Cayuga-Onondaga Area School Employees’

HEALTHCARE PLAN

**1879 West Genesee Street Road**

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In an effort to promote the well-being of all Members and Staff, the COASEHP is distributing Wellness Reminders and Tips from Excellus BCBS and ENV Insurance Agency.

We hope you find the information useful.

**Health Status & Lifestyle Habits**

Did you begin to evaluate your current health status and lifestyle habits as part of your new year’s resolutions or plan for 2024? **Preventive Care** is a key component of one’s overall health and wellbeing.

Regular preventive care can help reduce the risk or severity of chronic conditions like heart disease, cancer, and diabetes. According to the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC), 90% of the nation’s $3.8 trillion in annual health care expenditures are for people with chronic and mental health conditions. Preventing or managing these conditions can reduce these costs, as well as improve quality of life and productivity.

You and your physician should discuss preventative services to determine what is important for your personal overall health and wellbeing schedule: annual routine checkups, immunizations, colon, breast, and cervical cancer screenings, cholesterol screening, contraception, family planning, and more. Regular exercise, eating healthy, getting enough sleep, and quitting smoking are important preventive measures everyone can take.

* **COASEHP** Members can log into the ExcellusBCBS website and find useful tools and information:

Excellus BlueCross BlueShield: [Health & Wellness](https://protect-us.mimecast.com/s/2bD2CERV3As0DojtpqQuM?domain=excellusbcbs.com)

**Here are some additional resources:**

* [National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion](https://protect-us.mimecast.com/s/NvuqCBBY3xTR4JNCz7R6A?domain=cdc.gov), CDC

What is a Primary Care Provider?

Why do I need a Primary Care Provider?

How do I find a Primary Care Provider?

Refer to the attached Excellus Flyer, ***“Do I Really Need A PCP?”***

**~ ~ Heart Health is a Lifetime Goal ~ ~**

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Preventive (CDC), heart disease is the leading cause of death for men, women, people aged 45 and over, and most races and Hispanic-origin groups, accounting for 1 in every 5 deaths in the US. The term “heart disease” includes several heart conditions. The most common form of heart disease in the US is coronary artery disease (CAD), which affects the blood flow to the heart and can cause a heart attack.

The biggest risk factors for heart disease are high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and smoking. Almost half of adults in the US have at least one of these conditions. Diabetes and an unhealthy lifestyle also increase people’s risk for heart disease. Seeing a primary care provider annually is a great way to catch these risk factors before they develop into serious disease. Exercising regularly, eating a healthy diet, managing stress, and limiting alcohol consumption can also reduce a person’s risk.

For members who want support managing their health, the Excellus BCBS Member Care Management team can help. Whether someone has a simple question or big health challenges, care managers can help them meet their health goals (at no additional cost to the member). Member Care Management can be reached at 1-877-222-1240 (TTY 711), 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM, or by email at Case.Management@Excellus.com.

**Knowing your blood pressure is an important part of being healthy.** If high blood pressure is left untreated, it may result in serious health conditions such as heart disease, stroke or kidney disease. Health problems can develop if your blood pressure numbers are above normal most of the time. The American Heart Association says nearly half of American adults have high blood pressure, but many are unaware because most have no symptoms. The effects of high blood pressure can last a lifetime.

Blood pressure is measured as systolic and diastolic pressures. Systolic measures the force against the artery walls as the heart contracts to force blood through the body. Diastolic measures the force against the arteries when the heart relaxes between beats. You will see blood pressure numbers written with the systolic number above or before the diastolic number, such as 120/80 mmHg. Knowing your blood pressure numbers is important, even when you’re feeling well. Blood pressure doesn’t stay the same all the time. It changes with activity and sleep, or when you’re excited or anxious. If your blood pressure numbers put you into an elevated category, lifestyle changes can help delay or prevent the progression to high blood pressure.

If you take blood pressure medicine and your blood pressure readings are within the normal range, you still have hypertension, but it is controlled by the medicine. Be sure to continue taking your medicine as ordered by your health care provider. See your health care provider regularly to monitor your blood pressure and general health and wellness.

