GET OUTSIDE

Whether you enjoy canoeing on the lake, taking your dog for a walk, or meeting a friend at a local park, spending time in the great outdoors can help you lead a happier life.

According to the United States Forest Service, spending time outside provides a variety of health benefits. For example, studies have shown that when you’re outside and in touch with nature, you often become more relaxed. The act of simply being active outside can help ease stress, lower your risk of depression, and reduce muscle tension and your heart rate.

Finding passions

Talking from her van, parked in a friend's driveway in Ketchum, Idaho, earlier this summer, Ellis was just a week removed from competing in the Gorge Downwind Champs, a canoe race on the Columbia River Gorge. She paddled her outrigger canoe 13.5-miles in two hours and 28 minutes for a 10th-place finish in her age group.

"I was happy with it," she says. "I don't train like I used to. Considering that, I was very happy with how I did."

Growing up in Wisconsin before Title IX created equal opportunities for females in sports, Ellis couldn't have imagined taking part in such events. The only sport available to her as a child was track, which she recalled being "pretty pathetic." But she found ways to stay active and discovered the joy of paddling early on.

"I just have always loved to be in motion," she says. "Even though I didn't necessarily do sports in school, I was always running around. My family had a cottage in Ontario that we would go to in the summer and I could canoe and explore and I think that had a huge impact on me."

Ellis went to college at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, earned a degree in art and had a career for a while as an art director for an ad agency. She moved to the Twin Cities in the 1980s, working and raising two kids, and running when she could. She took part in numerous marathons and took up

cross country skiing after a friend's suggestion — at the age of 38.

Skiing was much easier on her joints than running and the sport soon became a passion.

"I thought, this is so much better because you get to glide," Ellis says. "You don't have to run down hills. So that was my introduction to Nordic skiing and I just really loved it immediately."

Ellis has since competed in ski races around the world, most at least 40 kilometers (or about 25 miles) in length. She has won several world championships in her age group and has turned heads, especially early on as a newcomer to a sport with many known athletes. She also turned the activity into a new career, leaving the advertising industry to coach a high school team and run summer programs for youth and adults before she retired.



ADVICE FROM COACH KATE

Start moving, whether it's a walk around the block, picking up a new activity or reconnecting with one you used to do. Doing it with a friend or joining a group helps with motivation and keeping you on track.



“I just have always loved to be in motion.”

— Kate Ellis

Staying fit

Turning canoeing into a competitive venture also came later in life. Ellis, who now owns three canoes with her husband, has raced solo and with partners, in races ranging in length from 6 miles to a grueling 120-mile marathon. That big race, the AuSable River Canoe Marathon, is a nonstop event that can take 14-19 hours, including portages — carrying the canoe — around six dams. Ellis has finished as high as 14th place in the event, which attracts more than 100 teams each year.

To stay in shape for endurance races, whether paddling or skiing, Ellis commits several hours a week to low-intensity workouts — short sessions where she pushes hard, along with strength training. In the canoe, she uses 6-mile races as time trials. Before a marathon, she tries to get around 200 hours of training completed in a canoe.

After decades of training, she is in tune with her body and its limitations and won't exceed them.

“By following a training plan, you are able to increase the amount of work you do and then allow your body to absorb the stress by decreasing either intensity or hours,” she says. “Going hard is painful, but if it feels like I’m going to injure myself, I back off. If I’m really tired from training, I’ll take a day off, sometimes two days.”

Ellis sets goals for herself, so she has something to strive for. But those goals don't always include where she finishes a race.

“For skiing it was just to have a really smart race and empty the tank so that no matter what the results, that’s the best I could do and I’m really happy with that,” she says.

Ellis also tries to stick to a balanced diet — eating as clean as she can, avoiding junk food and fast food. But she isn't so strict that she won't indulge in chocolate or ice cream from time to time.



Mindful connections


You might think that living in a van could be isolating, but Ellis says the opposite. She and her husband are very close. She jokes that they still have a great relationship despite their very snug living quarters, noting that the reality is that most of their time is spent outdoors.

