

thrive.

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 BlueCross
BlueShield
Minnesota

a magazine for healthy choices and your best life.

Overcoming Pain

Managing chronic pain for
a healthier, fuller life

page 8

**KAREN LITTLE
TOOK UP YOGA
IN HER 60s
TO EASE PAIN
SYMPTOMS**

also inside

**Tips for preventing
falls at home**

**How to get a better
night's sleep**

**Pain medication risks
and benefits**

WELCOME

Hello and happy spring. We hope you've had a safe, healthy winter and that you're looking forward to warmer weather and all of the opportunities this season brings in Minnesota.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, it's important that we stay safe and follow Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines. But that doesn't need to stop you from getting active this spring. Lace up your walking shoes, get on your bike, pick up a pickleball paddle — or challenge yourself with something new.

That's the mindset of this edition's feature subject, Karen Little, who took up yoga in her 60s to help manage chronic pain. Now she doesn't just practice yoga, she also teaches it, to share the benefits with others while making lasting friendships along the way.

In this edition, you'll also find tips for getting a good night's sleep, advice for avoiding falls in your home, and important information about the risks of certain pain medications.

As always, we encourage your feedback on **thrive.** and on the health care you are receiving. If you have story ideas, comments, or suggestions, email us at thrivemagazine@bluecrossmn.com. We thank you for being a member of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota.

Christine Reiten

Chris Reiten
Vice President, Medicaid



BUILDING BETTER CARE

Each year, Blue Cross and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) sends 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. All of these surveys are confidential, 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

Photographer Tim Gruber from Ackerman+Gruber captures cover subject Karen Little at Tula Yoga & Wellness in St. Paul. Do you have a compelling story for the pages of **thrive.**? We'd love to hear it! thrivemagazine@bluecrossmn.com.



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HEALTH BITES



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

A Taste of Spring

Enjoy this simple, seasonal lemon chicken with rosemary and garlic recipe for two



Use the American Diabetes Association's (ADA) Diabetes Plate Method to finish off this chicken entree from the Create Your Plate Diabetes Cookbook. Add some leafy greens over half your plate and a grain or starchy vegetable on one quarter of your plate. Learn more about the Diabetes Plate Method and find other recipes at diabetesfoodhub.org.

INGREDIENTS

- ½ lemon (juice and zest)
- 1 clove garlic (minced)
- 1 tablespoon white wine
- 1 teaspoon cornstarch
- ¾ pound chicken tenderloins
- pinch of salt and black pepper
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 tablespoon of fresh rosemary

DIRECTIONS:

1. In a small bowl, whisk together the lemon juice, wine, and cornstarch. Set it aside.
2. Sprinkle both sides of the chicken with the salt, black pepper and lemon zest.
3. Heat the olive oil in a medium skillet over medium heat.
4. Add the rosemary and garlic and cook until fragrant, 30 seconds.
5. Add the chicken and cook until a thermometer inserted into a chicken tender reaches 165 degrees, about five minutes on each side.
6. Add the lemon juice mixture and toss to coat. Continue cooking for three minutes; the liquid will slightly thicken. Serve warm.



Your Health Care Team

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



Member: Blue Cross recently asked me about a medical condition I saw my doctor about. I'm curious — why does Blue Cross need to know this information? —*Bob, Little Falls*

Dr. Fendrich: Thanks for the question, Bob. The quick answer is that Blue Cross works alongside your physician to support your health care team.

One way that Blue Cross supports the care of your health and wellness is to ensure they have a good understanding of any medical conditions you might have. This might be done through an in-home or virtual wellness visit. Once Blue Cross gets to know your health care needs, they can help you feel sure that you have all the essential resources to navigate your provider's treatment plan and to live your healthiest life.

Here are some more specific reasons Blue Cross might inquire about your conditions:

1. To help you understand your benefits

The main reason Blue Cross might ask you for information about your medical condition is to help you to locate any in-network specialists or to answer questions about your benefits. Ensuring that you understand all the pieces to complete your treatment plan is the main way Blue Cross can support your provider.