**Understand Your Cholesterol.** Cholesterol is a waxy, fat-like substance that’s found in all of the cells of our body. Cholesterol itself isn’t bad; our body needs cholesterol to make hormones, vitamin D, and to help digest food. Having too much cholesterol is a problem and is one of the major risk factors for coronary heart disease, heart attack and stroke. Our liver produces about 75 percent of the cholesterol in our body, but the food we eat is another source of cholesterol. Cholesterol moves through our bloodstream in bundles called lipoproteins (lip-o-PRO-teens). Lipoproteins are made of an outer layer of protein and contain fat (lipid). There are no symptoms related to high cholesterol, so that’s why it’s important to have your cholesterol levels measured by a blood test.

Your health care provider will consider cholesterol numbers, along with your family history, age, gender, and other parts of your lifestyle or health, such as smoking, that could raise your risk of heart disease or stroke.

**~ ~ The Importance of A Good Night’s Sleep ~ ~**

**Sleeping is a basic human need,** like eating, drinking, and breathing. Like these other needs, sleeping is vital for good health and wellbeing throughout your lifetime. Adults need between 7 and 9 hours of sleep per night; children and teens need even more. In 1910, most adults slept 9 hours a night! Now, surveys show the average adult sleeps fewer than 7 hours a night. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), one-third of adults report not getting enough sleep every day. More than one-third of adults report daytime sleepiness so severe that it interferes with work, driving, and social functioning at least a few days each month.

**Sleep is as important for good health and wellbeing as diet and exercise.** Sleep is essential to both our mental and physical health. Sleep impacts how you feel and perform during the day. During sleep, your body and brain repair and restore themselves – sleep helps strengthen your immune system, and improves learning, memory, stamina, mood, and general health. Not getting enough sleep increases your risk of developing chronic diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and depression. Lack of sleep also affects your cognition and reaction time, leading to more injuries and accidents.

**Six Habits for better sleep**

Not getting enough sleep is more than an inconvenience and is associated with serious health issues such as obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and depression. Poor sleep is linked with impaired decision-making, decreased alertness and less energy. Signs of poor sleep include: Waking frequently at night; Feeling tired after waking up; Mood shifts, difficulty concentrating and slower thinking. Health Experts recommend getting at least 7 – 9 hours of sleep each night and adopting these six habits to help improve sleep:

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| --- | --- |
| 1) Keep the bedroom quiet, dark and cool | 4) Stick to a consistent sleep schedule, even on weekends |
| 2) Exercise regularly | 5) Establish a relaxing bedtime routine |
| 3) Avoid large meals, caffeine, nicotine and  alcohol before bed | 6) Remove TV’s, computers and smart phones from the bedroom |

**Here are some additional resources:**

* Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): [Sleep](https://protect-us.mimecast.com/s/qFe6C82DQkcvvx9hnAXJe?domain=cdc.gov)
* NIH National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute: [Sleep](https://protect-us.mimecast.com/s/ySohC9rE0lu33P8FEeMCi?domain=nhlbi.nih.gov)

*[Excellus BCBS Wellness]*

**~ ~ Six Ways To Reduce Prescription Drug Costs ~ ~**

**Rising medication costs are at the forefront of news reports, as drastic increases are creating roadblocks for patients to receive proper health care treatment. Even with prescription insurance assistance, patients are bearing more of the cost-sharing burden, which results in prescriptions not being filled, and in turn conditions and illness going untreated. As frustrating and as defeating as this can be, UnityPoint Health pharmacist, Amanda Ketterer, Pharm.D., shares strategies to consider with your provider and pharmacist that may make your medications more affordable and accessible.**

