

Winter 2022

**INSIDE**

**Stellar Member Satisfaction  
Once Again!**

**Meet the Slaters from  
Granby, MA**

**Dr. Rollinger on Exercise  
and Aging**

**Limiting Holiday Alcohol**



Amy Gennaco and  
Kemuel Juarbe Hernandez, P02, USCG



**US FAMILY  
HEALTH PLAN**

# winter calendar

## DECEMBER

21

Winter begins

25

Christmas Day

31

New Year's Eve

## JANUARY

1

New Year's Day

16

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Holiday



Our online Member Handbook at [usfamilyhealth.org](http://usfamilyhealth.org) is always up to date!

## FEBRUARY

2

What did the groundhog see?

14

Valentine's Day



February is American Heart Month. Find heart-healthy tips at [heart.org](http://heart.org).

20

Presidents Day

## MARCH

12

Daylight Saving Time begins (set clocks ahead)

17

St. Patrick's Day

20

Spring begins



## COMMUNITY



**PAGE 2** Senior Vice President and Plan CEO Gail Schlesinger on

the honor of serving members well **PAGE 3** Sincere thanks for participating in the 2022 CAHPS® survey. We're over the moon! **PAGE 6** Member Michael Slater, SSG, USA (Ret.) on the satisfaction of service

## WELLNESS



**PAGE 8** Learning about SAD **PAGE 9** Helping a baby sleep safely •

Keeping germs to yourself • Introducing the 988 hotline **PAGE 10** Keeping holiday alcohol within limits **PAGE 12** What to do with pumpkin instead of pie!

## FITNESS



**PAGE 4** How a quick walk can reduce blood sugar levels • Safe winter

walking **PAGE 5** Turning back the clock with exercise

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 Gail Schlesinger,  
our Senior Vice President and Plan CEO



**We want to exceed your expectations — because you deserve the best possible health care.**

## Working Hard to Serve You Well

Every year, we engage a national organization to conduct a survey of a sample of you, our members, to find out how well we're meeting your needs. The content and format of the survey questionnaire is standardized so that the results can be compared against other civilian and military health plans nationwide. Although we always strive to exceed your expectations, it was especially satisfying this year to receive the Plan's results and see that our efforts have translated into very high marks.

In regard to your overall satisfaction with the health plan, we once again ranked in the 99th percentile compared to similar programs. This is an especially important measure for us because it's an assessment of your overall view of our performance.

Several other measures are critical to our understanding of how well we're doing. The first relates to whether you're getting the care you need. For that measure, I'm happy to say that we rated in the 100th percentile. Another measure relates to whether you get your care quickly when you need it, and for that, you rated us in the 98th percentile.

Another measure we consider key is how well our Member Services team is meeting your needs. For that, you rated us in the 97th percentile. This is a terrifically satisfying result, especially since we all know that

understanding your benefits, including where you can get care and what approvals you need, can be confusing. We take great pride in knowing that our Member Services staff helps you well with this.

I recently attended a meeting with our Member Services team. As the meeting came to an end, we did a "roundtable," where each team member was invited to speak about their experience working with the Plan. To a person, the team members described what a pleasure it is to work on the US Family Health Plan phone queue. Such enthusiasm is not something you normally hear from people who answer the phone all day. It's a tribute to all of our members.

Since the founding of this program, we have been honored to serve you and strive to meet your needs. Navigating through the complexities of the health care landscape can be difficult, so we always strive to make your experience smooth and seamless. All of us at US Family Health Plan want you to be more than just satisfied with your health plan. We want to exceed your expectations — because you deserve the best possible health care.

A happy and healthy winter to all of you, and a deeply felt thank you for your continuing loyalty and confidence. ■



FOCUS ON  
SERVING

YOU



## The 99th Percentile Once Again!

It's an honor to say that our members have rated us in the 99th percentile for member satisfaction in the 2022 CAHPS® survey of U.S. adult commercial health plans.

We're grateful to everyone who responded to the survey, which was mailed to a portion of our membership. Your responses let us know what we're doing well and where we can improve. And that's important to us. ■

## Our Member Handbook Is a Click Away

Questions about Plan basics? Our *Member Handbook* is always up to date. Find it online at [usfamilyhealth.org](https://usfamilyhealth.org) (click on "Members" on the top bar, then on "Member Handbook"). You can read it there or print it out.