2. To connect you to programs or services

If you have a major medical condition, such as cancer, Blue Cross might refer you or a caregiver for information and resources from the American Cancer Society. Similarly, Blue Cross might ask you about a medical condition in order to help you navigate one of their own programs that could help.

3. To make their benefits better

Blue Cross might inquire about your medical conditions so that they can define existing benefits, or explore new benefit options.

Remember, you have multiple people on your health care team. Talk to your doctor if something new comes up, and make sure to schedule regular preventive care visits to reduce potential health problems. Reach out to Blue Cross by calling the number on the back of your member ID card when you have questions about your benefits or need assistance locating an in-network doctor, specialist, care provider or program.



To submit a question for Ask the Doctor, email thrivemagazine@bluecrossmn.com.



Q&A WITH

Bukata Hayes

Vice President of Racial and Health Equity

Bukata Hayes serves in a new role of Vice President of Racial and Health Equity for Blue Cross. We met with Bukata to discuss his job, its aim and its impact on members and the community.

thrive.: Tell us about your new role.

Bukata Hayes: In 2020, Blue Cross made a declaration that racism is a public health crisis. Blue Cross wanted to be out front and forge a way forward. This position was created to help lead the organization's efforts to eliminate entrenched racial inequity at all levels of health care.

thrive.: That seems like a big task for one person.

Bukata: I have a team that works with me. We partner and collaborate to put our members' experience at the center and

understand how issues around race and language impact our members. We have to address those barriers to access.

thrive.: What are some specific initiatives that are underway?

Bukata: Part of what we've done is develop a definition around racial and health equity. We needed to be clear on what that meant. We want to embed racial and health equity in all of our processes. We've also partnered with community organizations and individuals, such as health care workers. Having those resources helps some of our members who are experiencing access issues.

thrive.: Is there anything else members can expect?

Bukata: Members can expect that we are willing to fully explore the ways that under-resourced members are experiencing Blue Cross, and we are committed to addressing that, particularly from a racial health and equity lens. We are committed to developing solutions for gaps in care and access. We will strive to be more culturally aware and to meet people where they are at.

Fun Facts



FAVORITE SPRING ACTIVITY:

Playing basketball outside, late in spring.

SOMETHING MOST PEOPLE DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU:

I took tumbling as a youth and can still do a backflip today. And I'm a huge Star Wars fan.



TAKE ACTION



Staying Safe at Home

A room-by-room checklist to prevent falls

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), falls are the top cause of injury among older adults, and 60 percent of falls occur at home. Fortunately, most at-home falls are easily preventable with a little planning and decluttering. Here's a room-by-room rundown of quick and easy steps to take to prevent falls.



Bathroom: Many falls occur in the bathroom, so this is a good place

to start.

- Put non-slip rubber mats or self-stick strips on the floor of the tub or shower
- Consider installing grab bars for support getting in or out of the tub or shower



Bedroom: Moving about in the darkness is often the cause of a

fall in the bedroom. Accessible lighting is the key for bedroom safety.

- Use bright light bulbs
- Place lamps close to the bed where they are within reach
- Put in night lights to be able to see a path in the dark. For areas that don't have electrical outlets, consider battery-operated lights.



Kitchen: Determining your most-used kitchen essentials is the best

way to prevent a fall in the kitchen.

- Put frequently used items within easy reach, about waist level
- Consider using a step stool or asking a friend to help with hard-to-reach items — do not use a chair



Floors and Common Spaces: Simple

decluttering goes a long way in these spaces.

- Keep objects off the floor and out of high-traffic areas
- Remove unnecessary rugs or tape them down
- Coil or tape cords and wires next to the wall and out of the way
- Arrange furniture in a way that keeps your space as open as possible



Stairs and Steps (both indoor and outdoor): It's easy for

anyone to trip and fall on the stairs. Most fall precautions for this area of the home comes down to simple home maintenance.

- Check for loose or uneven steps and repair if needed.
- Make sure carpet is firmly attached, or remove carpet and attach non-slip rubber treads
- Check for loose or broken handrails. Repair if needed.
- Consider installing handrails on both sides of the stairs
- Use bright overhead lighting at the top and bottom of stairs
- Consider putting light switches at both the top and bottom of stairs
- Slow down and watch where you walk

For more fall prevention tips, visit bluecrossmn.com/thrive.



