

Winter 2024

INSIDE
Post-Traumatic Stress
Later in Life
Helping Veterans
Through Fishing
Holiday Hosting
and Mental Health



Harold Skelton, SSgt, USAF (Ret.), with Harry and Daisy



winter calendar

DECEMBER

7
Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day

21
Winter begins

25
Christmas Day
Hanukkah begins at sundown

26
Kwanzaa begins

31
New Year's Eve

FEBRUARY

2
What did the groundhog see?

14
Valentine's Day



February is American Heart Month.
Find heart-healthy tips at heart.org.

17
Presidents Day

28
Ramadan begins (est.)

JANUARY

1
New Year's Day

20
Martin Luther King, Jr., Holiday



Our online Member Handbook
at usfamilyhealth.org is always
up to date!

MARCH

9
Daylight Saving Time begins
(set clocks ahead)

17
St. Patrick's Day

20
Spring begins

COMMUNITY



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Executive Officer of Brighton Marine, Inc. **PAGE 8** Member Harold Skelton talks about helping veterans through his passion — fishing

WELLNESS



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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 letter from Rosye B. Cloud,
Chairwoman and Chief Executive Officer
of Brighton Marine, Inc.



As we embrace the winter season, I'd like to take a moment to reintroduce Brighton Marine, Inc., which has been entrusted with managing your US Family Health Plan for over 25 years. We are honored to continue supporting your well-being as we look ahead to the new year.

Brighton Marine is a non-profit social enterprise dedicated to providing health, housing, and hope. Our flagship campus originated in Brighton, Massachusetts, and through our work we cover Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and areas of New Hampshire and Connecticut. Brighton Marine's origin began with, and continues to prioritize, our military and veteran community. Through the US Family Health Plan, we proudly offer healthcare support to thousands of beneficiaries, including families of active-duty military, National Guard, and Reserves, as well as military retirees and their eligible family members.

Brighton Marine provides vital resources to veterans throughout the New England region, including housing support for veteran-focused living and community outreach programs. We partner with trusted mission-driven organizations to enhance the services available, striving to ensure that you have access to the care and support you have earned. To ensure we are best positioned

to address our beneficiaries' needs, Brighton Marine recently opened healthcare and outreach operations in Washington, D.C.

I am continually inspired by the stories of the beneficiaries we are honored to serve. Rest assured that the care and commitment to you is reflected in our personnel, many of whom are veterans themselves or part of a military and veteran family. Brighton Marine has been consistently recognized as a veteran employer of choice, a high-quality housing provider, and a leader in beneficiary satisfaction. For most of us, our work on your behalf is a continuation of our collective service in national security, public service, or the armed forces. As we look to expand our services in the coming year and extend our reach to even more beneficiaries, we remain deeply grateful for the opportunity to continue supporting you and your families.

As we celebrate the holiday season, I want to express our heartfelt appreciation for your trust and partnership. Thank you for choosing Brighton Marine and US Family Health Plan. May your holidays be filled with peace, joy, and good health.

Warm regards,

Rosye B. Cloud
Chairwoman and Chief Executive Officer
Brighton Marine, Inc.



Post-Traumatic Stress Symptoms Later in Life

Many veterans find they have PTSD symptoms even 50 or more years after their combat experience. They may have nightmares or feel as though they're reliving the traumatic event. They may avoid situations that remind them of what happened, or they may be easily startled, or lose interest in activities they previously enjoyed.

According to the National Center for PTSD, symptoms of PTSD may increase with age because:

- Having retired from work may make your symptoms feel worse, providing more time to think and fewer distractions from memories.
- Medical problems and feeling weaker can increase symptoms.
- Bad news on the television and scenes from current wars can bring back bad memories.

Symptoms of PTSD can occur soon after a traumatic experience, but this isn't always the case.

- Some veterans begin to have PTSD symptoms soon after they return from combat, and these symptoms may last until older age.
- Other veterans don't have PTSD symptoms until later in life.
- For some veterans, PTSD symptoms can be high right after their war experience, decrease over the years, and then worsen again later in life.

Finding help

If you're having a difficult time dealing with your wartime memories, there are a number of things that you can do to help yourself. You can also seek help from others.

Take part in activities to feel strong and safe in other parts of your life, like exercising, eating well, and volunteering.

Talk to a friend who has been through the war or other hard times. A good friend who understands and cares is often helpful.

Join a support group. Some groups focus on war memories. Others focus on the present, and others focus on learning ways to relax.

