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**US FAMILY
HEALTH PLAN**

U spring calendar

MARCH

20
Spring begins

27
Passover begins

28
Palm Sunday

APRIL

★
April is the Month of
the Military Child

2
Good Friday

4
Easter

12
Ramadan begins (est.)

19
Patriots Day (Massachusetts)

MAY

9
Mother's Day

15
Armed Forces Day

31
Memorial Day

JUNE

6
D-Day Remembrance Day

14
Happy Birthday, U.S. Army!
Flag Day

20
Father's Day
Summer begins

FITNESS



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WELLNESS



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COMMUNITY



PAGE 2 Words of hope from Gail Schlesinger, Senior Vice President and Plan CEO **PAGE 8** Meet field rep David Mendoza, Maj, USAF (Ret.)

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](https://www.usfamilyhealth.org) or at facebook.com/USFHP.SouthernNewEngland.



a message from Gail Schlesinger,
our Senior Vice President and Plan CEO



Toward the Light

It's been over a year since the pandemic struck, eclipsing so much of what we've always taken for granted. Milestones like weddings, birthday and graduation parties, and even memorial services have taken a back seat to masks, Zoom events, and wary, socially distanced walks. Instead of family barbecues and outings to ball games, summer days brought carefully calibrated porch visits, and a kind of dimness set in over usually sunny memories.

In the darkest months, many of us grappled with sickness, isolation, and loss in ways that seemed inconceivable just months earlier. We learned how important our loved ones are to us, and we learned to hold them tightly in our hearts. We stood in awe of health care providers, and we developed a deeper appreciation for them for their courage in caring for others in ways that put themselves at keen risk.

And now the vaccine rollout has brought us something much-needed and new. That something is hope, one of the simplest, sunniest words

in the English language.

Knowing that loved ones are finally protected from COVID-19, or will be soon, kindles a spark in all of us. To be able to visit older relatives once again, to return to simple rituals with friends and family, to make plans for holidays, or even to play a game of cards, feels like warm sun at the end of a dark winter.

Along with hope and new lightness, and the feelings of connection that hope brings, the vaccines have introduced us to other groups of people to whom we owe our deepest gratitude: the scientists who developed the vaccines; the people who volunteered to test them; the logistics professionals who have mapped, refrigerated, organized, and distributed the small vials that contain so much work and promise.

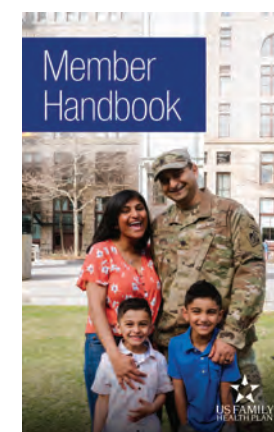
We'll still wear masks and we'll still keep our distance until scientific experts let us know that it's safe to do otherwise. But like the sprouts and shoots that erupt from the ground every spring, we'll be infused with a new warmth as we move toward the light. ■

Hope, one of the simplest, sunniest words in the English language.



Updated Member Handbook

Our newly revised Member Handbook is ready to help you. To read it online, go to usfamilyhealth.org and click on "For Members," then "Member Handbook."



The handbook contains clear information about the benefits available and how to access them, including important phone numbers, understanding referrals, and the extras we provide. In this revision, you'll find the current Summary of Benefits, new information about using Urgent Care clinics, and a comprehensive description of our telehealth programs, including Teladoc®.

To have a printed copy of the handbook mailed to you, just call Member Services at **1.800.818.8589** and we'll send one right out. ■

Are There Changes in Your Life?

If there are certain changes in your life — including moving; marriage or divorce; welcoming a new baby; or a change in the sponsor's military status (retirement, for example) — it's important to update DEERS and US Family Health Plan.

To update DEERS, bring your papers to the ID card-issuing facility or military/unit personnel office, or (for address changes only) go to tricare.mil/deers. If you have questions about DEERS, call the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) at **1.800.538.9552**. ■



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

Telemedicine Changes the Health Care Landscape

When the coronavirus pandemic started and in-person health care began to be considered risky, US Family Health Plan opened a relationship with Teladoc® to allow our members access to 24/7 telemedicine for urgent care, behavioral counseling, and other services. Soon after, many of our network providers began to offer telemedicine services to their established patients. TRICARE quickly allowed payment to providers for both video and telephone consults.

Since that time, many of our members have become used to interacting with medical providers via telemedicine. Members who aren't computer savvy may have telephone consultations with their primary care provider or specialists, while others benefit from video encounters on their computers or smartphones.