Rest and Refresh

Tips for getting a better night's sleep *by Elizabeth Boger*



Sleep is an essential component of maintaining a good quality of life. While you're catching your Z's, your body and mind are hard at work repairing tissues, fighting off infections, and even processing and forming memories. You should aim for about seven or eight hours of sleep each night, and it's even more important to wake up feeling rested and refreshed.

"Quality sleep is very much in the eye of the beholder," says Andrew Stiehm, a pulmonary and sleep medicine physician with Allina Health. "High quality sleep means that when you wake up, you feel rested. If you feel like your sleep is not satisfactory to you, then you're not getting quality sleep."

Getting older doesn't mean you have to settle for fewer hours of quality sleep. If you're spending a lot of time tossing and turning at night, it could be that you just need to make a few adjustments.

Find your natural bedtime

As you age, your body experiences natural changes to its sleep patterns.

"The first change we see is called advancing of the sleep phase, which means the natural bedtime starts to shift a little bit earlier," Dr. Stiehm says. "For a 30-year-old, the natural bedtime might be between 10 p.m. and midnight. For a 65-year-old, it's maybe be between 8 p.m. and 10 p.m."

Typically, your natural bedtime is whenever you feel tired. But if you're in bed counting sheep for a while, Stiehm recommends getting back up and doing something relaxing until you feel like you could doze off.

"If you've gone to bed and haven't fallen asleep within 20 minutes, that's your body telling you it isn't ready yet," Dr. Stiehm says. "Go to bed when you feel like it's time to go to bed — not necessarily because of the time on the clock, or because you feel like you need to go to bed at the same time as your partner."

Understand your body

As you grow older, you may experience a decrease in sleep efficiency.

"This is a jargony way of saying how much of your time in bed is actually spent sleeping," Dr. Stiehm says. "An individual who's very efficient will sleep throughout most of their time in bed. But someone who's inefficient will spend more time awake throughout the night."

If you fall into the inefficient category, perhaps you have medical issues that keep you awake, like having to urinate more often, or needing to reposition to ease back pain. These aren't always a cause for concern. But if you feel like they're regularly hindering your ability to rest, it might be worth bringing up to your doctor at your annual wellness visit.

If you do feel unrested, the biggest culprit is that you're likely not getting enough sleep. This could be due to behavioral reasons, such as choosing to take part in activities or hobbies in the evening, instead of sleeping.

"You really want to address the reason you feel unrested," Dr. Stiehm says. "If the issue is that you're getting enough sleep, but you still feel tired, that usually requires a medical evaluation. It could be due to an underlying medical condition or medication side effects."

Build a routine

Above all else, it's important to let your body know when it's time to wind down in the evening.

"Stability is important," Dr. Stiehm says. "Your body needs to know what time is bedtime, and your body needs to have a constant routine before bedtime. If you sometimes go to bed at 8 p.m., your body never gets used to a pattern."

Your sleeping environment should be dark, quiet and set at a comfortable temperature.

Even beyond a regular bedtime, it's also important to be consistent in your routine that precedes sleep.

Try to avoid light sources about an hour or two before bedtime. This means turning off the TV and putting away your cell phone. Light sources can affect your circadian rhythm, which can affect your body's ability to snooze.

A relaxing hobby such as light reading, yoga or meditation can be great ways to wind down and send a signal to your body that you're getting ready to sleep. Whatever your routine, Stiehm encourages consistency.

"Routine, routine, routine," Dr. Stiehm says. "Having a stable routine is one of the most important steps to getting a good night's rest."



TIPS FOR BETTER SLEEP

1. Stick to a consistent bedtime routine
2. Make sure your sleeping environment is quiet and dark
3. Avoid caffeine, alcohol and large meals before bedtime
4. Limit daytime naps
5. Avoid screen time before bed

OVERCOMING PAIN

How to assess, treat and manage pain for a healthier, happier life *by Jake Weyer*



DID YOU KNOW?

