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Lt. Col. Joseph Dolce, USAF, with Yaneris
and Victoria, Isabella, Adrianna, and dog Oreo

U fall calendar

SEPTEMBER



September is Suicide Prevention Month. Learn more at veteranscrisisline.net.

15

Rosh Hashanah starts at sundown

18

Happy Birthday U.S. Air Force!

23

Fall begins

24

Yom Kippur starts at sundown

NOVEMBER

5

Daylight Saving Time Ends
(move clocks back)

10

Happy Birthday U.S. Marine Corps!

11

Veterans Day observed

23

Thanksgiving Day

DECEMBER

7

Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day/
Hanukkah starts at sundown

21

First day of winter

25

Christmas Day

26

Kwanzaa begins



Be sure to schedule
your flu shot!

OCTOBER

9

Indigenous Peoples' Day/
Columbus Day

13

Happy Birthday U.S. Navy!

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Halloween

COMMUNITY



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FITNESS



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US Family Health Plan members choose from a network of over 2,000 civilian primary care providers and thousands of specialists, plus a large network of civilian hospitals.

Who We Are



US Family Health Plan of Southern New England is a Department of Defense TRICARE Prime option, and one of six regional US Family Health Plan programs across the nation. Our large network of civilian doctors, hospitals, and other health providers serves Plan members who live in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and parts of southern New Hampshire and northern Connecticut.

We pride ourselves on friendly, personal service. If you have questions, call us at **1.800.818.8589**. You can also get to know us better at **usfamilyhealth.org** or at **facebook.com/USFHP.SouthernNewEngland**.



a message from Susan Brown,
our Senior Vice President and Plan CEO



**The central tenet of
US Family Health Plan:
member service is paramount.**

Keeping You, Our Members, in the Forefront

As I sit and write my first letter to all of you, I am taking time to reflect on my first four months in this position. When I first started to think about taking on this new role, I was already in a comfortable place in my career. Life at home was humming along. Our children are now adults, one living in the area and one across the country. My husband and I were taking time to travel a little, getting to see some places that were on our travel bucket list. Was starting a new position really what my life needed? I was content where I was, doing something I really enjoyed, but I was not feeling challenged. Then the opportunity to work at US Family Health Plan presented itself.

I had worked for the Plan years ago, in a part-time position. I left to challenge myself and ended up with Steward Health Care, overseeing their Employee Health Plan. When I first started there, I found myself implementing the central tenet of US Family Health Plan: member service is paramount. Any decisions about the Plan must be made keeping the members' well-being first and foremost. The Plan's strategic mission was always close to my heart and guided the way I chose to work with my teams.

When the opportunity to lead US Family Health Plan presented itself last fall, I sat down with my family and discussed what the change would entail. After they saw how excited I was to have the chance to work with the team at Brighton Marine, they knew it was the right move for me. So, with my family's support behind me, I knew there was no way I could let the opportunity pass.

A few months into the position, I can say I made the best decision. There will be challenging times ahead; I am sure of that. But with the team I am working with, I know we will continue to do our best for all of you, our beneficiaries. You will always be at the forefront of what we do and why we do it. ■



The More Time Outside, the Better

Most of us try to stick to our outdoor physical-activity schedules through the summer, but sometimes the heat makes it hard. Now that we're headed into the cooler New England months, spending time outside can be a lot more pleasant. And experts are finding that the benefits can be significant.

Better sleep

Most people's internal clocks track the sun, which is why you feel awake in the daytime and sleepy at night (usually). Because direct sunlight has about 200 times the intensity of electric office lights, it affects your sleep cycle more strongly.

According to experts, spending time outdoors in sunlight can:

- help you feel more tired at night
- help you fall asleep more quickly
- improve the quality of your sleep

Reduced transmission of respiratory viruses

The COVID-19 pandemic brought a new focus to the transmittal of viruses through the air. According to a 2021 study, the chances of viral transmission are 18.7 times higher indoors than outdoors.