Through their activities, the couple has met many friends around the country. In Ketchum, they were staying with a friend that helped them through the COVID-19 pandemic, when they had to stay put for a winter because Canada's borders were closed. Ellis has had a variety of canoe partners in double competitions over the years, enabling her to build lasting bonds with other athletes. And the ski community in British Columbia is also tight-knit.

Outside of sports, Ellis is still passionate about art. She enjoys creating jewelry, drawing and

printmaking. She is also an avid reader and likes a good puzzle. Those activities contribute to her mental wellness, she says.

Throughout her life, Ellis says suggestions from others opened doors to activities that she loves. She encourages people to explore and to get outside their comfort zone, as you never know what might become a new source of joy.

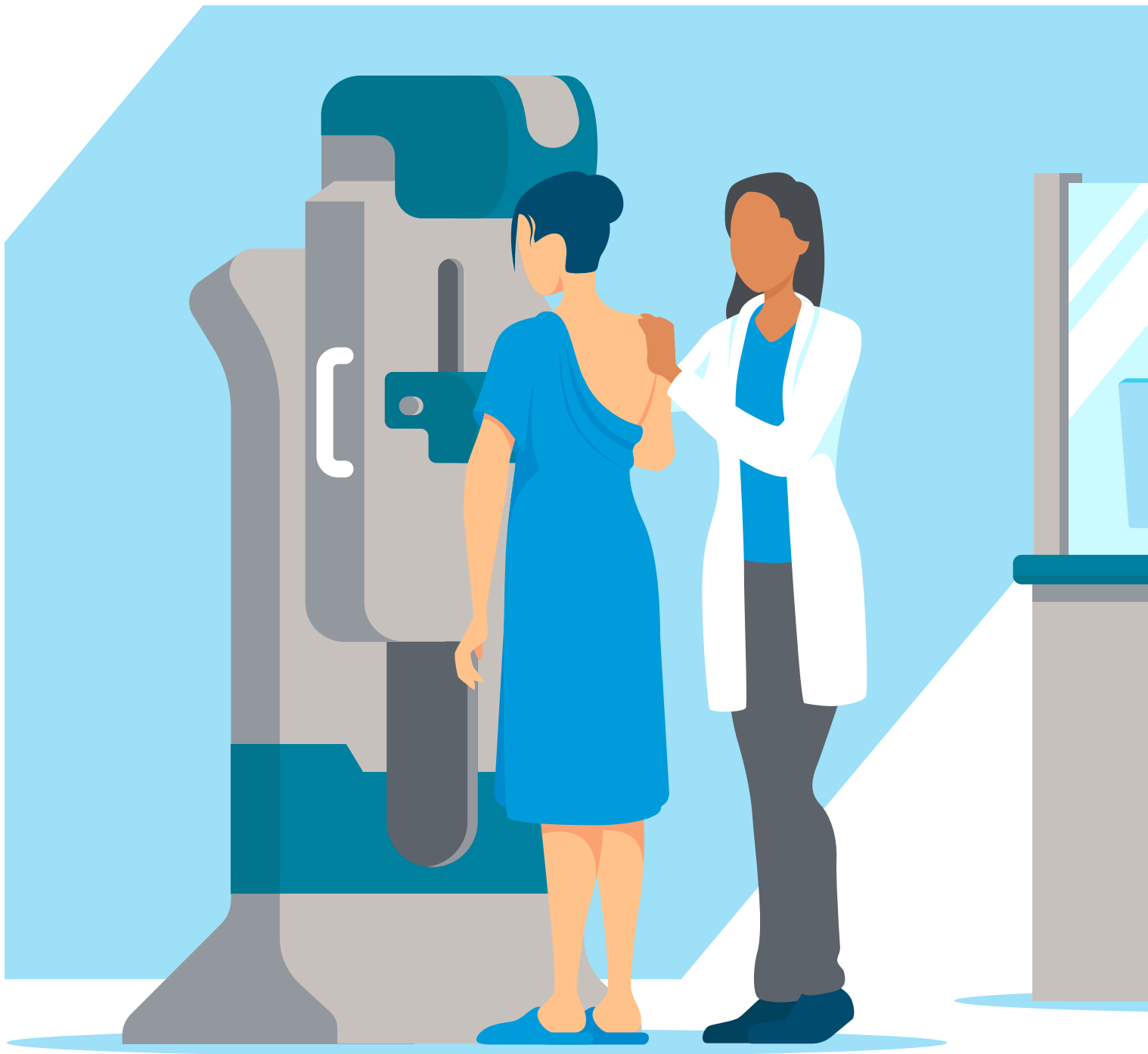
"I think just being curious, exploring new things, new places, meeting new people, being physically active, has all helped me stay fit both in mind and body," Ellis says. "I'm healthy, I'm all here mentally and I'm able to live this life. I feel so fortunate. I really do." 