Exercise can help reduce pain symptoms while also strengthening muscles and bones, and improving balance and range of motion.

For more than three decades, horses were Karen Little's passion.

"I actually spent most of my younger years riding horses," says the Roseville resident, now 69. "And falling off of horses is one of the reasons why I have pain. That and a couple car accidents along the way."

Lingering injuries from those incidents left Little with chronic pain in her back and neck. Arthritis caused joint problems as well, eventually leading to knee replacement surgery. But she hasn't let pain keep her down. She found relief in exercise, particularly yoga, which she teaches both independently and through Tula Yoga & Wellness in St. Paul.

It has benefited Little in her day-to-day movements, flexibility, balance and awareness. And most of all, it has helped her prevail over pain.

Little is among more than 100 million people in the U.S. living with chronic pain. Dr. Orlando Charry, a pain medicine specialist for Allina Health, defines the condition as pain that lasts longer than what is expected for a

given injury, or pain that goes on for three to six months and impairs quality of life.

While chronic pain is common, it doesn't need to be accepted. With a multi-pronged approach, Dr. Charry says, pain can be successfully managed and controlled, so it doesn't rule your life.

ASSESSING PAIN

First, Dr. Charry says, it's important not to let pain go unchecked. Though our bodies are resilient and we can get used to living with aches and pains, that doesn't mean we should. If you have any chronic pain concerns, be sure to share them with your doctor.

Chronic pain can surface for a wide range of reasons, from injuries to surgery to chronic diseases like diabetes or cancer. It can be skeletal, muscular or organ based. The first step in overcoming it is to acknowledge its presence and assess where it is coming from and why.

Dr. Charry says assessing pain requires a holistic approach. An evaluation covers age, health history, past injuries, lifestyle and more.



“ *I feel like
I've slowed
the trajectory
to old age.*

”

— KAREN LITTLE

The assessment goes well beyond examining the area where the pain is, which would be more inline with addressing acute pain from a recent injury. Pain assessments even include psychological considerations.

“That’s the way we are made,” Dr. Charry says. “Mind, body and spirit in

one package. Everything is connected.”

When treating chronic pain, he says, taking that same holistic approach is just as important.

INTERDISCIPLINARY TREATMENT

Treating chronic pain usually involves medical professionals from several

GET MOVING

The wide-ranging benefits of physical activity

Staying active is part of a healthy lifestyle at every age. Our bodies, minds, and quality of life all benefit from regular, moderate activity. Dr. Jerry Perra, an orthopedic surgeon at Summit Orthopedics, shares how activity improves our health.

Physical — Moderate exercise boosts physical health through increased muscle and core strength, improved cardiovascular health and a boost in balance.

Mental — Coordinated physical movement exercises our minds by requiring our brain and spine to work together. Mental health, such as anxiety and depression are also improved with regular exercise, as is cognitive function.

Social — Social interactions improve our brain health and keep us healthy longer. There is a clear benefit to choosing an exercise where you interact with others.

Decreased risk of falling — Strengthening our muscles and improving our core strength and balance decreases our risk of falling or injuring ourselves when we do other day-to-day activities.

Better range of motion — Exercise can help with arthritis symptoms and other movement-related conditions. For example, strengthening the thigh muscles can decrease knee pain for people with arthritis.



LITTLE'S TIPS FOR YOGA BEGINNERS

Karen Little shares how anyone interested in yoga can get started

- Listen to your body, understand your limitations, but don't shy away from a challenge. Be sure to talk to your doctor before starting yoga.
- Yoga comes in many forms. Do your research and find a class that's a good match with your abilities and goals.
- If you're unsure about starting with a group, try a virtual class. Many yoga centers and SilverSneakers offer virtual lessons.



different specialties. That may include physical therapists, occupational therapists, rehabilitation therapists, health psychologists and others.

"The treatment of chronic pain should be integrated and interdisciplinary," Charry says. "A comprehensive approach will produce the best outcomes."

Each patient's situation is unique and will require a different combination of treatment and management efforts. Those might include a combination of medications, physical therapy or other treatments.

