



# Healthy MercyCare Health Plans LIVING

*A wellness newsletter for MercyCare members*

Fall 2022



Some of our habits are good while others could be better. Changing habits can be downright hard. Here is a step-by-step plan to help you get started.

## Big picture goal

A big picture goal often takes months or even years to reach. They also have a lot of factors that affect them. Weight loss is a common example. Let's use losing 10 lbs. as an example of a big picture goal.

## Brainstorm

Think about what factors have the greatest impact on your big picture goal. Write down your ideas. Talking with someone you trust can be helpful too.

- Eat fruit or veggies in place of junk food
- Swap empty calories with foods that make me feel fuller for longer, such as protein
- Eat when physically hungry instead of when bored or stressed
- Increase activity

## Pick smaller goals

Habits have a lot of parts. Pick 1-3 items that you want to work on. Focus only on those items for now.

- Swap empty calories with foods that make me feel fuller for longer, such as protein

Smaller is not always easier. Smaller means it builds toward your big picture goal. Make sure to pick smaller goals that are challenging but achievable. These goals usually need more planning.

## SMART goals

SMART stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timely. Use this tool to create a plan that works for you.

**Specific** – This step takes the most time. Be patient. Write down in detail what you plan to do. Focus on the actions you can and will take. Try not to focus on what you don't want to do. Use what, when, where, who, and how to get more specific. Weekday routines and weekend schedules are often different. Have a plan for both. Keep each step as simple as possible.

**What** – What will you be doing?

- Have at least one protein-rich food per snack or meal
  - Proteins that I like and are easy to make: Beans, chicken, tofu, steak, Greek yogurt, plain kefir, low sodium nuts, cottage cheese, quinoa

**When** – At what time of day will the goal occur? Which days of the week or month? Commit these details to a calendar.

- Eating occasions:
  - Breakfast, lunch, midafternoon snack, and dinner
  - Walk a different way at work to avoid the vending machine
- Cooking:
  - Grocery shop Saturday afternoons
  - Make extra for dinner on Sundays and Wednesdays

**Where** – Think about the places this goal will occur.

- Eating:
  - Breakfast, lunch, midafternoon snack: kitchen, work, on-the-go
  - Dinner: kitchen, on-the-go



# Habit building during change (conintued)

**Who** – Talk with friends and family about your goals. Tell them how they can help. There will be times when your motivation is low. Support from people you trust is important.

- When someone else does the shopping, give them a list.
- Ask the person cooking on Sunday night to make two extra servings of protein.

**How** – Picture yourself walking through each step. What other tools are needed? This is a good time to address road blocks. Schedule changes might occur. Have a plan for when they do.

- Tools:
  - A lunchbox and ice packs are needed for work.
  - More storage containers and food storage bags are needed.
- Schedule changes:
  - Review calendars at the beginning of each week and each morning.
  - Keep non-perishable protein rich snacks on hand.
  - Keep frozen items on hand that can be cooked quickly.
  - When needed:
    - Plan for someone else to cook
    - Go out to eat or order take out
    - Pack an extra snack
    - Eat leftovers

**Measurable:** How will you know if you have reached your goal? Pick what you will track and for how long. Decide how you will track your progress before you begin. Think about if you would like to check in with someone along the way. Telling someone how things are going can be helpful.

- Have at least one protein rich food per snack or meal.
- Track each time a protein rich food is eaten or count at the end of the day.
- Review each Sunday morning for a month.
- Text a friend each Sunday morning about progress.

Some days will be better than others. Making habits takes practice. Decide on how much trial and error you are ok with. Pick when to change your approach.

- My goal is to have 28 protein rich eating occasions each week.
- I am okay with how things are going if I reached my goal 80% of the time.
- My plan will be reviewed if there were less than 23 occasions that week.

**Achievable and realistic:** Take a good look at the smaller goals you picked. Be honest with yourself. Review your schedule again. Is this goal something you can realistically do with the time you have? How ready are you to tackle this goal? Do you actually want to do this right now? How confident are you that you can stick with this? Is this smaller goal getting you closer to achieving your big picture goal? Using a scale of 1-10 can be helpful when answering these questions. You may want to rethink your plan or change your goal if you answer lower than a seven.