START SKIING

Nordic skiing is often called a lifetime sport, as it's an activity you can do at any age. If you're interested in getting started, check out loppet.org to find lessons, trails and other helpful resources.





5 MYTHS OF BREAST CANCER SCREENING

Explaining the importance of early detection *by Anna Zeck*



Roughly one in eight women will develop breast cancer in their lifetime, according to the American Cancer Society, making it the most common cancer among women, aside from skin cancers. Breast cancer is treatable, though, more

so when it's caught early. That makes regular screenings a must.

And yet, low breast cancer screening numbers remain a concern for oncologists, says Allina surgical oncologist Dr. Natasha Rueth, who specializes in breast cancer and is also the medical director of the Atlanta Health Cancer Institute.

"We have seen a lot of women return back to their mammogram screenings post-COVID," Rueth says. "During COVID, we saw a huge dip, and then return, in women who were getting screening mammograms because we told people not to come in for that. And so there was an attributed, increased risk of cancer and more advanced cancer as a result of the holdovers from 2020."

"Now, for some populations, those screening numbers have caught up to pre-COVID numbers, but we still know that there's some significant populations that have much lower screening rates, including Black women and Hispanic women — these populations still have low rates of mammographic screening."

Rueth believes there's a way for every woman to get on a committed schedule of yearly mammograms, and she breaks down the five biggest myths surrounding breast cancer screenings.



DID YOU KNOW?

Breast cancer is the second most common type of cancer in women.

SOURCE: AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY



1. **"I don't have time to have the procedure done."**

For many busy people with a long to-do list, it might sound difficult to set aside the time for a mammogram, but it's actually a straightforward and typically quick procedure, often only 15–20 minutes of actual study time, Rueth says.

For those wondering what to expect, a mammogram is a compressive study where the breast gets put in a machine and is compressed under pressure so that the tissue can be X-rayed and visualized. Many breast programs now use the 3D mammogram, or the tomosynthesis mammograms, which take additional pictures. The results? Reduced callback rates for additional testing and increased cancer detection rates.

Everyone's experience will be different, Rueth says, depending on the makeup and density of a woman's breast tissue, but on the whole, she says it's generally a mildly uncomfortable few minutes for a life-saving procedure.

"I sort of revert back to the old school, no pain, no gain, but again, for most women,

that is not the experience," she says. "It might not be the most pleasant, but it's certainly not the hardest thing we will have to go through."



2. **"I don't have a family history of breast cancer."**

One of the most common misconceptions, Rueth says many women tell her that they don't have a family history, so are less worried about their likelihood of being diagnosed. However, she says that research shows most breast cancer is not familial, and that a genetic link or predisposition has only been identified in roughly 10% of patients.

"The majority of women have spontaneous cancer, so just because it's not in your family doesn't mean that you shouldn't get screened and take your health screening really seriously," she says.



3. **"I'm not sure about my screening schedule."**

Rueth says there's often a misunderstanding of the recommendations, which is only fair as the

recommendations do change and can be difficult to follow. Some recommendations come from population-based data and some are driven by more breast cancer-specialized data, which explains the variations in recommendations.

