



# Wellness Connection

## 6 Smart Steps to Ease Health Care Costs



“An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” The old saying still rings true today. When a serious health condition develops, treatment may require costly medications, surgery, or hospitalization. But taking small, sensible precautions every day can help prevent many of those major medical problems.

For better health and lower bills, try these measures:

**Stop smoking.** This expensive habit harms nearly every organ of the body, causing cancer, cardiovascular disease, bone damage, and reproductive issues.

**Vaccinate.** Flu shots offer low-cost protection for all ages. Those older than age 65 also should get a pneumonia shot.

**Move and eat right.** Exercise regularly and eat a balanced, nutritious diet—one low in unhealthy fats and high in fruits and vegetables. These are the keys to avoiding obesity and its related health risks.

**Check your vitals.** Men and women both need regular checks of their weight, blood pressure, and cholesterol levels. Unhealthy levels can lead to serious, disabling health problems.

**Manage long-term diseases.** Chronic conditions, such as diabetes and high blood pressure, require daily self-care steps. Taking care of yourself will help keep you well and out of the emergency room.

**Get screened.** Women need periodic breast exams and Pap tests. Men need prostate exams. Both benefit from colorectal cancer screenings and other tests to identify warning signs of health problems early, when they are least expensive and most treatable. ■

### Shoo the Flu!

Get your flu shot this fall. Call Member Services at 402-398-3869 or 800-424-7105 to ask if it's covered by your plan. If it is, you might not have to pay!

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# Is Your Child's Backpack Too Heavy?



**Y**our child rushes through the front door after school, and you hear the familiar thump of a backpack dropping to the floor.

How many books are in there, you wonder, and is it really safe for a child's body to carry that weight?

It's smart to ask these questions, and get answers. Overloaded backpacks can cause back pain. Prevent backpack-related injury all school year with these A-plus ideas:

- Grab your kid's backpack on an average day and stick it on a scale. Make sure it does not weigh more than 10 percent of his or her body weight.
- Lighten your student's load by helping him or her determine what's essential to carry and what doesn't make the grade. Items that are not educational, such as mirrors and games, can be left in a locker. Ask if there are any materials that can remain in the classroom instead of being toted.
- Support your child's spine by purchasing a traditional backpack with two well-padded shoulder straps. Satchels and messenger bags with only one strap will not provide as much support.
- Remind children to always wear both straps. Kids often sling backpacks over one shoulder, which distributes the weight unevenly and increases the risk for back pain.
- Teach your children to lift heavy objects by bending at the knees. That way, when heavy textbooks are a must, they won't injure their backs as they pick up their bags. ■

## The ABCs of Whole-Body Wellness

Looking to learn a little more about your health? Visit our virtual library! At [www.bluehealthadvantage.com](http://www.bluehealthadvantage.com), you can read up on a variety of conditions and wellness tips, from managing stress to balancing portion sizes.

## PACK THE PERFECT SCHOOL LUNCH

These tricks aren't just for kids. Use them as a framework for building your own healthy meals, too!

- ✓ Purchase juice boxes with 100 percent juice rather than sugary blends or sodas.
- ✓ Satisfy a sweet tooth with fresh fruit, not cookies. Make it appealing for kids by cutting it into cubes or by selecting unusual varieties, such as star fruit or kiwi.
- ✓ Choose whole-grain bread, not white. Switch it up by using whole wheat tortillas or pita pockets on some days.
- ✓ Stuff sandwiches with lean turkey or chicken and lots of leafy greens.
- ✓ Skip the chips and serve sliced veggies, like carrots or sweet bell peppers, on the side.



# The ‘Write’ Way to Lose Weight

Most of us are already working to improve our eating and exercise habits. But did you know that adding one more step to your health routine may increase the number of pounds you drop?

A recent study showed that overweight people who kept track of their daily food intake and exercise lost twice as much weight as those who didn't keep records. The more records people kept, the more weight they lost.

## WHAT A FOOD DIARY DOES

An effective food diary is a detailed, honest account of your daily diet. It will make you aware of every visit to the cookie jar and any absent-minded nibbling.

By tracking your eating habits, good and bad, a food diary helps you understand them. When your daily consumption is visible on the page or computer screen, you can study patterns and note problems. Then you can start to change your behavior, balance your diet, and avoid

situations that trigger unhealthy choices. Your diary can also provide useful information for your doctor.

## GET STARTED TODAY

Follow these tips to get the most from your journal:

- Record everything you eat and drink. Do this right away, while it's fresh in your memory. Estimate portion sizes by weight or measurements.
- Be specific. Include condiments and other extras, such as mayonnaise on a sandwich and cream in coffee.
- Set the scene. Write down where you were, the time of day, what else you were doing, and who was with you. Note how you were feeling—calm or stressed, famished or not hungry? If unhealthy habits cluster around particular situations, such as snacking while watching TV, these details can help identify the problem.
- Stay honest. Even when it's embarrassing to admit them, we learn from our mistakes. ■



Recording your daily activity can improve your exercise habits. WalkingWorks, a **free** program from Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska, offers an easy-to-use walking log. Visit [www.bluehealthadvantage.com](http://www.bluehealthadvantage.com) and choose “WalkingWorks” from under the “Tools and Programs” tab.

## You Can Save on Vision Care!

When participating vision providers are used, you and your family members will receive a 10 percent discount off the cost of routine vision exams and a 17.5 percent discount off the retail price of frames, lenses, and contacts.

To obtain the discount, you must show the participating provider your Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska I.D. card and pay for the services at the time care is received.

Considering a more permanent solution to poor sight? QualSight offers a laser vision correction plan that is easily accessible and affordable. Our members receive 40 to 50 percent off the national price for LASIK. Call **888-284-5594** for preferred pricing and to find a provider.

## We Cover H1N1 Vaccines

A vaccine for H1N1, formerly called swine flu, will be available this fall. Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska will cover this vaccine. Certain people—for example, children and adults ages 6 months to 24 years—are encouraged to get the H1N1 shot. Check your benefits to verify vaccine coverage or call Member Services. The numbers are on the back of this issue.

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## OUR COMMUNITY



### Highest Ranked in Member Satisfaction

Nothing matters more to us here at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska than the happiness and well-being of our members. So we were thrilled when J.D. Power and Associates announced us "Highest in Member Satisfaction among Health Plans in the Heartland Region" (Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska).

In the study of health plan members, our members consistently scored us very high in categories such as coverage and benefits, claims processing, provider choice, approval processes, and billing statements.

### Congratulations, Grant Winners!

As a Nebraska-based company, we believe strongly in giving back to our community and supporting programs that are important to you, our members and our neighbors. That's why Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska offers wellness grants every year.

The winning programs focus on areas of major concern in Nebraska, such as childhood obesity, diabetes prevention, and providing health care to the uninsured. This year's winners include the Building Healthy Families program at the University of Nebraska at Kearney and KBAM (Kids, Body, and Mind) at the Hastings Family YMCA, among others.

Visit "Who We Are" at [www.bcbsne.com](http://www.bcbsne.com) to read more about our commitment to Nebraska.

### How to Reach Us

Call Member Services for questions about billing, benefits, or claims: **402-398-3869** (Omaha) or **800-424-7105** (toll-free), Monday to Friday, 7:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. (CST).

**Or write to us at:** 7261 Mercy Road,  
P.O. Box 3248, Omaha, NE 68180-0001

For information about our products and services, call **877-881-2583** (toll-free) or visit [www.bcbsne.com](http://www.bcbsne.com).