Continuing our relationship with Teladoc

We are currently finding that about a third of our members' medical encounters and 80 percent of their behavioral-counseling encounters are through telemedicine. From the beginning of the pandemic to

the end of 2020, our members have had over 20,000 telemedicine visits. All indications are that this form of patient interaction is here to stay. With this abrupt change in the health care landscape in mind, US Family Health Plan has decided to continue our relationship with Teladoc.

The availability of Teladoc services shouldn't conflict with members' relationships with their primary care providers. The service provides convenient access to a health care provider when transportation may be an issue or at other times when reaching your established provider may be difficult.

Accessing telehealth

For behavioral health counseling, having access to services without having to leave home has lowered barriers for people who wish to seek help. Members can now contact the Tufts Health Plan behavioral-health telephone line at **888.257.1985** to find a network provider who offers telehealth services, or reach Teladoc by registering at <https://member.teladoc.com/tuftshealthplan>. ■



You'll be hearing from US Family Health Plan

We'd like to know about your experiences and satisfaction with telehealth, and we will send a survey in the mail to a sample of members who have used it. Thanks in advance for helping with this survey.

And from Teladoc

US Family Health Plan members will be receiving mailings from Teladoc explaining their complete range of services. Be on the lookout!

Stay on Your Feet

Simple ways to help seniors avoid falls

Falls are the leading cause of injury among people 65 and older. Head injuries and hip fractures can take a serious toll on senior health, resulting in hospitalizations, lengthy rehab periods, and even death.

Falls may be common, but most falls are avoidable. Here are some simple steps you can take to stay safe.

Move more, sit less

The stronger your muscles, the less likely you are to fall. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), if you're generally fit and don't have limiting health conditions, it's important to aim for 150 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise a week (for example, 30 minutes a day, five days a week). If chronic conditions prevent this much activity, it's important to be as physically active as your health allows.

The CDC website provides comprehensive, easy-to-follow strategies for getting optimum activity. Go to cdc.gov/physicalactivity/basics/older_adults.

Declutter your floors

Pocketbooks, scatter rugs, shoes, and stacks of mail can turn a simple walk from the living room to the kitchen into a perilous obstacle course. Think about mounting hooks on your walls that will let you hang storage bags. Say goodbye to the rugs, and make a point of keeping mail and other papers on tables or shelves.

About those eyeglasses

Avoid wearing reading glasses, bifocals, or progressive lenses when you take the stairs or walk outside. They affect your depth perception. Single-focus lenses are safer for walking or stair-climbing.

Wear secure footwear

Wear shoes or slippers with a secure back and a good tread. Flip-flops and slide-on sandals may feel comfortable, but they set you up for falls.

Use handrails

If stairs in your home don't have handrails, have them installed. Then be sure to use them. If you're carrying a few objects up or down a set of stairs, make more than one trip so you can always keep one hand on the railing or just above it.

Get out of bed slowly but surely

It's easy to tangle your feet in sheets and blankets as you get out of bed. Make sure both feet are securely on the floor before you stand up. ■

The stronger your muscles, the less likely you are to fall.



Working & Learning from Home

Keeping a Routine Is Key



Routines are essential to healthy family life. During the COVID-19 pandemic, with children and teens often learning at home and many parents working remotely, making and sticking to routines has become even more important. These tips from the American Academy of Pediatrics can help:

- Make sure everyone wakes up, gets dressed, and has breakfast at a consistent time.
- Set up a whiteboard and list times for learning, exercise, breaks, and meals.
 - For younger children, 20 minutes of class assignments followed by 10 minutes of physical activity might work well.
 - Older children and teens can focus on assignments for longer stretches, taking breaks between subjects.
 - Include your working hours as well, so your children know when your workday is done.
- Have dinner together as a family and discuss the day. (This might be easier now that kids aren't participating in extracurricular activities.)
- Enjoy more family time in the evenings — playing games, reading, or watching a movie together.
- Stick with normal bedtime routines as much as possible during the week to make sure everyone gets enough sleep.
- Try not to have the news on all day or in rooms where children are doing schoolwork or relaxing. It's likely to increase anxiety for everyone in the household. Communicate in an age-appropriate way with your children. "Yes, the virus is a bad disease, but it won't last forever." ■

Vitamins and Parkinson's Risk

People who consume high levels of antioxidant vitamins C and E in their diets may decrease their risk for developing Parkinson's disease, according to a January 2021 study published in *Neurology*.

Parkinson's disease is a movement disorder that can affect speech, walking, and balance because of a gradual reduction of a brain chemical called dopamine. Antioxidants may help counteract unstable molecules and the resulting oxidative stress that can lead to dopamine loss.