If you'd like to have someone else print it out for you, call Member Services at **800.818.8589**. We'll send it to your home. ■

## Chiropractic Care

If raking fall leaves has left you with an aching back, remember that US Family Health Plan covers spinal manipulation — up to 12 visits in a Plan year — by an authorized network chiropractor. Call Member Services at **1.800.818.8589** for more information. ■



## Just Had Lunch?

### A quick walk can help lower blood sugar levels

You've just had lunch at your desk. What's the best thing to do next? According to a recent study in the journal *Sports Medicine*, taking a short walk, even just two to five minutes, can reduce your blood sugar levels. And this can lower your risk from health complications like type 2 diabetes.

The key is to take the walk within 60 minutes of eating your meal. Light walking soon after eating creates active engagement of the muscles. This means that your muscles will absorb some of the excess glucose produced by the food you've just taken in. ■

Source: Buffey, A.J., Herring, M.P., Langley, C.K. et al. The Acute Effects of Interrupting Prolonged Sitting Time in Adults with Standing and Light-Intensity Walking on Biomarkers of Cardiometabolic Health in Adults: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. *Sports Medicine* 52, 1765–1787 (2022).



## Wintertime

### And the walking's not easy

We all know that during a New England winter the weather can change on a dime. So it's smart to be prepared for the ice you're suddenly bound to find.

Make sure you have winter boots with a thick, non-slip tread and wide, low heels. For extra security, use a pair of traction cleats that slip on over the bottom of your boots.

If you encounter a slippery surface, remember this: "Walk like a penguin!" This means:

- Point your toes slightly out.
- Bend slightly and walk slowly and flat-footed, keeping your knees loose and taking small steps.
- Extend your arms slightly out to your sides to help with balance. ■





# Is Exercise the Fountain of Youth?

While watching television recently, I noticed several advertisements for supplements that were promoted as reducing the effects of aging. There are supplements described as helping with memory loss, hair loss, bone loss, and muscle loss.

Limited evidence exists that any of these supplements improve anything. But there is a lot of evidence that one activity that doesn't cost anything can lessen the risk of many of these problems — and that activity is exercise.

For most of us, the idea that you don't have to run a marathon to reap the anti-aging benefits of exercise is good news. Even daily activities like taking the stairs instead of the escalator, walking the dog, gardening, or doing household chores may have physical benefits and improve memory, as long as the activity is done regularly.

## The exercise-dementia connection

The *New York Times* recently (September 2022) ran an article highlighting the effect of exercise on decreasing the risk of dementia. Three major long-term studies released in recent months identified the types of physical activity that confer the most overall protection against the condition. These studies, which followed hundreds of thousands of people over many years, showed conclusively that regular physical activity can help decrease the risk of developing dementia.

## Four key exercise types

The National Institute on Aging (NIA) encourages including all four types of exercise in your daily routine. Not each type must be done every day, and each has its own benefits.

The four types are:

- **Endurance exercise** to increase your breathing or heart rate
- **Strength lifting** with even low-weight objects
- **Balance exercise** like standing on one foot
- **Flexibility exercise** including stretching or yoga

## Benefits

According to the NIA, with exercise, you may:

- Keep and improve your strength
- Have more energy and reduce fatigue
- Improve your balance and lower risk of falls and injuries from falls
- Manage and prevent some diseases like arthritis, heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, osteoporosis, and eight types of cancer, including breast and colon cancer
- Sleep better
- Reduce stress and anxiety levels
- Reach or maintain a healthy weight
- Control your blood pressure
- Possibly improve or maintain some aspects of cognitive function, such as your ability to shift quickly between tasks or plan an activity
- Perk up your mood and reduce feelings of depression

It's easier to take a daily supplement in the hope that it may improve your memory than it is to get started on an exercise program, but the rewards of exercise are clearly worth it. ■



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



# Finding Purpose in Service

**Member Michael Slater, SSG, USA (Ret.)**  
**Granby, MA**



Growing up in western Massachusetts, Michael Slater didn't feel much of a sense of direction. His family situation was difficult, both personally and financially. Fortunately, at Amherst High School, and with the help of an aunt and uncle, he found encouragement and support.

As a high school senior, it occurred to Mike to explore joining the military. He took the ASVAB and excelled across the board, especially in coding. Then he went to an Army recruiting office, because both of his grandfathers had been in the Army. When the recruiter pulled up Mike's ASVAB scores, he told Mike, "You can do anything in the Army."

Mike enlisted in December 2000 for six years at the start, as a combat engineer, work that took him to Missouri for training. Then he was sent to Fort Hood in Texas to train for deployment to Iraq. He and his

high school girlfriend, Renee, married on the fly in Vermont and went to Texas together. He was 19 and she had just turned 18.