Being active outdoors reduces your chances of catching any number of viruses, not just COVID-19, including flu viruses. It's interesting to note that the "open-air" schools, some of them on rooftops, created toward the end of the 1918 influenza pandemic, were credited with lowering rates of sickness and mortality in schoolchildren at the time.

Mental health benefits

A Stanford University study showed that outdoor physical activity, especially in nature, provides significant mental health benefits. City dwellers who took a 90-minute walk in a natural area showed decreased activity in the part of the brain called the subgenual prefrontal cortex, which is associated with anxiety and brooding.

A different group that took a 90-minute walk along a busy four-lane highway showed no activity reduction in that part of the brain. Despite the walk, they continued to brood and feel low.

Vision benefits in children

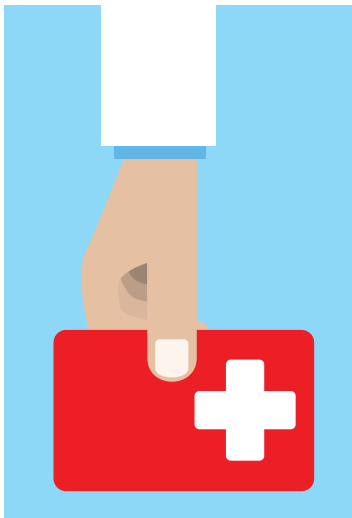
A 2020 study suggests that children who spend plenty of time outdoors have less chance of becoming nearsighted. Researchers found that children who spent more time outside at recess were 22 percent less likely to develop nearsightedness than other children.

Experts say that this difference may be because being outdoors lets the eye practice looking at objects from a range of distances, and that natural light offers a wider, brighter range of light wavelengths used to see. ■

T. C. Bulfone, et al., Outdoor Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 and Other Respiratory Viruses, *The Journal of Infectious Diseases*, 223, 550-561 (2021).

P. C. Huang, et al., Protective Behaviors of Near Work and Time Outdoors in Myopia Prevalence and Progression in Myopic Children, *British Journal of Ophthalmology*, 104(7) 956-961 (2020).





US Family Health Plan and Medicare Part B

For each member who has Medicare Part B coverage, there is no annual enrollment fee for US Family Health Plan, and no copayments for any covered services except prescriptions. Grandfathered members who are age 65 or older and remain enrolled in the Plan do not lose their entitlement to Medicare. Members can be enrolled in US Family Health Plan and still have Medicare coverage.

However, to avoid duplication of coverage under government-sponsored programs, members may not use their Medicare benefit for services covered by US Family Health Plan. Members may also not use Medicare for a service that

has been denied or for unauthorized care obtained from an out-of-network provider.

This is because even if a service is covered by the Plan, it may not always be medically necessary or appropriate in every case. Members are not allowed to enroll in Medicare-sponsored managed care plans while enrolled in US Family Health Plan. The use of Medicare benefits by a US Family Health Plan member for covered services is grounds for disenrollment from the Plan. However, the use of Medicare for services not covered by US Family Health Plan, such as end-stage renal disease, is allowed. ■



FOCUS ON SERVING YOU

Learn about 988 National Suicide Prevention Line/ Veterans Crisis Line

All Americans can call or text **988** for assistance if they or someone they care about is experiencing a mental health crisis or is at risk of suicide. For military veterans and their families, specialized help is available by phone, text, or online chat with the Veterans Crisis Line.



Veterans Crisis Line

Call: 988 (then press 1)

Chat online: [VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat](https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/Chat)

Text: 838255 ■

Open Season Doesn't Affect Current Members

In 2017, federal legislation created an annual Open Season enrollment period for all TRICARE beneficiaries. For benefits starting January 1, 2024, Open Season will take place from November 13 through December 12, 2023.

If you're enrolled in US Family Health Plan now, you will be re-enrolled automatically in the Plan for the coming year. This means *you don't need to do anything during Open Season*. However, if you want to change your TRICARE coverage for 2024, you must make this change during Open Season.