Foods like oranges, strawberries, broccoli, and Brussels sprouts contain vitamin C. Foods rich in vitamin E include spinach, collard greens, pumpkin, and nuts like almonds and peanuts. ■

Source: Hantikainen, et al., Dietary antioxidants and the risk of Parkinson's Disease, *Neurology* (online), January 2021.



Hold the Sugar!

Sugary drinks are known to be associated with an increased risk of cardiovascular disease, obesity, and diabetes. A recent study published in the *British Medical Journal* extends that association to cancer risk, concluding that drinking an extra 3.5 ounces of sugary drinks a day increases the risk of developing cancer by 18 percent.

What's a sugary drink? The researchers defined it as a drink with more than 5 percent sugar.

That included fruit juice (even with no added sugar), soft drinks, milkshakes, energy drinks, and tea or coffee with sugar stirred in.

If you're in the habit of reaching for a sugary beverage when you're thirsty, it might be a good time to rethink. Water is always a healthy option. ■



Source: Chazelas, et al., Sugary drink consumption and risk of cancer, *British Medical Journal*, July 2019.



A Passion for the Military

David Mendoza, Maj, USAF (Ret.)
US Family Health Plan Field Representative
for Western and Central Massachusetts

At USAF
Basic Training
graduation, 1985,
Lackland AFB.



The first time Dave Mendoza got on an airplane, it was to fly to San Antonio, Texas, for basic training. He was fresh from high school.

"I told my dad I wanted to go to college," Dave says. "He looked at me and he said, 'How are you going to pay for it?' And then he drove me to the Massachusetts Air National Guard recruiting station in Westfield."

Before he knew it, Dave was in San Antonio, then on to Myrtle Beach AFB, then back to Westfield. He finally did land in college — North Adams State College — in 1986. In college he played basketball and studied English and Communications. While he was earning his degree, he served part-time in the Air National Guard 104th Fighter Wing.



Left: Dave, OEF, 2003. Middle: With Rocky and Trooper. Right: With Brady, Madison, and Teresa hiking in Utah's Zion National Park, 2019.



Once Dave caught the military bug, he found it hard to shake. After college, he worked in sales at an office-technology company for 15 years while serving in the MA ANG. He was activated and deployed in January 2003 as part of Operation Enduring Freedom and then Operation Iraqi Freedom, participating in the base buildup before the U.S. invasion of Baghdad. He rejoined the MA ANG full-time in 2006. After retiring from the military in 2014, he joined US Family Health Plan as our field representative for western and central Massachusetts.

Dave's roots now run even deeper in New England. His family calls South Hadley home, and Dave's wife, Teresa, teaches fifth grade in

Longmeadow. The two Mendoza teenagers are serious athletes. Brady, 17, plays soccer, baseball, and, like his dad, basketball. Madison, 15, swims and plays field hockey and lacrosse.

They pursue sports as a family, too. "We've started kayaking," says Dave, "on the Swift River. It's great for that." In the winter, they turn their skills to downhill skiing.

Not one to sit still for long, Dave also volunteers for the USO of Pioneer Valley and as the Veterans Social Director for the Springfield chapter of the veteran enrichment group Team RWB.

Thank you, Dave, for your service to your family, your country, and to US Family Health Plan. We're honored that you're working with us. ■

Small Talk



Favorite music:
"Old stuff," he says, "like James Taylor, the Beatles, and U2"



What Dave's reading:
Philip Craig's Martha's Vineyard mystery series



Dave's best friends:
Trooper, a German Shepherd, and Rocky, a Ridgeback/Boxer mix



Dave is New England through and through. His mom, Jan, was raised in Vermont and Maine. She and Dave's late dad, Bob, originally from Massachusetts, met while she was in nursing school at Cooley Dickinson Hospital in Northampton. Family legend has it that Bob, working as a cook at the hospital, would give the nursing students extra scoops of ice cream, and the rest is history.

Dave's parents, Bob and Jan, with Madison and Brady.

The ABCs of End-of-Life Care Documents



Sometimes people become so sick that they can't communicate their wishes about their health care. If this happened to you, what person would you want to make decisions about your care? If you were so sick that you were likely to die, who would make decisions about whether you would receive life-sustaining treatments such as feeding tubes or intubation with a ventilator?

It's possible to make your wishes known ahead of time by completing documents that are valid in your state.

Ideally, you will work with an attorney to include end-of-life care documents as part of your estate planning. There are also documents that you can download from reliable sources and complete on your own. Here are some important ones.

Massachusetts

In Massachusetts, certain documents help you plan for end-of-life care. The key documents are a **Health Care Proxy** and a **Personal Directive**.