Rueth says the best thing to do is follow the recommendations of breast cancer societies, all of which recommend annual mammograms starting at age 40 for most women.

"It's really reasonable why patients might be confused," she says. "I think the most important thing you can do is to commit to it and get into a routine and do it once per year."



4. "I have accessibility issues and can't make it."

There are many factors that affect screening rates, particularly among differing populations, that shouldn't be overlooked. Those include socioeconomic status, public transportation options, representation in the doctor's office and the cost of medical care. These are very real issues, Rueth says, that still need to be improved.

However, she also says that many organizations have made huge strides in making mammograms more accessible for all, including:

- Translating educational materials into other languages
- Finding cultural, community

liaisons who can represent a range of people and values while providing medical information

- Mobile mammography
- Offering extended or after hours appointments so people with difficult schedules can still make it

Rueth is also passionate about educating and recognizing women for whom understanding is especially important.

"Really just making sure that you have organizational policies and that your healthcare system and your team are thinking about unique approaches to breast health, is really important," she says.




5. "I don't fall into any of the risk factors."

There are numerous risk-reducing factors

that everyone can take to reduce the likelihood of getting breast cancer, but the most proven risk factors you might not be aware of (besides being female, Rueth says), include:

- Age
- Having a higher BMI or largely sedentary lifestyle
- Excessive alcohol intake

It's never easy or convenient to make an appointment for a medical exam, but the reality is, doing so could save your life, Rueth says. Commit to starting your schedule of yearly mammograms. 



DID YOU KNOW?

Mammograms only take about 15-20 minutes of actual study time.



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DoctorOnDemand.com/BCBSMN.



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FLU & COVID-19 VACCINES

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



Member: I plan to get my flu shot soon. Should I also get another COVID-19 shot? I haven't heard much about boosters lately — is there an update? —*Larry, Mounds View*

Anita: Hi Larry and thank you for the question. First off, I'm glad to hear you are getting your flu shot.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends an annual flu shot for everyone over 6 months old as it is a proven defender against illness during the fall and winter months when flu risk is highest. The flu shot composition is reviewed and updated each year to match whatever flu viruses are circulating and making people sick and it generally reduces your risk of getting the flu between 40% and 60%.

To your question, you can get a flu shot and COVID-19 vaccination booster at the same time. It is safe and will save you a trip to the doctor or pharmacy.

Right now, the CDC recommends that everyone 6 years old and older get one updated Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna COVID-19 vaccine, regardless of whether they've received any of the original COVID-19

vaccines. Beyond that, people aged 65 and older can get one additional COVID-19 vaccine dose four or more months after their first updated COVID-19 vaccine. People who are moderately or severely immunocompromised can get a single additional COVID-19 vaccine two or more months after their last updated COVID-19 vaccine.

When we say "updated" COVID-19 vaccines that's because the latest shots protect against both the original virus and newer variants. You might also hear these vaccines called "bivalent." What's most important to remember is that, like the flu vaccine, COVID-19 vaccines are reviewed and updated to make sure that they provide maximum protection against the viruses that are going around.

If you have any questions about the vaccines or your schedule, it's a good idea to talk to your doctor or pharmacist. They can help ensure you get the protection you need to stay as healthy as possible.



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That's why **95%** of members keep their Blue Cross Medicare plan.²



¹Based on enrollment data from CMS December 2022.

²Highmark monthly Medicare enrollments on January 31, 2023, compared to December 31, 2022.



MAPPING OUT TRANSPORTATION

Finding transportation assistance for your loved one

Life is busy, especially when you are a caregiver. Driving your loved one to appointments and pharmacy visits can put even more stress on your schedule. Emily Vassar, a Blue Cross Medicare Advantage social worker, says transportation concerns are common among caregivers. Part of Vassar's work is connecting caregivers with assistance, and there are several easy to access resources you can use to ensure your loved one is taken places safely.