You may also make a change to your TRICARE coverage when you experience a Qualifying Life Event (QLE) such as marriage or divorce, retirement, or birth or adoption of a child. Find a current QLE list at [tricare.mil/LifeEvents](https://www.tricare.mil/LifeEvents).

Just call Member Services at **1.800.818.8589** if you have questions. ■



Charles Rollinger, MD, is our Vice President of Medical Management and Quality

Understanding Long COVID

The COVID-19 public health emergency was declared over in May and rates of infection have remained low. But a small number of people (between 5 and 15 percent) continue to have issues with symptoms more than three months after infection, lasting longer than sixty days. The World Health Organization has referred to this as “long COVID.”

There are many viruses that cause long-term symptoms after an acute infection. One of the viruses that people are most familiar with is the chickenpox virus, which can cause both acute chickenpox and, many years later, shingles.

Several recent studies have looked for possible reasons why COVID-19 may result in long COVID. Some investigators have found a decrease in levels of infection-fighting cells in the systems of people with long COVID. But that decrease doesn’t appear to be true for everyone with this condition. There is no simple laboratory test that can diagnose long COVID, and there is no simple treatment.

What is long COVID?

One of the problems with long COVID is defining what it is. People who experience symptoms for months after an acute COVID-19 infection may have very different

symptoms. A common symptom appears to be fatigue and early physical or mental exhaustion with activity. Another common symptom is continued loss of taste or smell. Some people develop chronic cough or thirst, and others complain of “brain fog.” There is an increased incidence of anxiety and depression in people with long COVID.

People who haven’t been vaccinated or have had multiple infections appear to be at higher risk of long COVID. Also, those who had a severe acute infection, which may have required admission to the intensive care unit, are at higher risk, but even people with mild infections can develop long COVID. The best way to avoid it is to not get a COVID-19 infection at all.

Even those with long COVID show a decline in their symptoms over time, with more than half improving over the course of a year. In August 2022, the federal government initiated the RECOVER program to try to determine why some people recover from long COVID and others do not.

Treatment

The treatment is on an individual basis because each case is different. Clinicians tailor the treatment to the individual member. That can mean focusing on strength and stamina for members who fatigue easily or on lung function for those with chronic shortness of breath or cough. In the US Family Health Plan network there are rehabilitation centers that can help members recover from long COVID. If you think you may have symptoms of long COVID, be sure to discuss the situation with your primary care provider. ■

People who haven’t been vaccinated or have had multiple infections appear to be at higher risk of long COVID.



Six Sound Sleep Strategies

According to the National Institutes of Health, 30 to 40 percent of U.S. adults say they have insomnia symptoms within a given year, and 10 to 15 percent say they have chronic insomnia. Fortunately, there are strategies that can help you get to sleep and stay asleep:

- **Stick to a sleep schedule.** Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day.
- **Get exercise, but not late in the day.** Avoid exercise in the two- to three-hour period before bedtime.
- **Limit caffeine.** Coffee, chocolate, many soft drinks, and some teas contain caffeine, a stimulant that can take up to eight hours to wear off.
- **Avoid alcohol before bed.** Drinking alcohol before bed can help you relax, but it can also interrupt your sleep later on.
- **Avoid big meals late at night.** A light snack is usually fine, but large meals can cause indigestion that interferes with sleep.
- **Don't take naps after 3 p.m.** Short naps earlier in the day can be energizing, but late-afternoon naps can make it hard to fall asleep at night. ■

PTSD and Sleep

According to the Department of Veterans Affairs, people with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are likely to have sleep problems. This is because they may feel constantly on the alert, or they may worry excessively and have negative thoughts. Some people with PTSD may resist falling asleep because they're likely to have nightmares.

Getting treatment for PTSD can reduce accompanying sleep problems dramatically. In addition to treatments like talk therapy and medication for PTSD, your doctor may prescribe medication that helps you sleep. The strategies at left can also help.

