

Summer 2021

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U summer calendar

JUNE

★
June is PTSD
Awareness Month

6
D-Day Remembrance Day

14
Happy Birthday U.S. Army!
Flag Day

20
Summer begins
Father's Day

JULY

4
Independence Day

19
Eid al-Adha (est.)

AUGUST

4
Happy Birthday U.S. Coast Guard!

9
Victory Day (Rhode Island)

SEPTEMBER

★
September is
Suicide Prevention Month

6
Labor Day
Rosh Hashanah begins
at sundown

15
Yom Kippur begins at sundown

18
Happy Birthday U.S. Air Force!

22
Autumn begins

FITNESS



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WELLNESS



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COMMUNITY



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



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



The Gift of Change

I think we would all agree that the past 16 months have been some of the most challenging times of our lives. The COVID-19 pandemic has tested our capacity to deal with change — from how we shop, work, educate our children, and exercise, to keeping in touch with friends and family. As a colleague so aptly pointed out to me when we were talking about this: we no longer have the option to just deal with this change. Instead, we need to embrace it.

Just the way we New Englanders embrace the change of seasons, finding beauty in the fall leaves, winter snow, spring blooms, and summer sunshine, we need to focus on the positive that the pandemic change has brought in our lives. I don't mean to minimize the suffering and loss that so many have experienced, but I sincerely hope that we can all find some light as well.

From a personal standpoint, I know that this pandemic has strengthened my relationship with family — our calls have become more

frequent and moved from just a periodic check-in to very frequent, and some deep, conversations. Also, like most organizations, although our staff will be coming back to the office soon, we will permanently make this a mix of remote and in-person work. And the days of the business suit I think are gone for good. Business “comfortable” will be the new norm.

Also, the pandemic allowed both of my children to get puppies — a German Shepherd for my son and his wife, and a French Bulldog for my daughter. They all agree that without remote work having a puppy would have been impossible. These creatures are so cute and fun, although sometimes a little unpredictable and mischievous.

Finally, as spring changes to summer, I hope that we will continue to see that the number of those vaccinated increases and that the downward trend in the virus continues. And I hope that the final change we need to embrace is each other! ■

We no longer have the option to just deal with this change. Instead, we need to embrace it.



If You Receive a “Balance Billing” Charge

Occasionally a member receives a bill from an in-network medical provider for the difference between the amount US Family Health Plan paid for medical services and the amount the provider charged. This is called “balance billing.”

If you receive a charge like this, don't pay it. You aren't liable for the amount. For example: If US Family Health Plan pays \$80 (minus any copay) for a certain medical service, and the provider charges \$100, the member isn't responsible for the \$20 difference, no matter what the bill says.

In-network providers are prohibited from balance billing. They must accept the amount that US Family Health Plan pays for services as payment in full. However, providers may bill for non-covered services provided under a waiver. If you receive a balance billing charge, call Member Services at 1.800.818.8589 and we'll take care of the issue for you. ■

Extras, Extras, Extras!

US Family Health Plan members enjoy extras that other TRICARE Prime programs don't provide. These extras, including 12 visits in a Plan Year (January 1 through December 31) to an in-network chiropractor for spinal manipulation, are meant to help keep you as healthy as you can be.

Other extras include discounts on acupuncture, hearing aids, and eyewear with certain providers; and discounts on programs related to aging, meditation, nutrition and weight control, smoking cessation, and more, held at local hospitals and fitness centers. Learn details from Member Services at 1.800.818.8589. ■



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

Coming Out of Lockdown

I'm writing this as the end of this round of the COVID-19 pandemic appears near. Many people have received the vaccine and many more should be getting it soon. If you haven't been vaccinated by the time you read this, please schedule an appointment.

COVID-19 consequences

What are the consequences of the pandemic beyond the immediate effects of the coronavirus? One consequence is that people have put off getting routine checkups or other preventive screens. For example:

The rate of early cancer detection has gone down over the past year due to a decrease in mammograms and colon cancer screenings. If you skipped these tests in the past year, please schedule one soon.

Diabetes control has worsened because many people who would have had routine blood testing for hemoglobin A1C were afraid to go to the laboratory to get blood drawn. Many members with high cholesterol, heart disease, or other health conditions have also been reluctant to obtain lab work.