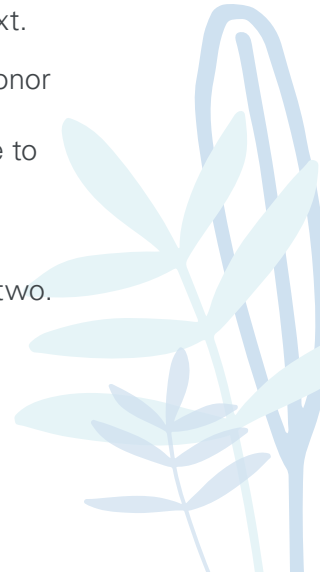
**Timely:** Set weekly, monthly, and three-month check-ins for your smaller goals. Set monthly and three-month check-ins for your big picture goal. Look at how your smaller goal is moving you toward your big picture goal each month.

Don't move on to a new goal until things are stable. A sign of things being stable is you are not putting as much thought into each step. There may be times when you need to take steps backward before you can move forward. Life happens. You may need to stop what you are doing to focus on something else. Be kind to yourself if things don't go as planned.

- Big picture goal: I will lose two or more pounds each month. I will lose six or more pounds after three months.
  - o I will plan an increase in exercise after one month of eating 28 protein-rich snacks at least 80% of the time.
  - o I will plan and practice paying attention to when I am physically hungry next.

**Celebrate:** Decide healthy rewards to honor your successes. Schedule these in your calendar as a reminder of what you have to look forward to.

- The dogs and I will go hiking at my favorite park after month one.
- We will go mini-golfing after month two.



A stylized illustration of a plant with a yellow stem and several green leaves, positioned on the left side of the page.

## Healthy, quick snacks

“Hanger” is a term used when someone is so hungry they become cranky. The change in mood is often a result of blood sugars dropping. Eating meals that have a balance of protein, carbs and fats from whole foods at regular times can reduce these events. Hanger may strike outside of meal times. Having healthy, grab-and-go snack options on hand is important to stabilize energy and mood. Here are a few ideas to help.

### Recipe lists

Plan and make items before hunger strikes. Build a library of recipes that are quick and easy. These recipes should also leave you satisfied after eating. The website and app Pinterest is a great source for ideas.

### Build a routine

The body loves routine. Ghrelin is a hormone responsible for hunger. You can impact when your body releases this hormone by eating at the same times daily. Having food ready to eat at snack and meal times is key. Block off time to prepare food and to eat. This practice can help create consistency.

### Grab-and-go

Convenience usually wins. Set yourself up to make choices you feel good about. Keep healthy, easy to make foods on hand.

- You may need to grocery shop more or buy some items in bulk. Many grocers offer delivery or pick-up. Your order history is usually saved when you order online. This can make reordering the items you use most simple and fast. Impulse purchases are often less likely as well.
- Buying prepared options such as chopped veggies or fruit can be helpful if prep is a barrier. Precut items can cost slightly more but may reduce food waste.

### Healthier gas station snacks:

- Veggies and hummus
- String cheese
- Meat sticks
- Apples
- Bananas
- Hard boiled eggs
- Nuts
- Yogurt
- Pickles

Salt and sugar are often added for flavor. They're also used to make items last longer. Read nutrition labels before buying. Turn the package over to learn what is in your snacks!

Easy snack/meal ideas to buy or make ahead of time:

- Overnight oats with fruit such as blueberries
- Baked chickpeas
- Chopped fruit with yogurt or cottage cheese
- Kale chips
- Steamed vegetables
- Salad in a bag with tuna
- Apple with peanut butter
- Frozen grapes





## Practicing a timed lunch with children

Grown-ups and kids both have a lot on their mind during the back to school season. This can be especially true when sending kids to full-day school for the first time. Timed eating is one stressor many don't think about until school has started.

It doesn't matter if your child is making the change from staying with a parent or grown-up or making the move from a daycare classroom to the "real" classroom. Most kids who have not gone to school before are not innately equipped with the skills to eat a full meal in a timed period. This makes lunchtime and the second half of the school day pretty tough for them, and may lead to some very grumpy little ones in the evening. One way to avoid the stress is to work on timed lunches at home.

Practice lunches can be easy. Start by letting your child know you are going to be practicing a timed lunch and why. This way they know what to expect at their first school lunch. Set a timer for the duration of your child's school lunch period. Be sure to tell them it's okay if they don't finish everything on their first try. Practice makes perfect!