For his three combat tours in Iraq with the 1st Cavalry Division, Mike spent 12 months deployed to Camp Falcon on the outskirts of Baghdad; another 14 months deployed to Forward Operating Base Warhorse, near Baqubah in Daliyah Province; and 12 months at Qayyarah West Airfield, nicknamed Q-West, south of Mosul in Ninevah Province. Renee and Mike's first child, Thomas, was born in 2008.

After Iraq, Mike returned to Fort Hood, then moved with Renee and Thomas to Bamberg, Germany, for three years, joining the 42nd Clearance Company. Their daughter, Michaela, was born there in 2011. The family relished their time in Germany. And Mike, as he says, "learned enough German to order a beer."





*Clockwise from top:* Mike with his brother Jeremy in Iraq, 2005. Mike, Thomas, Michaela, and Renee in Granby in 2022. Mike and Renee at their 2002 wedding in Brattleboro, VT. *Left:* The Slaters in Bamberg, Germany, 2012. On the convoy from Kuwait to Baghdad, 2004.

Mike deployed out of Germany to Ghazni, in Afghanistan, for 12 months, living in Combat Outpost Arian, involved in the perilous work of clearing IEDs.

Like so many veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan, Mike has grappled with post-traumatic stress. He's spent much of his retirement time learning to tame what haunts him, providing stability and sustenance

to his family, and supporting other veterans. Today he's the Director of Veterans Services for the South Hadley and Easthampton Veterans District ([southhadley.org/155/Veterans-Services](https://southhadley.org/155/Veterans-Services)).

In Texas, Renee became a licensed vocational nurse. She went on to earn a bachelor's degree in communication disorders and a master's degree in speech pathology, all while raising a family. She now works as a speech therapist in the Holyoke school system.

As a family, the Slaters enjoy spending time with family and friends. They also raise a flock of much-loved chickens, which supply them with four to six eggs a day.

A deeply felt thank you to the entire Slater family, for your service to your country and the military community, and for your loyalty to US Family Health Plan. ■



# Feeling SAD?

## Learn about Seasonal Affective Disorder

Some people feel extra low and irritated in the winter. They may feel a need for extra sleep, have a hard time concentrating, and crave sweets and foods like pasta, potatoes, white rice, and bread.

These can be signs of Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), a kind of depression that is thought to be caused by a disruption of your body's winter clock. Treatments include:

- Getting as much daylight as you can. Sit by a window, take regular outdoor walks, and try sitting in front of full-spectrum lights designed to help with SAD.
- Replacing sweet and starchy foods with nuts, fruits, and vegetables.
- Obtaining antidepressant medication or counseling, or both.
- If you think you may have SAD, be sure to talk about it with your primary care provider. And remember that US Family Health Plan members can self-refer to a network mental health provider for up to eight outpatient visits in a Plan year. Be sure to call **800.208.9565** for a list before you access services. ■

Source: The American Psychological Association at [apa.org](https://www.apa.org). Enter "Seasonal Affective Disorder" in the search box.





## Is a Baby Visiting for the Holidays?

### Back to Sleep Is Best

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) says that the most effective step that parents and caregivers can take to lower an infant's risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) is to place the baby to sleep on its back — not on its stomach and not on its side.

If the baby falls asleep anywhere except in its crib, move them to the crib — on their back — as soon as you can. Infants should never sleep on couches or other unsafe places that can make it hard for them to breathe. ■



## Cough and Sneeze into Your Elbow



For the last two winters we've focused on masks as the primary way of preventing sickness (like COVID-19). Now that there are situations where people don't wear masks, it's important to remember that bacteria and viruses still fly through the air when we cough or sneeze.

If you don't have a tissue handy, cough or sneeze into your elbow, not into the air or your hand. You'll help reduce the spread of colds, flu, and more. ■

## Remember 988

### The New Suicide Prevention Lifeline

The new **988** hotline provides access to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline and the Veterans Crisis Line. Expert responders help those who are experiencing a mental health crisis or are at risk of suicide.

For the Veterans Crisis Line, which provides specialized help for veterans and their families, call **988 (then press 1)**, chat online at **VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat**, or text **838255**. ■





# Limiting Alcohol

## Strategies to Help Keep Your Holidays Healthy

For the past two holiday seasons, most of us have limited our gatherings with family and friends in an effort to stem the COVID-19 pandemic. But this year, with widespread use of immunizations, including boosters, many of us will feel safer gathering for the holidays.

With the holiday season often comes wider availability of alcohol, and, for some people, more of a desire to drink. It's important to make conscious choices about whether you will drink alcohol, and, if you will, how much to drink. The strategies here can help.