For a wide range of expertly prepared information about dealing with PTSD, including information about sleep, go to ptsd.va.gov. ■



Propelled by Service and Family

Jethro Byron, SMSgt, USAF (Ret.)
West Greenwich, RI

When Jethro Byron was growing up in Hadley, New York, near Lake George, he didn't have much of an interest in joining the military and was planning an industrial design path after high school. He knew that he liked anything to do with the outdoors, including hiking, cycling, and camping, and that he hoped to travel someday outside of his rural community.

Jethro mentioned this to an Air National Guard recruiter at his high school job fair. The recruiter suggested that he think about joining the Guard after

graduation. Jethro was so attracted by the idea that he ended up doing drill weekends for his senior year. After his 2001 graduation, he flew to Texas for basic training. "It was," Jethro says, "the first plane trip of my life."

That was clearly a touchstone year for Jethro. The end of basic training coincided with 9/11 and the supercharging of all service branches. Returning to New York, Jethro met Carolyn, a college student in Troy. Not long after that, they married.



Left page: Jethro Byron, SMSgt, USAF (Ret.), with Anna, Carolyn, Luke, and Seth; Left: Arriving home in 2016; Below: Carolyn and Jethro have been married for 20 years.



His intense focus on life support while in the Guard left Jethro with a credo to pass on to other service members: “People first. Take care of your people.”

If Jethro had been looking for travel and the outdoors, his wishes certainly came true with his service career. As part of polar operations supporting the National Science Foundation with expeditions spanning from Antarctica to Greenland, he ended up traveling on ski-equipped Lockheed C-130 planes to the most remote and frozen parts of the world.

His primary task? Making sure that equipment and crew skills were sufficient for survival in any climate. His intense focus on life support while in the Guard left Jethro with a credo to pass on to other service members: “People first. Take care of your people.”

Initially, Jethro was based at the 109th Airlift Wing in Schenectady. He and Carolyn started their family of five there — Anna (now 18), Seth (now 17), and Luke (now 14) — and Carolyn became a registered nurse with a specialty in psychiatric nursing.

In 2013, the Byrons moved to Rhode Island, and Jethro served as Aircrew Flight Equipment Superintendent with the 143d Airlift Wing out of North Kingstown until his retirement in 2022.

In Rhode Island, the Byrons follow in Jethro’s outdoor pathways, hiking and mountain biking. Now Anna and Luke have become enthusiastic birdwatchers, and both worked this past summer at Norman Bird Sanctuary in Newport. Seth, an avid mountain biker, has ridden with New England Youth Cycling for over five years.

Every member of the family is a member of US Family Health Plan. Enhancing the Plan connection, Jethro became our Field Representative for Southeastern Massachusetts and Rhode Island soon after his Guard retirement, and we’re sincerely grateful for that.

A sincere thank you to the entire Byron family, for your service to your country and your community, and for your loyalty to US Family Health Plan. ■



Ultra-Processed Foods and Health

Experts have known for some time that eating highly processed foods as a large part of the diet can lead to unhealthy outcomes like obesity, diabetes, and certain cancers. Recent studies show that these foods can also negatively affect mental health, leading to feelings of anxiety and depression. Staying aware of ultra-processed foods and choosing to focus on fresh foods can help you keep your family on an even keel physically and mentally.

What are ultra-processed foods?

Ultra-processed foods contain ingredients that you aren't likely to include in homemade foods. They include high-fructose corn syrup, hydrogenated oils, and chemical additives like sweeteners and preservatives.

Most items in a grocery store's frozen foods section (like desserts, pasta entrees, and enchilada meals)

are ultra-processed. So are foods like sugary drinks, cereal bars, crackers, and cookies. They have little fiber or nutritive value.

Making choices

Many nutritionists recommend sticking mainly with the outside aisles of grocery stores, where fruits and vegetables tend to be, and limiting your shopping in the interior aisles to what you absolutely need. Keep in mind that pineapple, apples, watermelon, salad greens, whole-grain pasta with homemade sauce, and fresh fish and poultry can supply you and your family with core nutrients, fiber, and plenty of flavor.