Mental health has been affected by anxiety related to concern about catching the virus, and by the social isolation of the lockdowns. Some people have lost their jobs and are depressed. Others have

found it stressful to work from home in an environment that isn't designed for office work, often with children at home.

Physical ailments have resulted from participating in too many video conferences while sitting at a laptop computer on a card table or kitchen counter.

Telehealth

US Family Health Plan provides many options for members experiencing pandemic-related behavioral or physical health issues, including expanded telemedicine access through our vendor, Teladoc®, which is available for behavioral health consultations. Most behavioral health providers in our network are also available for telemedicine consultations, which means that 85 percent of these visits now take place by phone or video conference. Any member can call **800.208.9565** for a referral.

Getting back on track

If you've been putting off getting your routine health care because of COVID-19, now is the time to make those appointments. And if you're feeling anxious or depressed as the world returns to a "new normal," be sure to take advantage of the resources available through US Family Health Plan. ■

BY THE NUMBERS

More than 42 percent of people surveyed by the U.S. Census Bureau in December 2020 reported symptoms of anxiety or depression, an 11 percent increase over 2019.

Other studies and surveys conducted during the pandemic consistently show that young people, rather than older people, are especially vulnerable to increased psychological distress, perhaps because their need for social interactions is stronger.

Young women appear to be more vulnerable than young men, and people with young children or a previously diagnosed psychiatric disorder are at particularly high risk for mental health problems.



Support for the 104th Force Support Squadron

On April 2, US Family Health Plan, along with the USO of Pioneer Valley, was honored to sponsor Snacks for Deployers, a goodwill effort for deploying 104th Force Support Squadron members. Here 104th Airman and Family Readiness Manager Amanda Winslow and Dave Mendoza, Maj., USAF (Ret.), the Plan's field representative for Western/Central Massachusetts, provide some hands-on service.

At the end of April, the Plan also sponsored a Burger Burn in support of the 104th Force Support Squadron. ■

Trivia Night at Joint Base Cape Cod

In early March, US Family Health Plan was a sponsor of Trivia Night at Joint Base Cape Cod. Thirty-seven participants with a penchant for '80s trivia enjoyed the evening. Highlights included an '80s-themed costume competition judged by Jim Souza, SFC, USA (Ret.), our field representative for Southeastern Massachusetts and Rhode Island. ■





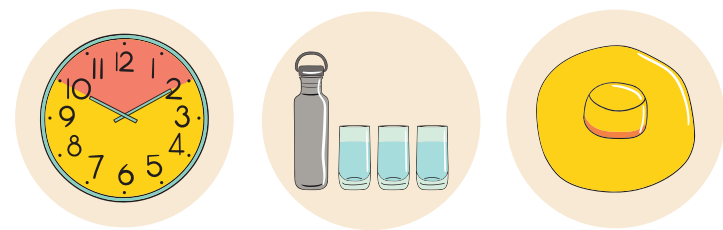
Heat Stress and Exercise for Kids

The notion of summer in New England often brings to mind cool shade. But summer here can also bring sudden high heat and humidity. Children need activity time outdoors, but they need to be kept safe in the sudden onslaught of summer temperatures. These tips from the American Academy of Pediatrics can help:

- **When temperatures go up, keep children indoors during the hottest part of the day,** from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.
- **At the start of a strenuous exercise program — tennis lessons, for example — the intensity and duration of outdoor activities should start low.** They should then gradually increase over seven days or more to let the children gradually get used to the heat, especially if the humidity is high.

- **Make sure children drink water** before outdoor activities and while the activities continue. They shouldn't be expected to feel thirsty before they drink.
- **Make sure your children are wearing light-colored, lightweight clothes.** Keep it to one layer so sweat evaporates more easily. ■

Summer Safety



Childproofing Exercise Equipment

In 2019, the Consumer Product Safety Commission reported that U.S. emergency departments treated 2,000 children under age 8 for treadmill-related injuries. Because sales of exercise equipment have leapt during the pandemic, it's likely that the number for 2020 will be even higher, and higher still when you take into account other home-gym equipment.

These injuries can be severe. Children's hands can catch under the moving belt of a treadmill or in the rotating parts of a stationary bicycle, resulting in scrapes, friction burns, and finger amputations. Falls from exercise equipment can cause head trauma and broken bones.