Metro Mobility

A popular form of transportation in the Twin Cities area, Metro Mobility provides bus rides for medical visits. Drivers are trained to transport people of all abilities, and Vassar says that services are easy to use and inexpensive compared to other transportation providers. To learn more about Metro Mobility visit metro council.org/Transportation/Services/Metro-Mobility-Home.aspx.

GoGoGrandparent

A ride service that operates like an Uber or Lyft, Vassar says that while GoGoGrandparent can be more expensive if you live in a rural area, but rides are convenient and can bring your loved one takeout meals, to the grocery store and to doctor or pharmacy appointments. To schedule a ride, call 1-855-464-6872 ext 21843.

Check local resources

If you live in a rural area or don't have access to these ride services, the city or county you live in may offer ride assistance. You can start by visiting dot.state.mn.us/transit/riders/ or by contacting the county you live in. Ultimately, Vassar says when you are looking for transportation help for a loved one, your family and community are your most important resource.

"Don't be afraid to ask your friends and family and rely on them," Vassar says. "Everyone is running around with a million things to do, but people are willing to help out with transportation."



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IN OUR COMMUNITY

INVESTING IN COMMUNITIES

Blue Cross partners with Indigenous organizations

Indigenous communities have long faced health inequities and barriers across our state. For this reason, Blue Cross is investing in solutions by working to support the health and wellness of Indigenous communities.

“Our commitment to advancing racial and health equity is more than just symbolic,” Bukata Hayes, vice president of racial and health equity and chief equity officer at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota, says. “This starts with understanding the root causes of health inequities in Indigenous communities.” Here are some of the ways Blue Cross is partnering with organizations to support Indigenous communities:

Native American Community Clinic

Blue Cross is committed to making sure everyone has equitable access to quality healthcare. Through the Equitable Care and Coverage Program, the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota Foundation supports the Native American Community Clinic (NACC). Located in the Twin Cities, the NACC works to address the systemic health disparities within the Native American community, and provide care services rooted in health and tradition.

Lower Sioux Indian Community

The Blue Cross and Blue Shield Center for Prevention directly supports the Lower Sioux Indian Community, which is seeking to improve the health of community members. The community offers a health clinic, youth and recreation programs, and financial

assistance options for education among other programs that benefit the community.

Grandma's House

Developed by Fond Du Lac Tribal College and directly supported by the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota Foundation, Grandma's House is an Ojibwe immersion childcare center in the Twin Cities. The organization offers an Ojibwe language curriculum for community members of all ages run by tribal parents and elders.

Indigenous Food Network

Led by Dream of Wild Health and in partnership with local Indigenous organizations, the Center for Prevention supports the Indigenous Food Network (IFN), which works to expand access to healthy, Indigenous foods.





READ THE REBUS

Routinely exercising your mind improves your memory, brain function, and mood. Because this is both a visual and word puzzle, its benefits also include maintaining your verbal reasoning and visual thinking skills.

A Rebus Puzzle is a specific type of puzzle where an image represents a common word or phrase. To solve these puzzles, you need to “read” the image and the words to make sense of them.

Example:

**1,2,3,...,38,
39,40 LIFE**

Answer: Life begins at 40.

Your turn:

1. **LE
VEL**
2. **12:00T**
3. **give get
give get
give get
give get**
4. **TRY STAND
2**

Answers on back cover.

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Si habla español, tiene a su disposición servicios gratuitos de asistencia con el idioma. Llame al 1-855-903-2583. Para TTY, llame al 711.

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.

Haddii aad ku hadasho Soomaali, adigu waxaad heli kartaa caawimo luqad lacag la'aan ah. Wac 1-866-251-6736.

Markay tahay dad maqalku ku adag yahay (TTY), wac 711.

Blue Cross Medicare Advantage is a PPO plan with a Medicare contract. Enrollment in Medicare Advantage depends on contract renewal.

Medicare Advantage customer service, 1-800-711-9865 (TTY 711), 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., Central Time, seven days a week October 1 through March 31 and Monday through Friday the rest of the year.

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