Talk with a professional. It can be helpful to talk with someone who is trained and experienced in dealing with aging and PTSD. You can also find information about PTSD treatment programs at [ptsd.va.gov](https://www.ptsd.va.gov).

This article is adapted from information on the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs website. Go to [ptsd.va.gov](https://www.ptsd.va.gov) for comprehensive information about PTSD, its symptoms, effects on friends and family, and treatment. ■



FOCUS ON SERVING YOU

Even More Rhode Island Providers

US Family Health Plan welcomes a large primary care group at **Wood River Health** in Hope Valley, RI.

The new Primary Care Providers include:

Nadia Duvilaire, MD

Lisa Menard-Manlove, MD

Alexa Allard, FNP-C
(nurse practitioner)

Shital Desai, DNP, MSN,
FNP-C (nurse practitioner)

Rachel Holland, FNP
(nurse practitioner)

Maria McGurrin, DNP,
MSN, CPNP (pediatric nurse
practitioner)

Elena Manchette, PA-C
(physician assistant)

For more information go to **woodriverhealth.org**.
Call **401.539.2461** for an appointment. ■

An Up-to-Date Member Handbook Is at Your Finger-Click

Our *Member Handbook* helps keep you up to date about Plan details, from contact information, to copays, to coverage. Find it online at **usfamilyhealth.org** (click on “Members” at the top bar, then on *Member Handbook*). ■





Over the Moon! With the CAHPS® 99th percentile

Our members have once more rated US Family Health Plan in the 99th percentile for member satisfaction among adult commercial health plans in the United States. This rating was determined by the 2023 CAHPS® survey.

Deep thanks to those of you who responded to the survey, which was mailed to a portion of our membership. Your responses let us know what we do well and where we can improve. And that's important to us.

CAHPS® means Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems. ■



Suicide Prevention Resources

**Call or text 988
or chat 988lifeline.org.**

Every American can call the **National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline** at **988** for help if you or someone you care about is experiencing a behavioral health crisis or is at risk of suicide. You can also chat at **988lifeline.org**.

For military veterans and their families, specialized help is available from the **Veterans Crisis Line** at:

Veterans Crisis Line

Call: **988** (then press 1)

Chat online: **VeteransCrisisLine.net**

Text: **838255** ■





Supporting Mental Health During the Holidays

According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), 64 percent of people living with a mental illness say that their conditions get worse around the holidays. Whether because of separation from loved ones, the pressures of gift-giving, or challenging interactions with family members, holiday times can bring their own concerns.

These strategies from NAMI can help:

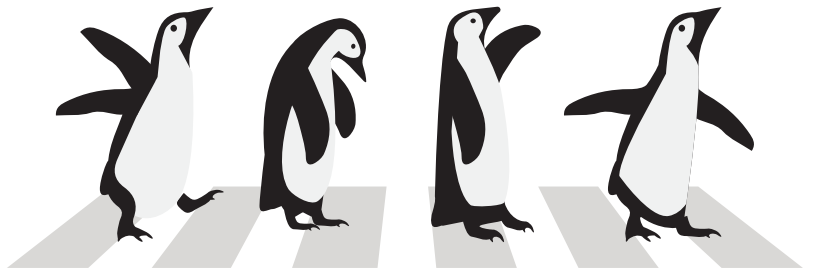
- **Pay attention to your feelings.** Remember that it's all right to feel unhappy during the holidays. Recognizing your feelings is the first step toward addressing them.
- **Make a plan for when you're feeling stressed, sad, or lonely.** This may include calling a friend or family member, going for a walk, engaging in an activity that brings joy, or watching a favorite movie.
- **Practice self-care.** Reading a good book, working out, spending time in nature, and getting plenty of sleep can help.
- **Connect with community.** If you'll be away from loved ones during the holidays, finding a supportive community through clubs, support groups, and faith communities can help.
- **Support others.** Feelings of grief and loss can grow during the holidays. Check in on loved ones who may be struggling. This won't just bring joy to others but can improve your own well-being. ■

Is It Icy?

Walk like a penguin

If you encounter a slippery surface, be sure to:

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





Childproofing for Grandparents

If a new grandchild will come to your home for the holidays, you're in for a wonderful treat. But be sure to take advice from the American Academy of Pediatrics and make sure that your home is safe for little ones:

- Place smoke detectors and carbon monoxide detectors in the proper locations throughout the house.
- Make sure that pets and pet food are out of a child's reach.
- Think about escape plans in advance, and make sure that fire extinguishers are readily available.
- Position gates at the top and bottom of stairs.
- Make sure that medications (and vitamins) are out of sight and out of reach of children and stored in child-resistant containers. Store your purse or any bags away from grandchildren if any medications are kept in them.
- Be sure to position soft covers or bumpers around sharp corners or solid furniture. ■



Hosting a Holiday Party?