**Keep track.** Keep track of how much you drink. Carry a card in your wallet or enter notes in a cell phone calendar or note-taking app. Making note of each drink before you drink it can help you slow down when you need to.

**Count and measure.** Know standard drink sizes and measure drinks at home. Away from home, it can be harder to keep track. Ask whoever is preparing beverages how much alcohol they used before you decide whether or how much to drink.



**Set goals.** Decide which day or days of the week you will drink alcohol. You may want to limit your drinking to Saturday evenings only, for instance.

**Pace and space.** If you do drink, pace yourself. Sip slowly. Have no more than one standard drink in an hour. If you want to have two drinks, have a non-alcoholic one, like water or a soft drink, in between.

**Include food.** Don't drink on an empty stomach. Eat something so the alcohol is absorbed more slowly into your system.

**Find alternatives.** If drinking alcohol has come to occupy much of your time, think of ways to fill your free time without drinking. You may want to get outside more for walks, find a hobby that uses your hands (knitting, gardening, working on your car), or renew relationships with friends who limit their drinking.

**Avoid triggers.** What triggers your urge to drink? Certain people? Certain places? If certain activities or times of day trigger the urge to drink, anticipate it, and schedule something different to do.

**Plan to handle urges.** When you can't avoid a trigger and an urge hits, think about these options: Remind yourself of your reasons for limiting your drinking. Or talk things through with someone you trust. Or instead of fighting the feeling, don't give in, but ride it out, knowing that it will soon crest like a wave and pass.

**Know your "no."** Practice what you will say or do when you're offered a drink but don't plan to have one. Have a polite, convincing "no thanks" ready. The faster you can say no to these offers, the less likely you are to give in. ■

*Adapted from "Rethinking Drinking" at [rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov](http://rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov)*

## What is a standard drink?



12 fl oz of regular beer



8-9 fl oz of malt liquor  
(shown in a 12 oz glass)



5 fl oz of table wine



1.5 fl oz of distilled spirits  
(gin, rum, tequila,  
vodka, whiskey)

## US Family Health Plan Mental Health and Substance-Use Disorder Self-Referrals

Plan members may self-refer to an authorized network mental health or substance-use disorder provider for the first eight outpatient visits in a Plan Year (January 1 – December 31). Please call **800.208.9565** to obtain a current list of Plan providers.



# Great Pumpkin Squares

Lots of us buy canned pumpkin puree for just one reason: traditional pumpkin pie. But pumpkin puree, which is densely nutritious (and delicious!) can take on other forms. These pumpkin squares don't take much time to make and are a stellar addition to your holiday treats.



## Makes 8 squares

### Base

- ½ cup whole wheat flour
- 1 cup rolled oats
- ¼ cup packed brown sugar
- ¼ cup butter, chunked
- 2 tablespoons olive oil

### Filling

- 1 15-ounce can pumpkin puree
- 1½ cups milk (whole or sweetened condensed)
- 2 eggs
- ⅓ cup packed brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon each of ground cinnamon, ginger, and cloves

### Topping

- ½ cup chopped walnuts
- ¼ cup packed brown sugar

Preheat oven to 350°.

For the base, mix the flour, oats, and brown sugar in a medium bowl. Add the butter and oil and combine until you have moist crumbs. Transfer the mixture to an 8- x 8-inch baking dish and pat it smooth with your fingers. Bake until lightly browned (about 15 minutes).

While the base is baking, make the filling by combining the pumpkin, milk, eggs, brown sugar, and spices in a bowl and whisk until smooth. After the base is baked, pour the filling on top and bake for about 40 minutes, until a knife inserted in the center comes out clean. Combine the chopped nuts and brown sugar, and sprinkle on top while the base is still hot. Serve after it's cool.

*Pumpkin puree is rich in vitamin A, vitamin K, and copper. ■*





*at ease*

**Well, I know now. I know  
a little more how much a  
simple thing like a snowfall  
can mean to a person.**

— Sylvia Plath  
*(The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath)*



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## Would U Like to Be in Pictures?

We're always on the lookout for members who would like to have their photograph taken and used in our magazine and other materials. We're looking for families and for singles and couples, too. If you're interested, write to [michael.bucell@usfamilyhealth.org](mailto:michael.bucell@usfamilyhealth.org).

We make our selection based on geographic area and service branch, so we can't use everyone who responds. But thank you in advance for your interest. If you're selected, you'll receive a gift card and a framed print as our thanks.

**Kerry Tucker**  
Managing Editor/Senior Writer

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At Ease photo by Hal Morgan