For example, doctors might recommend X-rays or nerve studies, could suggest injections such as cortisone shots, might advise a patient to work with a personal trainer who understands the anatomy of a condition, and so on. If a patient is having trouble holding a toothbrush or utensils, or doing other daily activities, an occupational therapist can help find different ways to do those things.

Taking a thoughtful, multi-modal approach to medications is also important, Dr. Charry says.

"Multi-modal means that different types of medications are used for pain, so that they can help each other, in order to try to obtain a better response," he says.

Common medications for pain treatment include topical creams, acetaminophen (Tylenol), non-steroidal anti-inflammatories, and sometimes steroids, as well as medications for mood. Beyond those are medications that doctors tend to be more cautious about prescribing, Dr. Charry says. Those include adjuvants and muscle relaxants that can cause more serious side effects. Opioids are generally not recommended for chronic pain as they are often abused and can lead to opioid use disorders.

Ongoing physical activity is also a common part of long-term chronic pain management, improving our heart, lung, muscle and bone health. Low impact activities, such as pool exercises or yoga, are great examples of ways to keep our bodies strong and flexible, while also reversing pain symptoms.



LOW IMPACT

Yoga is an example of a low-impact exercise, making it easy on the joints. Other low-impact activities include swimming, cycling and walking.

“

Exercise is a mainstay for any treatment plan, not just to manage pain, but also to prevent it...”

— DR. ORLANDO CHARRY, PAIN MEDICINE SPECIALIST



“Exercise is a mainstay for any treatment plan, not just to manage pain, but also to prevent it and maintain a healthy lifestyle in general,” Dr. Charry says.

RISING TO A CHALLENGE

Though Little had tried yoga many years ago, her work life got in the way of making it a habit. It wasn't until her 60s that she gave it another try — and realized what she'd been missing.

The style she practices and teaches, called SomaYoga, uses slow, gentle movements designed to be therapeutic, releasing tense muscles and promoting healing. She discovered the practice through Tula Yoga & Wellness and quickly recognized the benefits.

“It's just made life easier. It's easier to get around. I feel like I've slowed the trajectory to old age, so to speak,” Little says. “My mobility is greater, my

flexibility is greater, and in general I have the ability to do things with ease that I wouldn't be able to do if I hadn't been doing yoga.”

Her pain isn't gone, but when symptoms arise, she knows how to move in ways that will help. In addition to practicing yoga about four times a week, Little sees a chiropractor to help with her back pain.

She has also taken up pilates and is learning QiGong. She enjoys the challenge of a new activity as well as the social aspect. She's met many new friends through her activities and enjoys being a part of the yoga community.

“I enjoy the social contact, the multiple health benefits derived from being active, and the sense of accomplishment when I can finally do something that I wasn't previously able to do,” she says. “Plus, it just makes me feel good and boosts my mood.” 🧘



DID YOU KNOW?

Virtual and in-person yoga classes are available through your SilverSneakers benefit. Learn more about SilverSneakers and how to get started at silversneakers.com.

EXERCISE RECOMMENDATIONS

Dr. Perra suggests 30 minutes of moderate, varied activity about four days per week. Find a few different activities that get your heart rate up and mix it up throughout the week.

MODERATE, LOW-IMPACT ACTIVITIES TO TRY:

- Walking
- Biking
- Yoga
- Pickleball
- Dancing
- Swimming





Understanding Opioids

Weighing the benefits and risks of these common prescription medications *by Kelsey Hanson*

Oxycodone. Morphine. Fentanyl. Do these prescription drugs sound familiar? You might have talked with your provider about using one of these if you've ever asked for advice about pain.

These medications are all part of the opioid family. Over the past several years, health care professionals have learned a great deal about the benefits and risks of taking these drugs. Let's take a look at why opioids are prescribed and why your doctor might encourage alternatives.



WHAT ARE OPIOIDS?

Opioids are a class of drugs that are frequently prescribed by doctors to help their patients manage pain. Often, these drugs are prescribed for short term use, such as to alleviate discomfort during the healing process after a surgery or procedure. They can also be prescribed on a long-term basis, most commonly as comfort measures to support cancer treatments.