To keep a lid on the alcohol situation:

- **Offer a variety of non-alcoholic drinks.** Water, club soda, and juice can counteract alcohol's dehydrating effects and slow the rate of alcohol absorption into the body.
- **Provide plenty of healthy food.** Food can also help slow the absorption of alcohol.
- **Take "no" for an answer.** When someone says "no" or puts their hand over their drink, it really does mean that they don't want more. ■





A Passion for Helping Veterans Through Fishing

Member Harold Skelton, SSgt, USAF (Ret.)
Buzzards Bay, MA

Harold Skelton, a veteran of the war in Iraq, has worked hard to handle his resulting PTSD issues, and today he's able to share his knowledge with other veterans, who benefit from his help — mainly through his therapeutic fishing program.

Born in Holyoke, MA, Skelton initially planned to be a police officer like his grandfather, who immigrated from Ireland. So, after he attended Westfield State University, he did become a police officer. But in 2005, at age 24, after boot camp in Texas, Skelton joined Air Force security forces, then based at Schriever SFB in Colorado.

Skelton's first deployment was to Kuwait. Then, in 2008, he deployed to Iraq, based at Balad Air Base, which was regularly struck by rockets and mortars. He was also a criminal justice adjunct teacher at Central Texas College. In 2010 Skelton was medically retired from the military. He also received a master's degree in organizational security management from Webster University.

Still haunted by his deployment experience, he began to drink heavily and tried to take his own life.

"I spent the next seven years in the basement," he said, "doing nothing."

In 2020, as a single father, he moved to Cape Cod with his two children, and they live right by the Cape Cod Canal.

"I needed to be somewhere different," he said. "Somewhere new. I didn't know anyone on the Cape, but I knew I liked it here."



Fishing for the Mission 22, a non-profit organization, focuses on providing a therapeutic approach to help heal veterans through fishing. Learn more at fishingforthemission22.org

He started fishing, something he had learned years earlier from his grandfather. His dad liked fishing, too. On the Cape, something about fishing brought him a pleasure and contentment that he hadn't felt in a very long time.

In 2022, he decided to share the satisfaction of fishing with other struggling veterans. So he formed a nonprofit organization and called it "Fishing for the Mission 22."

"The '22'" he says, "is for the 22 veterans lost every day to suicide, on average."

The organization provides fishing trips meant to bring veterans together and give them the joy of pulling in the big ones.

Skelton's children, Harry, age 8, and Daisy, age 5, have caught on to fishing, too. Harry also loves to read and draw. Daisy dances and is a Taylor Swift fan. Both children play lacrosse.

We're grateful to have the Skeltons as part of the US Family Health Plan family, and we thank you for your commitment to your community — especially to military veterans. ■



Staying Strong with Protein

It's common to lose muscle as we age. This loss is usually caused by a condition called sarcopenia, which can start as young as age 40 and cause some people to lose as much as half of their muscle mass by age 70. Factors that contribute to sarcopenia include reduced physical activity and inadequate protein intake.

Steps to Take

Sarcopenia can be slowed and sometimes even reversed. Key steps are eating plenty of protein and performing strength-training exercises.

Increasing your protein intake

Look for foods that are rich in an amino acid called leucine. These foods include fish, chicken, beef, nuts, eggs, cheese, milk, and yogurt with at least 3.5 grams of protein.

Strength training

Physical activity makes muscles contract and release "muscle growth factors," proteins that sustain muscle growth and repair muscle breakdown. Whatever your age, you can benefit from a strength-training program using resistance bands or free weights.

The National Institutes of Health provides easy-to-understand instructions for a series of strength-training

exercises at [go4life.nia.nih.gov/exercise-type/strength/](https://www.go4life.nia.nih.gov/exercise-type/strength/). Whenever you begin a new exercise program start slowly and increase repetitions gradually.

If you haven't exercised in a while or have a health condition, be sure to talk with your doctor about ways to start an exercise routine safely. ■

Walston, JD. Sarcopenia in older adults. *Curr Opin Rheumatol.* 2012 Nov; 24 (6):623-7.

