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APWU Health Plan  
800-222-2798  
www.apwuhp.com



# The Health Connection

## Time to Get Moving

GETTING MORE PHYSICAL EXERCISE REDUCES THE RISK OF DEVELOPING coronary heart disease, stroke, and having a second heart attack in people who have already had one. It lowers the risk of developing type-2 diabetes and high blood pressure, helps reduce blood pressure in people who already have hypertension, lowers total cholesterol and triglycerides, and increases HDL or "good" cholesterol. More physical exercise is a major benefit that helps just about everyone:

- **Older adults**—it can reduce the risk of falling and fracturing bones and can improve the ability to live independently.
- **Parents and children**—parents can help their children by encouraging physical activity. Planning outings and events can encourage the entire family to be active.
- **Teenagers**—regular physical activity improves strength, builds lean muscle, and decreases body fat. Activity builds stronger bones.
- **People trying to manage their weight**—regular physical activity burns calories while preserving lean muscles. It is a key component of any weight loss or weight management effort.
- **People with high blood pressure**—regular physical activity helps lower blood pressure.
- **People with physical disabilities, including arthritis**—it helps people with chronic, disabling conditions improve their stamina and muscle strength. It also can improve psychological well-being and quality of life by increasing the ability to perform the activities of daily living.
- **Everyone under stress, including persons experiencing anxiety or depression**—it improves one's mood, helps relieve depression, and increases feelings of well-being.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention



Experts are finding more and more benefits to adding additional physical activity to our daily lives. The lead article in this issue of The HealthConnection makes the point, with an overview of the many ways exercise can help, from losing and managing weight to helping prevent life threatening diseases. In this edition, we also let you know about the Health Plan's successful Open Season this year, and give you our results.

Good communications with your doctor can make a difference in the quality of care you receive, so we've included some ideas to help. And because more and more people every day are using the Internet to find health and medical information, inside is an article on checks you can make to assure that the sites you are using are credible and reliable. May is High Blood Pressure Education Month—you'll find an article on steps you can take to help prevent high blood pressure.

In this issue we've also included news about a recent study on high blood pressure; and an article on trans fats, a fat that increases the risk of coronary heart disease. And, as a reminder, don't forget to let all your doctors and other providers know APWU Health Plan's new address in Glen Burnie, Maryland. We've listed the address for claims and other correspondence inside.

Happy Spring!

Sincerely,



Director

William J. Kaczor, Jr.

## Health Information on the Web

THE INTERNET HAS BECOME A RESOURCE FOR finding information about healthcare, and the number of available sites grows every day. Many sites provide extremely valuable information, while others are less reliable or downright misleading. The National Institutes of Health suggests some things you should consider when you visit healthcare websites.

1. Who runs the site? You should be able to find this easily.
2. Who pays for the site? It costs money to run a website. Know how the site pays for its existence. A ".gov" site denotes a Government-sponsored site. Does the site sell advertising, and if so, to whom? The source of funding can affect the content.
3. What is the purpose of the site? Many sites have an "About This Site" link, which can help you evaluate the trustworthiness of the information.
4. Where does the information come from? If the organization in charge of the site did not create the information, the original source should be clearly labeled.
5. What is the basis of the information? Medical facts and figures should have references. Opinions or advice should be clearly set apart from "evidence-based" results.
6. How is the information selected? Is there an editorial board, do people with excellent professional

and scientific qualifications review the material?

7. How current is the information? The most recent update/review should be posted.
8. How does the site choose links to other sites? Some link to any site that asks or pays; others link only to those that have met certain criteria.
9. What information about you does the site collect, and why? Many health websites ask you to "subscribe" or become a member. This may be so they can collect a user fee or select information about you that is relevant to your concerns. In all cases, this gives personal information about you. Credible sites asking for this kind of information should tell you exactly what they will and will not do with it. Be sure you read and understand any privacy policy on the site.
10. How does the site manage interactions with visitors? There should always be a way to contact the site owner if you have problems, questions or feedback. If there are chat rooms or online discussions, it should tell you the terms of using the service, such as, is it moderated, by whom, and why.

We have included reliable health site links on the Health Care and Patient Safety Tips page of the APWU Health Plan's website at [www.apwuhp.com](http://www.apwuhp.com).

### Health Plan Continues to Grow

APWU Health Plan had a successful Open Season, enrolling almost six thousand new members in 2006. Following is an overview of 2006 Open Season enrollment results:

	High Option	Consumer Driven Option	Total
Retirees	1,201	153	1,354
Associates	1,003	910	1,913
Postal	1,850	467	<u>2,317</u>
<b>Total</b>			<b>5,584</b>

Thanks to our new members for choosing the Health Plan this year, and to our current members for staying with us. We will be working hard to ensure your complete satisfaction with APWU Health Plan.

## Lifestyle Changes Help Lower Blood Pressure

A recent study conducted by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute shows that people with elevated blood pressure substantially reduce rates of high blood pressure if they make lifestyle changes and maintain them for a year and a half.