For more information about unprocessed, processed, and ultra-processed foods, be sure to review the always helpful Harvard Nutrition Source at hsph.harvard.edu. ■

How Hot Should the Turkey Stuffing Be?

Not sure how long to thaw a frozen turkey and the safest way to do it? How long can turkey leftovers safely stay on the counter after the meal? Call the FDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline with any questions at **1.888.674.6854**. And enjoy the meal! ■





Time for Your Flu Shot!

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that you have your flu shot by the end of October. Just make an appointment with your Primary Care Provider or stop in at a pharmacy clinic. Either way, US Family Health Plan covers the cost.

Are you 65 or older?

People 65 and older are most likely to develop severe flu, accounting for the majority of flu-related hospitalizations and deaths. To address this higher risk, the CDC recommends that people 65 and over receive high-dose and adjuvanted flu vaccines (Fluzone High-Dose Quadrivalent, Flublok Quadrivalent, or Fluad Quadrivalent).

If one of these vaccines isn't available to you, you should get a standard-dose flu vaccine instead. US Family Health Plan covers the cost of either. ■

Some History

The 1918 flu pandemic killed over 40,000 U.S. service members, a drastic blow to the military in wartime. It wasn't until 1930 that scientists discovered that influenza was a virus, not a bacterium. With the support of the U.S. Army, the vaccine was ready and made available to U.S. service members in 1945, and it was distributed to the public a year later. ■



Grandkids Visiting for the Holidays?

Make sure your kitchen is safe

If you haven't had grandchildren in the house for a while, be sure to

- put child locks on lower cabinets and move cleaners and chemicals up high and completely out of reach
- secure dangling cords, like cords from toasters and mixers, completely out of reach
- take extra precautions before giving your grandchild food prepared in a microwave oven, since microwaves can heat liquids and solids unevenly, so food may be only slightly warm on the outside but very hot on the inside ■

Adapted from [healthychildren.org](https://www.healthychildren.org) from the American Academy of Pediatrics.



The Spell of the Pomegranate

Do your usual fall side dishes, like brussels sprouts, squash, or broccoli, seem a little lackluster? Take heart! September through February means fresh pomegranates in our part of the world, and the crimson seeds add sparkle and nutrients to any dish. The little gems are dense with potassium, vitamin C, iron, and fiber.

To make things easier and avoid staining your clothes or kitchen counter, score the whole pomegranate with a knife and break it open inside a bowl of water. As you pluck out the whitish pulp (which is inedible), pieces of it will float to the top, and the seeds, called “arils,” will sink. Pour off the water, scoop out the seeds, and let them drain on a paper towel.

If you can’t find fresh pomegranates, look for frozen arils at your grocery store. They keep well and you can use them a little at a time in yogurt or on salads or desserts.



Butternut Squash with Sparks

Makes 4 to 5 servings

1 large butternut squash, peeled and chopped into 1-inch chunks

2 tablespoons olive oil

½ teaspoon salt

½ teaspoon chopped rosemary

Preheat the oven to 400°.

Toss the squash chunks, olive oil, salt, and rosemary in a bowl until the squash surfaces are lightly coated. Spread the mixture on a baking pan and roast until the chunks are just starting to brown (about 30 minutes) and can be pierced easily with a knife point. Use a metal spatula to turn the pieces over at about 15 minutes.

Mix it up, using cauliflower or broccoli chunks or halved brussels sprouts. Add walnut or pecan pieces if you have them on hand, or try thyme or oregano instead of rosemary. ■



at ease

Like music and art, love of
nature is a common language
that can transcend political
or social boundaries.

— Jimmy Carter, 39th President of the United States





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Thank U

This issue marks the twelve-year anniversary of this magazine.

From the start, we've welcomed article suggestions from you, our members. And we've responded to your requests — with articles about accessing eye-care benefits, TRICARE Young Adult details, how TRICARE's Open Season works, and how to stay as healthy as you can be.

Please keep your suggestions coming. Write to me at
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