If you tend to reach for potato chips or candy for a snack, think about going for one of these alternatives instead:

- A small container of cottage cheese
- Canned tuna on whole-grain crackers
- Peanut butter or almond butter on celery sticks
- Canned salmon
- No-Bake Energy Balls

See the recipe on page 12



Are Antibiotics Helpful Against Colds and Flu?

Antibiotics are useful drugs to combat infections, but they are not useful for all infections. They help fight bacteria, but not viruses. If used for the wrong reasons, antibiotics can in fact encourage bacteria to become resistant to them. Then when we need them to fight infection they may no longer work.

Antibiotics are drugs and all drugs run the risk of potential side effects. So why take them when they might not help?

The overuse of antibiotics for infections that they might not help is a leading cause of antibiotic resistance. We need antibiotics for serious bacterial infections. More and more of these serious infections are becoming resistant to drugs that used to work against them. Bacteria that survive an antibiotic may pass that ability on to more bacteria, making it even harder to control an infection.

Antibiotics aren't right for colds and flu

Colds and flu are caused by viruses, so taking antibiotics won't help make you well any sooner. In today's environment of busy schedules people don't have time to be sick and may want to do anything to get well sooner. But antibiotics don't help get you better faster and may even cause side effects such as upset stomach, rashes, or allergic reactions. They also don't make you any less contagious. If you have a virus, you can still give it to someone else even if you are taking antibiotics.

Antibiotics are appropriate for strep throat

An infection like a strep throat is appropriate for treatment with an antibiotic, because strep is a bacterial infection. But if a virus is causing a sore throat, an antibiotic won't help. That is one of the reasons it's important to get a strep test before starting a course of antibiotics.

If you're an older member

In our older members we see more use of antibiotics than in the pediatric group. That may be because older members are more concerned with infections becoming more serious, leading to hospitalization.

Antibiotics won't help reduce the risk of hospitalization from the flu. In fact, they may cause a more serious infection to occur because of antibiotic resistance. They can also cause a bacterial infection to occur in the colon that is very serious and can lead to chronic diarrhea, known as C.diff. With this infection, the antibiotics kill off good bacteria and lead a bad one to grow, unchecked. ■

Antibiotics help fight bacteria, but not viruses. If used for the wrong reasons, antibiotics can in fact encourage bacteria to become resistant to them.



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



Celestial Date and Nut No-Bake Energy Balls

If you get up early and go for a high-energy walk it can leave you with little time to make breakfast before you hit the road. But it's important to have something healthy that's handy to eat.

You can easily make energy balls one night a week and be out the door in the morning before you know it.

Energy balls packed with dates and nuts can do the trick. You can also vary the fruit: try raisins or chopped dried apricots, and toast some coconut flakes to ramp up the flavor. And you can use chopped almonds, peanuts, or hazelnuts instead of walnuts if that's what you have on hand. Or substitute toasted sesame seeds for some of the nuts.

Try this combination for starters:

2 cups of roughly chopped fresh Medjool dates, with the pits removed

1 cup of roughly chopped walnuts

¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon

Grind the dates, nuts, and cinnamon in a blender, and then mold the mixture into balls about an inch in diameter. If the mixture seems dry, add a sprinkling of water until it makes a texture that easily holds its shape.

Store the energy balls in the fridge for up to a week. ■





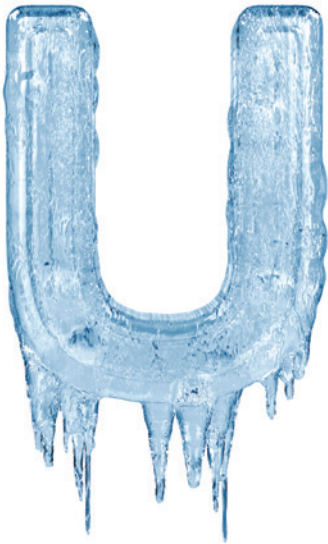
at ease

When snow falls,
nature listens.

— Antoinette Van Kleeff



77 Warren Street
Boston, MA 02135



Cold Is Coming!

Now that we're leaving warmth, chrysanthemums, and autumn leaves behind, it's time to prepare for New England at its most intense. Warm jacket, safe boots, thick gloves, snow shovel — we need to be ready. We also wish you warmth and comfort inside your home, including hot tea, and an extra blanket on your bed.

Cover photo by Kelly Lorenz
At Ease photo by Hal Morgan
Design by Five Line Creative



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