What you can do

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that you:

- **Never allow young children to be unsupervised** around exercise equipment.
- **Use safety gates and lockable doors** to keep kids away.
- **Never set up exercise machines and equipment in places where children regularly play.**
- **Unplug treadmills and other equipment when not in use** and safely secure the power cords.
- **Keep free weights on the floor,** not up on a rack where children may be able to pull them down on themselves.
- **Take the weights off a bench press when not in use** so a child can't try to lift one up.
- **If your equipment has a safety key, remove it from the machine** and keep it in a separate, secure location.
- **Consider installing a lock** on the workout-room door. ■



Post-Traumatic Stress

Causes, symptoms, & getting help

Service members who have been exposed to disturbing and life-threatening experiences in combat often develop symptoms of post-traumatic stress. The symptoms include nightmares and other sleep disturbances, anxiety, hypervigilance, depression, alcohol and substance misuse, and difficulty managing anger and relationships.

According to the Veterans Administration, the number of veterans who bear this burden varies by the conflict in which the veteran served:

- **Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom.** About 11 to 20 percent of veterans who served in OIF or OEF have PTSD in a given year.
- **Gulf War (Desert Storm).** About 12 percent have PTSD in a given year.
- **Vietnam War.** About 15 percent were currently diagnosed with PTSD at the time of the National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Study in the late 1980s. It's estimated that about 30 percent of Vietnam veterans have had PTSD in their lifetime.

Military sexual trauma (MST), which means any sexual harassment or sexual assault that happens while a person is in the military, can be another cause of PTSD.

Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic

According to a survey conducted last winter by behavioral science experts Dr. Eric Pederson and Dr. Jordan Davis, veterans who struggled with PTSD before the pandemic began have shown an increased use of alcohol and cannabis in an effort to manage their symptoms. These experts see the rise in telehealth counseling as a cause for hope.

Another expert, Dr. Megan Gerber, recently wrote in the *Journal of General Internal Medicine* about a socially distanced, masked encounter with a veteran at the Veteran Affairs

medical center in Boston. When she asked the veteran how he was doing, he said, "I feel like I'm in Vietnam." According to Dr. Gerber, "many veteran[s]...were experiencing the pandemic through the lens of past military service."

Dr. Gerber describes the military motto of "adapt and overcome" as especially relevant to the veterans she has worked with. "We must consider what this crisis is like for those who have actually served and how we may best support them during the pandemic. We may also learn from their courage, resilience, and expressions of camaraderie." ■

Source: Megan Gerber, MD, MPH, The Things They Carry: Veterans and the COVID-19 Pandemic, *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, July 28, 2020.

PTSD Resources

Help is available for veterans with PTSD, including:

US Family Health Plan

Members may self-refer to an authorized behavioral health provider for the first eight outpatient visits in a Plan Year (January 1 through December 31). Call **1.800.208.9565** for a list of authorized network providers before you access services. You can also reach the Teladoc telehealth program by registering at <https://member.teladoc.com/tuftshealthplan>.

VA National Center for PTSD

Go to ptsd.va.gov for information and resources for veterans and those who care about them. You can also download the VA's "COVID Coach," a free mobile app to support mental health during the pandemic, by clicking on "Mobile Apps" in the left menu.

Home Base

This partnership between the Red Sox Foundation and Massachusetts General Hospital serves veterans from any conflict, regardless of ability to pay. Go to homebase.org or call **617.724.5202**.



Fruit v. Juice

Who's the winner?



Many of us were raised on fruit juice and sweetened juice drinks like Hawaiian Punch® and Tang®. Nutrition research has progressed to the point where most of us now know that artificially sweetened juice isn't a healthy way to quench thirst. But what about plain old fruit juice?

Plain fruit juice isn't "bad" for us. But it's important to keep in mind that eating a piece of fruit — for example, an apple instead of apple juice, or grapes instead of grape juice — has advantages over drinking juice.

✓ **Whole fruit has more fiber than juice does.** Fiber is associated with a reduced risk of diabetes and improved intestinal health. Fiber also makes you feel full and less likely to want to eat more.

✓ **Whole fruit takes longer to consume than juice does.** Juice is a fast way to take in excess carbohydrates that contribute to weight gain.