1. **Generic Medications:** Using generic medications can provide significant cost savings and are nearly always preferred by prescription insurance plans. Be assured that generics have been proven to be equally as effective and safe as the original, brand name medication. While the inactive ingredients may vary, the active drug has met the same requirements and standards for production as the original product and will treat your condition in the same manner. Ask your provider or pharmacist if there is a generic treatment option available and if it is appropriate for you.
2. **Different Medication Choice:** Oftentimes, there is more than one medication option to treat the same condition. When your provider is deciding what to prescribe, he/she doesn’t always know the cost of medications and just how variable the costs can be. If you get to the pharmacy and it seems your cost is high, ask your pharmacist if there are any alternatives you can suggest to your provider and/or insurance company. Insurance companies use something called drug formularies, which specify medications they prefer in order to keep costs down. Sometimes, it is as easy as switching from one drug to an equally-effective drug on your insurance formulary, resulting in hundreds of dollars in savings to you each month. This won’t always be the case, but it certainly doesn’t hurt to inquire with your pharmacist, your provider or your Prescription Benefit Manager’s customer service phone line. Don’t be afraid to ask questions – your provider wants to prescribe the best option for you, but sometimes, there is more than one – and it may be worth it to ask.
3. **Different Pharmacies:** With the changing health care system, we are seeing more high-deductible insurance plans, as well as more patients who decline prescription coverage with their plan. In these cases, the out-of-pocket costs of medications are very important to know. It may shock you how much the cost of the very same medication can differ between pharmacies. For example, with no insurance savings, the out-of-pocket cost for Atorvastatin, the generic version of Lipitor, a common cholesterol medication, may be $4.50 at one pharmacy and $140.00 at another just down the street – the best price may not be the pharmacy you think – sometimes the smallest pharmacies are able to offer medications at a much more reduced rate than the larger retailers. While not suggesting jumping between pharmacies, it can certainly pay to speak to different pharmacies to see if they can aid with reducing your out-of-pocket costs. Call the pharmacy and ask if you can set up a time to go through your medication list and see if their out-of-pocket costs may save you significantly each month.
4. **Coupon Savings:** If the medication you need is only available as an expensive brand name, then there may be an opportunity for coupon savings directly through the drug manufacturer. If you have a commercial prescription insurance plan, such as through your employer or private insurer, you may be eligible for substantial reductions on your monthly copays with these coupons savings programs. Many drug manufacturers realize their medications have higher copays for patients, and in order to keep their medications competitive and accessible, they may offer these coupons to make your copay comparable to the less expensive options. The company may offer a 1-time free trial coupon so you can try the product without spending a substantial amount of money. The most reliable way to find these coupons for brand-name medications is through the manufacturer’s website.

Generic medications don’t have the same manufacturer based savings programs, but there are many discount programs you can find online that may provide cost savings compared to the out-of-pocket prices. There are a number of websites but you can ask your pharmacy if they’ve seen any specific worthwhile discount programs. CommunityCaresRX.com, WellRX.com, and GoodRX.com are a few, and allow searching for a specific medication and compare your area pharmacies. The prices are not always exact (sometimes they’re even less than listed), but they give a general idea of which pharmacy may have the best price for you. These websites also offer phone apps so you can get an estimate before leaving your provider’s office.

1. **Patient Assistance Plans:** Even if you don’t qualify for coupon savings programs from the manufacturer, many of the brand name drug manufacturer’s offer Patient Assistance Programs. To find out if these programs are available, use either the manufacturer’s website, or search for the drug name at RXAssist.org, a nationally-recognized resource for finding reliable patient assistance program information and criteria.
2. **Don’t Skip Important Medications:** The most important thing you can do for your health is to stay on track with your necessary medications. While it is tempting to skip doses, or just forego filling a prescription altogether, this will often result in worsening your illness or condition. Ultimately, going untreated or under-treated can lead to far more serious and expensive health care outcomes, such as hospitalizations, more prescription medications, missed work days and an overall lack of well-being. Keep up with your daily medications, and always ask your provider before stopping medications. Take advantage of preventive appointments and annual well check appointments. Communicate with your pharmacist and provider to make sure you understand why you’re taking each medication so you have the best possible health outcomes. Be an advocate for your own health by working with your pharmacist and provider to find the most affordable and effective solutions together.

*[MyUnityPoint News Article]*

**Serving the School Districts of Cato-Meridian, Jordan-Elbridge, Moravia, Port Byron, Skaneateles, Southern Cayuga,**

**Union Springs, Weedsport, and the Board of Cooperative Educational Services.**