In the study, men and women with either prehypertension or hypertension (high blood pressure) who were not taking medication for blood pressure were assigned to groups. Those in two of the groups received counseling, increased their physical activity, and adopted a healthy diet. One of the groups additionally received guidance on and implemented the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) diet, a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, and low-fat dairy products and low in saturated, total fat and cholesterol. A third group served as a control, and received limited guidance.

More than one third of those in the study had high blood pressure (hypertension) at the beginning of the study. Of these, sixty-two percent in the group with DASH guidance, and sixty percent in the intervention group without DASH successfully had their blood pressure under control after 18 months. Only 37 percent of the control group with hypertension had their blood pressure under control at the end of the study.



## Pressure Points

MORE THAN 65 MILLION AMERICAN ADULTS—1 IN 3—HAVE HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE. HIGH BLOOD pressure is a factor in 67 percent of heart attacks and 77 percent of strokes in the U.S.

When blood pressure stays high over time, it's called high blood pressure, or hypertension. Blood pressure is considered high if the level is 140/90 or higher. Normal blood pressure is less than 120/80. A reading of 120-139 over 80-89 is "prehypertension", an indication that you don't have high blood pressure now but are likely to develop it in the future.

Certain factors increase your risk of high blood pressure, and can be controlled: being overweight or obese, being physically inactive, high salt and sodium intake, low potassium intake (due to not eating enough fruits and vegetables), excessive alcohol consumption, and diabetes.

The National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute of the National Institutes of Health recommends the following:

- Follow a healthy eating pattern that emphasizes fruits, vegetables, and lowfat dairy foods and is low in saturated fat, total fat, and cholesterol. Include whole grains, poultry, fish, and nuts and reduce amounts of fats, red meats, sweets, and sugared beverages.
- Reduce salt and sodium in your diet.
- Maintain a healthy weight. If you are overweight or obese, lose weight.
- Be physically active.
- Limit alcohol intake.

If lifestyle changes don't bring your blood pressure into normal ranges, you may need medications.

### New Address

**REMINDER:** APWU Health Plan has relocated to Glen Burnie, MD. Be sure to let your doctors and other providers know our new address on any visits that you make.

**New Address for Claims:**  
American Postal Workers Union Health Plan  
P.O. Box 1358  
Glen Burnie, MD 21060-1358

**All other correspondence:**  
American Postal Workers Union Health Plan  
799 Cromwell Park Drive, Suites K-Z  
Glen Burnie, MD 21061

The main telephone number for claims and customer service has not changed—it is 1-800/222-2798.

What's **New**

## Facts About Trans Fats

Beginning in January, 2006, the U. S. Food and Drug Administration required that trans fat be listed on food labels. Scientific evidence has shown that saturated fat, trans fat, and dietary cholesterol raise "bad cholesterol" levels, which increases the risk of coronary heart disease. Saturated fat and dietary cholesterol have been listed on the Nutritional Facts label since 1993. Now, you'll find all three on food labels.

Trans fat is made when manufacturers add hydrogen to vegetable oil. This process is called hydrogenation, and increases the shelf life and flavor stability of foods that contain these fats. Unlike other fats, the majority of trans fat is formed when food manufacturers turn liquid oils into solid fats like shortening and hard margarine. Trans fats can be found in vegetable shortenings, some margarines, crackers, cookies, snack foods, and other foods made with or fried in partially hydrogenated oils.

The FDA recommends checking the Nutrition Facts panel and choosing foods lower in saturated fat, trans fats and cholesterol.



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# Making Connections

BEING AN ACTIVE PART OF YOUR HEALTHCARE team and communicating clearly will help your doctors help you receive the highest quality of care.

**What to tell your doctor** – Tell your doctor the most important things first so you won't get off-track: your reason for the visit, a clear statement of your symptoms or problems, when they happened and for how long. Having written records of your health history will help your doctor. The list should include any operations you have had, any treatments or tests you have taken, and any medicines you are taking. If you see several doctors, all may not know your full medical history and a written record will keep the record straight. Tell your doctor about your family's history of diseases and conditions. Be honest about your health and lifestyle. Withholding information can hurt your medical care.

**Ask questions** – It's good to write your questions down before you arrive. Take a friend or relative with you, and tell them what role you want them to play. Ask the most important questions first. Ask about any fears or concerns. If your doctor tells you something you

don't understand, ask for definitions, or have the doctor explain it in a different way. No question is unimportant or dumb. Write down the answers to the questions. Ask if you can follow-up if you have questions later, and whether a telephone call or e-mail is the best way to communicate.

**Follow-up** – If you have other questions, call the doctor. Follow your doctor's directions about ordering any medications and take them as long as prescribed. Make appointments for any tests or specialists. If you don't hear from your doctor about test results, call. If you don't understand the results, ask what they mean.

Source: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ)

Only rely on APWU Health Plan's Brochure (RI 71-004) as the official statement of benefits, limitations and exclusions.

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