✓ **Whole fruit contributes less to tooth decay than juice does,** especially among children.

No one says to eliminate juice from your diet. The healthy route is to use water as your key thirst quencher (for children, too), snack on whole fruit, and treat yourself to an occasional glass of juice. ■

Whole fruit has more fiber than juice does



Hazards of Button Batteries



"Button" batteries and lithium coin batteries — those small, shiny disks that power devices like hearing aids, toys, remotes, calculators, watches, fitness bracelets, and even some greeting cards, are irresistible to toddlers.

If swallowed, a button battery can pass through the intestines without causing harm. But it can also catch in the esophagus, where the battery's hydroxide, an alkaline chemical, can cause tissue burns that are dangerous and sometimes fatal.

These tips can help keep children safe:

- Put devices with button batteries out of sight and reach of small children.
- Keep loose or spare batteries locked away.
- Make sure that the battery compartments of all electronic items are secure and taped shut.
- To safely dispose of these batteries, wrap them in tape so they can't be swallowed and promptly recycle or put them in an outside trash can. ■

Sources: The National Safety Council and the American Academy of Pediatrics.



Poison Ivy? Sunburn? A Bee Sting?



You can call our 24-Hour Nurse Advice Line

Now that it's summer, it's likely that you'll be outdoors more often. And being outdoors sometimes means irritations that won't send you to the doctor, but that need some attention.

Fortunately, US Family Health Plan members have 24/7 telephone access to advice for small matters from a registered nurse. Call **1.866.767.4546** and be on summer's safe side. ■



Because Salads Are Summer's Best Friend

If you don't know about bok choy, it's a good time to extend a welcome. A cruciferous vegetable, like cabbage or broccoli, bok choy is crammed with nutrients, especially calcium and vitamins A and C. In addition to being one of the most nutrient-dense greens, it's relatively inexpensive.

Cultivated in China since the 5th century AD, most of the bok choy eaten today in the U.S. today is grown in California. And although it used to be available mainly in Asian markets, bok choy is offered in most grocery stores.

Baby bok choy, a younger version of larger bok choy, is especially sweet, but the grown-up version will taste fine in this salad, too.

Baby Bok Choy Salad

Serves 4

- 4 teaspoons rice vinegar
- 1 tablespoon low-sodium soy sauce
- 1 teaspoon sesame oil
- $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon sugar (brown or white)
- 5 cups sliced, raw baby bok choy
- 2 tablespoons chopped unsalted peanuts
- chili pepper flakes to taste

In a large salad bowl, whisk the rice vinegar, soy sauce, sesame oil, and sugar together to make the dressing. Add the bok choy slices and toss. Top with the chopped peanuts and chili pepper flakes.

Switch it up

If you don't have peanuts, try sliced almonds, chopped cashews, or unsalted sunflower seeds. For more color and crunch, try adding thinly sliced carrots or radishes. If you have unsweetened flaked coconut on hand, toss some on top for extra texture and flavor.

Make it your main dish

Serve on top of cooked and cooled whole grains like brown rice, farro, or barley, and mix in some chopped chicken or fish. You'll have two servings. ■

at ease



**There are truths which one
can see only when it's dark.**

— Isaac Bashevis Singer



Flourishing in the Dark

The remarkable flowers in the photograph on the previous page erupt from a plant called a night-blooming cereus for one night and one night only every summer. The rest of the year the plant, which lives on a bookcase in my house, is an ungainly mass of huge flat leaves.

My late father-in-law Henry grew up in Honolulu surrounded by plants like these. When he was 15, his parents, afraid after the bombing of Pearl Harbor that the Japanese would overrun the Hawaiian Islands, sent him to New England to live, and he stayed here for the rest of his life.

On a trip to Hawaii in the 1950s, Henry took a cutting of the plant from his parents' yard and brought it back to his home in Massachusetts. In the 1980s, my husband took a cutting from that plant and potted it up. It has lived with us ever since, sometimes producing as many as ten or twelve flowers at a time. We fuss over the blooms, which emit pulses of lemon-vanilla scent. Sometimes we drink champagne, and we always stay up late to enjoy the spectacle.

This summer's blooms will be especially welcome: a vibrant reminder that although much has been lost in the darkness of the pandemic, much can still flourish.

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

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