Health Care Proxy

Every competent adult age 18 and older has the right to appoint a **Health Care Agent** by completing a **Health Care Proxy** form. If your doctor states in writing that you don't have the capacity to make or communicate health care decisions yourself, the person you appointed as your Health Care Agent in the Health Care Proxy will have the authority to make these decisions for you.

You must sign this document in front of two witnesses who have watched you write your signature. A Health Care Proxy is a legally binding document.

Personal Directive

A **Personal Directive** (in some places called an Advance Directive or Living Will), tells your Health Care Agent, family members, doctors, and other health care providers what's important to you and the kind of care that you do and don't want if you're near death or are permanently unconscious, without hope of recovery.

Although a Personal Directive isn't legally binding in Massachusetts, your Health Care Agent can use it to help communicate your health care choices to family members, doctors, and other health care providers. You are the only person who needs to sign the form.

You can obtain Massachusetts Health Care Proxy and Personal Directive forms from the Massachusetts Medical Society. For copies of the forms (including forms in a language other than English), go to massmed.org and type "end of life" in the search box.



Rhode Island

In Rhode Island, two key documents are a **Durable Power of Attorney** for Health Care and a **Living Will** drafted in accordance with Rhode Island's Rights of the Terminally Ill Act.

Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care

A **Durable Power of Attorney** allows one person to make decisions about the health care of another person if they become unable to do so.

Living Will

A **Living Will** is a written document which directs your physician to withhold or stop life-sustaining medical procedures if you develop a terminal condition and can't state your wishes at the time a decision about those kinds of procedures must be made. While a Massachusetts Advance Directive (or Living Will) isn't a legally binding document, a Rhode Island Living Will written in accordance with the Rights of the Terminally Ill Act is legally binding.

Rhode Island's Rights of the Terminally Ill Act offers a form of Living Will, but that form does not need to be used. If you decide to sign a Living Will, you may use the language contained in the Act or draft your own Living Will that meets the same requirements.

You can download a Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care form and language for a Living Will that meets the requirements of Rhode Island law from the Rhode Island Health Department at health.ri.gov. Enter "Advance Directives" in the search box. ■

What's Orange and Sweet and Healthy All Over?



As the cold and gray of winter recede, let's turn our attention to a humble root vegetable: the carrot. Botanists think that the carrot originated in Persia, and it has been bred over centuries to become the brilliant spear that we know today.

Carrots are crammed with alpha- and beta-carotene, which converts to vitamin A. Vitamin A helps maintain the cells that line your body's interior surfaces, and it is also thought to help vision. Carrots are also loaded with vitamins K, which is key to blood clotting, and B6, which is thought to play an important role in reducing the risk of heart disease and some cancers.

If you, like many of us, were raised on overcooked, flabby carrots, you're likely to welcome this roasted version, which comes together quickly and lets the carrots keep their bite.

Roasted Carrots with Honey and Spices

Serves four

- 2 teaspoons cumin seeds
- $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1 tablespoon honey
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 pounds carrots (any size), peeled and cut lengthwise into sticks
- 1 teaspoon lemon juice
- A sprinkle of salt

Preheat oven to 475°.

In a large bowl, mix cumin, cayenne, honey, and olive oil. Add the carrot pieces and toss until the mixture is distributed evenly over them.

Spread the carrots on a large baking sheet. If they'll be crowded on one sheet, use two.

Bake until the carrots are just starting to brown but still have some crunch. (This should take 12 to 15 minutes, depending on the thickness of the carrot pieces.)

Take the carrots out of the oven and let cool. Just before serving, sprinkle with lemon juice and salt.

Extras

Liven things up by adding pomegranate seeds, chopped mint, parsley, or cilantro just before serving. ■

at ease



Life is not measured
by the number of
breaths you take but
by the moments that
take your breath away.

— Maya Angelou



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To U

For all of us, the COVID-19 pandemic has meant facing changes. On a small scale, it's meant organizing grocery shopping and trips to the bank and post office in ways we're not used to, masking, and staying six feet apart. On a larger scale, it's meant handling children's erratic school schedules, facing the loss of time with friends and relatives, and the deep pain of grieving the deaths of loved ones remotely.

So much change is rattling and hard to adjust to. I think it's time to honor ourselves, and especially you, our members, for simply pulling through. Thank you for your continuing commitment to US Family Health Plan, to your friends and relatives, and to your passion for life.

Best wishes for a healthy spring from Kerry.Tucker@usfamilyhealth.org.

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Managing Editor/Senior Writer

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Cover photo by Kelly Lorenz
At Ease photo by Hal Morgan