In the past, doctors have prescribed opioids to manage chronic pain. Today, however, the Mayo Clinic suggests that opioid alternatives should be explored first when treating ongoing pain unrelated to cancer treatments.

OPIOID MISUSE AND ADDICTION

Opioids are very effective, but they are highly addictive and can be easily misused. Opioids work by causing a flood of endorphins in the body, which creates a feeling of happiness and reduces the amount of pain a person feels.

The body also develops a tolerance for opioids, so the same amount becomes less effective as time goes on. In other words, a higher dose is needed to achieve the same effect. This is often what causes opioid misuse, and it can lead to addiction. It also leads to more side effects, some life threatening.

Anyone, regardless of age, can get addicted to opioids, even when taking them as prescribed. The Centers

for Disease Control and Prevention states that just three days of opioid use increases the likelihood of addiction. Because of this, your doctor will likely discuss opioid alternatives as a first option for pain management.

Just like any other medication, there are both benefits and risks of taking an opioid. Your doctor will know if an opioid is right for you.

LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF OPIOID USE

If your doctor has determined that an opioid is the best course of action to control your pain, make sure you understand the plan for how long you will take the opioid and how you will wean off safely. Your doctor should also discuss with you these long-term effects of opioid use:

- Becoming physically dependent or addicted
- Irregular heartbeat
- Increased risk of heart attack
- Depression
- Constipation
- Severe abdominal pain
- Weak bones
- Building tolerance and the need to continue increasing your dose
- Increased risk of overdose

ALTERNATIVES TO OPIOIDS

Opioids are effective and sometimes the best option; however, there are some excellent alternatives that you can explore. Many of these non-opioid choices are



DID YOU KNOW?

Lower doses of opioids can make you feel sleepy, while higher doses might slow your breathing and heart rate. It's important not to mix opioids with other medications.

SOURCE: MAYO CLINIC

Alternative Medications

Talk with your doctor about the best plan for managing your pain. There are several alternatives to opioids that could be a better option for you. Some of these options are:

- NSAIDs such as ibuprofen — some NSAIDs are available over the counter, while others require a prescription
- Acetaminophen
- Topical products such as a Lidocaine patch

Alternatives to Medicine

Besides medications, there are other options that can help and may be covered in your health plan. Call the member services number on the back of your member ID card for assistance. Here are some alternatives to medicine:

- Talking to a mental health professional
- Acupuncture
- Chiropractic or spinal manipulation
- Music therapy for behavioral health

Get Help from Your Plan

Your plan provides a quarterly over-the-counter (OTC) allowance that can help you get needed health and wellness products. If you have a drug plan, prescription medications will usually have a cost share. Call the number on the back of your Blue Cross Member ID card to learn more.




effective while carrying fewer risks. Your doctor can help you determine the best alternatives for you.

OPIOID TREATMENT PROGRAM

Members who have an opioid use disorder are able to get help through an Opioid Treatment Program at no extra cost to you. This program may include the use of FDA approved medications that help break the addiction to opioids, substance abuse counseling, individual and group therapy, ongoing toxicology testing and periodic assessments. Call the member services number on the back of your Blue Cross member ID card to get more information.

TALK WITH YOUR DOCTOR

If you are feeling frequent pain, communicate with your doctor, and ask questions about a treatment plan. Your provider will determine if opioids are the most appropriate option for you. If they are, make sure that you are on the same page about dosage and expected time frame for using the medication. Follow up with questions about possible opioid alternatives. Pain is common, but fortunately there are several options to help you take charge and prevail over pain. Reference the previous article for more tips for overcoming chronic pain. 



Statin Therapy Truths & Myths

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



Member: My doctor prescribed statin therapy drugs to help treat my high cholesterol (dyslipidemia), but I've heard of statins causing some bad side effects. How can I know that what I'm taking is safe and effective? —*Charles, Grand Rapids*

Anita: Hi, Charles. It's natural to be concerned about side effects from medication, but remember that your doctor should have your best interests in mind. Statins can be very effective at treating various types of cardiovascular diseases, like your high cholesterol. They're also helpful to people with diabetes, heart failure, coronary heart disease or congenital cardiovascular heart defects.