Remember to pack the same lunchbox they will be using at school for your practice lunch if you plan to send lunch from home. This will help teach how to budget time to open and unpack food. It may seem like a small detail, but it lets you make sure your kid knows how to open everything too.

It can be easy to forget all the things children are learning from us as adults. Practicing a new skill with a trusted grown-up can help ease any first-day nerves. Making that first day even brighter!



# Transitioning from pediatric to adult well care

Health and well-being are the focus of childhood wellness visits. Questions from the child and parent(s) are covered as well.

Topics discussed during a wellness visit:

- School readiness
- How is school going?
- Emotional well-being
- Safety measures
- Cognitive development
- Social interactions
- Physical growth
- Preventive care

The provider and a child may meet one-on-one beginning at 13 years old. This helps a child build trust in their doctor. They will learn about and discuss their health. Seeing the doctor can also help kids and teens build self-management skills.

Most patients will switch doctors between 18 and 21 years old. A primary doctor is often picked from family or internal medicine. This transition will look different for each person. Most patients are allowed to make their own health decisions at the age of 16. Parents can help by teaching their teens to take care of their own medical needs.

Changing to an adult primary doctor can help:

- Keep shots up to date
- Have better continuity of care
- Learn to navigate a health care system
- Support the change to adulthood
- Help prevent ER and hospital visits

Call your doctor's office or send a MyChart message to learn more.



# Know where to go

A visit to your primary doctor or an e-visit is often a better option than an urgent care or emergency department (ED) visit for some health problems. We know there are times when you need care right away.

There are other ways for you to get care that take less time and may cost less than visiting the ED. E-visits are a fast way to get care without leaving your home. We want you to get the best care that is easiest for you to access.

This chart will help you know where to go depending on your condition.

Condition	E-visits via MyChart	Urgent Care	Emergency Department
Cut needing stitching, puncture wound		✓	
Ear pain	✓	✓	
Headache, fever	✓	✓	
Minor allergic reactions		✓	
Allergies	✓	✓	
Minor eye irritation		✓	
Minor neck or back pain	✓	✓	
Minor or small burn		✓	
Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, constipation	✓	✓	
Sinus trouble, runny nose, sore/strep throat, cough	✓	✓	
Skin rash, itch or sunburn	✓	✓	
Sprain, pulled muscle	✓	✓	
Suture removal, wound check	✓	✓	
Urinary tract infection	✓	✓	
Broken bone, open fracture			✓
Change in mental status/behavior			✓
Chest or abdominal pain			✓
Difficulty seeing			✓
Head injury, convulsion			✓
Large hives with shortness of breath			✓
Painful urination with fever or back pain			✓
Severe allergic reaction			✓
Severe bleeding, multiple injuries			✓
Severe pain of any kind			✓
Serve shortness of breath, difficulty breathing			✓
Vomiting blood			✓





# Influenza season is starting

The flu shot is the best way to protect you and your family from problems from the flu. Everyone six months and older should get a flu shot. Even people with egg allergies can get the shot too. The best time to receive the vaccine is between September and October. This is normally before the flu has started to spread. The flu usually peaks between February and May. Pregnant women should get the flu shot to help protect their infant as well. The flu shot can reduce missed work and school days, and prevent flu-related deaths.

Children under the age of 5 and people 65 years and older are at the highest risk for problems from the flu. Chronic medical conditions and pregnancy make you high risk too.

## Influenza symptoms

Influenza (flu) can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. The flu is different from a cold. The flu usually comes on suddenly. People who have the flu often feel some or all of these symptoms:

- Fever\*
- Chills
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Body aches
- Headaches
- Tiredness
- Vomiting and diarrhea\*\*

You may be able to spread the flu to someone else before you know you're sick or while you're sick. Symptoms begin about 1-4 days after you've been around someone with the flu. Stay home if you have the flu. You're not as contagious at least 24 hours after your fever breaks. Antiviral drugs may help treat your illness if you see your doctor early. They can shorten the time you are sick.

The flu is different from the COVID-19 virus. Both require you to see a doctor to be tested.

## How to prevent the flu?

An important step in preventing the flu is to get a flu shot each year. When possible, stay away from those who are sick. Cover your coughs and sneezes with your elbow. Wash your hands often. Use hand sanitizer if you cannot wash your hands. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth!

It's never too late to get vaccinated against the flu.