The main benefit to statins is they help lower your level of cholesterol, which is a fatty substance made by your liver. Bad cholesterol — or LDL — can leave behind fatty deposits in your arteries. These deposits can eventually build up, restrict your blood flow and increase your risk for a stroke or heart attack. If you have an existing deposit, statins can make it less likely to break off and cause a blood clot.

As with all medications, it's true that statins can cause side effects. However, there are also many myths associated with statins. You may have heard that statins can destroy your muscle tissue. Though statins may rarely cause some

aches and pains, it's even more rare to develop a muscle breakdown.

Another common concern is that statin therapy can contribute to a diabetes diagnosis. The reality is that only a very small percentage of pre-diabetic people (0.2%) may have an increased risk. In patients with diabetes, it may increase A1C (blood sugar) by a very small amount (0.1%).

Memory loss is another common myth associated with statins. There's simply not enough evidence to say that statins can affect cognitive function. In fact, statins can actually help prevent strokes, and strokes will often lead to dementia.

If you do feel like something is out of the ordinary while taking statins, consult your doctor or pharmacist. You know your body better than anyone else, so just keep an eye out for anything that feels unusual. Remember that while there are always risks to medications, your doctor prescribed them because they believe the benefits far outweigh any risks. Millions of Americans have benefited from taking statins, and I hope you will, too.



To submit a question for Ask the Pharmacist, email thrivemagazine@bluecrossmn.com.



TAKING MEDICATIONS PROPERLY

It's important to make sure your loved one uses medications as prescribed

As a caregiver, you balance many of your loved one's daily tasks. In the midst of scheduling doctor appointments, paying bills or grocery shopping, it's especially important to ensure the person you are caring for takes their medications as prescribed.

That can be easier said than done. Perhaps your loved one is forgetful, or maybe they won't even agree to even take medication. Medication adherence means taking medication according to a doctor's instructions, in the correct dosage and on schedule.

It may not seem like a big deal to skip a dose from time to time, but medication nonadherence can lead to health issues down the road. Consider these tips to help your loved one stay on track.

CONSIDER CHALLENGES

If your loved one is struggling with taking their medications, consider why. Is it because they don't understand the instructions? Are they simply unable to open the pill bottle? Other reasons could include forgetfulness or communication barriers.

When you get at why it is challenging for your loved one to take their medication, you can help them fix the issue. Showing empathy is an important step in helping to make things easier for your loved one. Discuss the issue thoughtfully and be sure to listen to their challenges.

EXPAND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

With the help of your loved one's doctor and pharmacist, enhance your knowledge about your loved one's medications — such as why they are taken, directions and side effects. Some medications should be taken at certain times of the day, and others should be taken with food.

UTILIZE TOOLS

Even the simplest tools can have big effects on medication adherence. Help your loved one pick out a pill container to help organize their doses, or even a special container with a timer that will sound a reminder alarm. You can also opt for labels with enlarged print, or bottles with an easy-to-open cap.

If your loved one has a disability or they find it difficult to swallow pills, talk to their doctor or pharmacist to see if there are other options. They might recommend the medication in liquid form. Do not to crush any pills without the approval of your pharmacist or doctor. Pills that are time released cannot be crushed. Remember that your loved one's doctor and pharmacist can be excellent resources in addressing issues with medication adherence.



Responding to Basic Needs

Using our hand-crafting skills to keep our community warm

At Blue Cross, we know better than most that health extends beyond the doctor's office. That's why we have a longstanding history of volunteerism. The heartbeat of our company is the desire to care for and support the wellbeing of our friends and neighbors. Our volunteer programs focus on the holistic health of our communities by working to alleviate some of the struggles of daily life.

The focus of every volunteer program at Blue Cross is to build a more equitable world by supporting those who are going through challenging times. It is a lofty goal, but the Heart and Hands program at Blue Cross shows that small steps have a big impact.

Heart and Hands was founded in 2011 by Deb Dagget, an executive administrative assistant here at Blue Cross. The goal of this volunteer program is to hand craft winter items for charities to ensure that the most vulnerable members of our community have access to them.

"It has been really fun and rewarding to be able to use something I do for fun to benefit others."

This past year, Blue Cross associates volunteering with Heart and Hands met virtually five times to work "together" on knitting, crocheting, or sewing various winter items. These items get donated to several different charities annually to ease the struggle to stay warm.

Dagget's goal this year was to donate 100 warm winter items to local charities that have a direct



**HEART AND HANDS DONATED
MORE THAN 800
HATS, SCARVES, AND OTHER WARM
ITEMS TO NONPROFITS.**

impact on the community. Heart and Hands met that goal eight times over by donating more than 800 hats, scarves, and other warm items.

Jenn Sexten, a customer service representative and volunteer associate with Heart and Hands reflects on her experience this year. "It has been really fun and rewarding to be able to use something I do for fun to benefit others."

Heart and Hands donated its handicrafts to American Indian Work Youth Enrichment, the Hallie Q. Brown Community Center, the Minnesota Assistance Council for Veterans and Bundles of Love. These organizations serve youth, babies, families, and veterans who are in economic distress, facing food scarcity, or are without homes.

Though the goal of Heart and Hands is to build relationships with the greater community, an added bonus is growth within the volunteer community at Blue Cross.

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Get Your Game On!

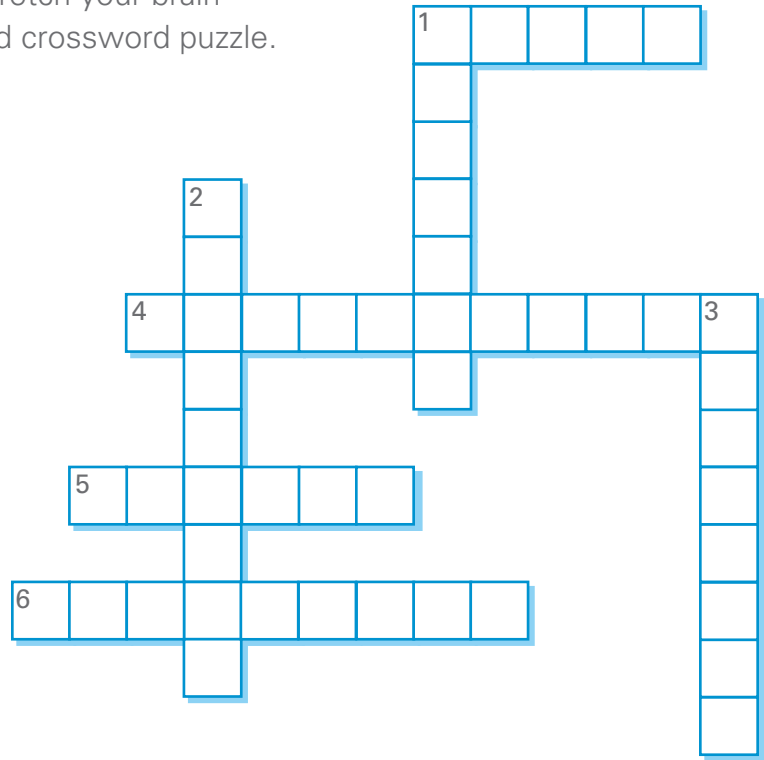
Puzzles are a great way to strengthen critical thinking skills, promote brain health and stay sharp. Stretch your brain muscles with this **thrive.** issue-themed crossword puzzle.

ACROSS

- 1. Many people experience changes in this as they age.
- 4. Most falls are _____.
- 5. Sometimes taken for pain management.
- 6. Cover 50% of your plate with a non-starchy _____.

DOWN

- 1. Effective at managing cholesterol.
- 2. A person who regularly looks after another.
- 3. A common way to relieve chronic pain.



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- 6. VEGETABLE
- 5. OPIOID
- 4. PREVENTABLE
- 1. SLEEP

- DOWN
- 1. STATINS
- 2. CAREGIVER
- 3. EXERCISE

ANSWERS:

thrive.

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