Source:

[cdc.gov/flu/about/keyfacts.htm](https://cdc.gov/flu/about/keyfacts.htm)

\*It's important to note that not everyone with flu will have a fever.

\*\*This usually happens to children.





# Breast cancer screening awareness

Breast cancer is found in a woman in the United States every two minutes. It's the second most common cancer in women here. That means most people know someone that has had it or will have it. Breast cancer is caused when cells grow out of control. The kind of breast cancer depends on what cells turn into cancer. Breast cancer can start in different parts of the breast. Breast cancer can spread outside of the breast as well. It's called metastasizing when it spreads.

The main risk factors for getting breast cancer are being a woman and getting older. Most breast cancer is found in women who are 50 years old or older. Men and younger women can get breast cancer too. Other risk factors include a family history of breast cancer or ovarian cancer, if you have had breast cancer or some non-cancerous breast diseases, have dense breasts, have inherited genetic mutations, are not active, are overweight, are taking hormones, and drinking alcohol.

Here are some warning signs of breast cancer:

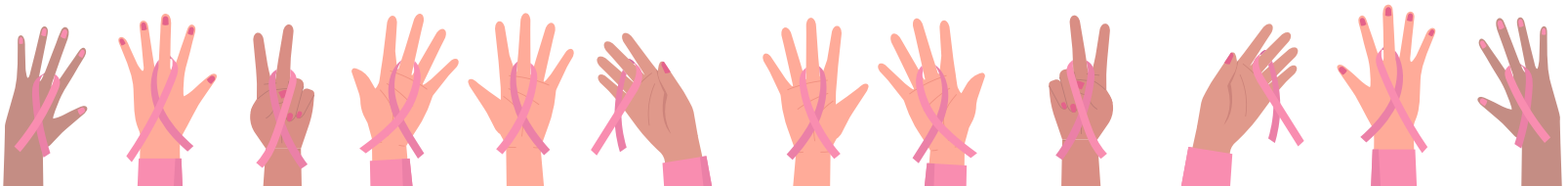
- New lump in the breast or armpit
- Swelling of the breast
- Red or flaky skin on the breast
- Pain in the nipple or the breast
- Discharge other than breast milk, like blood
- Change in size or shape of the breast

Screening for breast cancer can help find it early even though it doesn't prevent cancer. Women who are 50-74 years old and have an average risk of breast cancer should get screened every two years. Anyone at high risk should talk to their doctor about early screenings.

Breast cancer screening tests include:

- Mammograms
- Breast magnetic resonance imaging (MRI)
- Clinical breast exam
- Self-breast exam

Don't forget to schedule your screenings this year.



# Emmi education for members

Mercyhealth and MercyCare Health Plans use a tool called Emmi for health education. This tool is a web-enabled video that is interactive and free to use. The videos cover services important to your health or common health conditions. The videos will guide you through step by step.

## Why is this important?

Some Emmi videos explain what you can expect before, during and after service or procedure. Others talk about short-term or chronic health conditions, like pregnancy or diabetes, and how to take care of yourself. Watching the videos will help you make your own decisions about your health. You may learn something you haven't heard before.

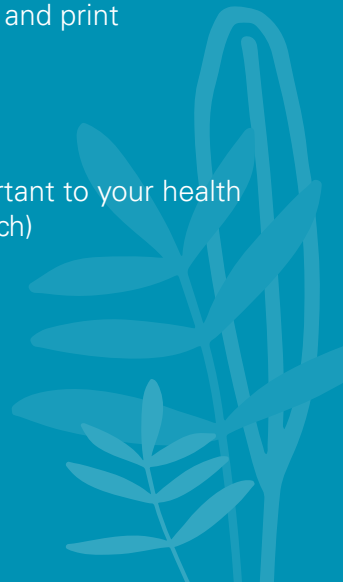
To view these videos, you can self register or have a doctor or case manager assign you a program. Most programs will take 20 minutes to complete. Emmi will allow you to pause the video, take notes and print information.

Here are a few videos that you can view:

- Heart health
- Pregnancy, childbirth, and newborn care
- Pain management options
- Health insurance-related options
- Thinking about quitting smoking
- Cervical cancer screening; Why is this important to your health
- Diabetes (over 10 programs available to watch)
- Why vaccines are important for everyone



Scan the QR code to access the videos or visit [mercycareshelathplans.com](https://mercycareshelathplans.com). Most of the videos can also be found in a language other than English.





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