APWU HEALTH PLAN

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6 myths and facts about the flu shot

Each year, thousands of people in the United States are hospitalized with complications of the flu. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), during the 2021–2022 influenza season, influenza was associated with nine million illnesses, four million medical visits, 10,000 hospitalizations, and 5,000 deaths.

The most effective step you can take to avoid the flu is to get a shot every year. Unfortunately, there is no shortage of misinformation about flu shots. Here are five common myths and facts about the vaccine.

Myth: The flu is just a bad cold, so you don't need to get a shot.

Fact: The flu is a severe respiratory illness that easily spreads when an infected person coughs or sneezes. It can lead to serious complications or even death. People with weak immune systems are particularly at risk for complications.

Myth: The flu shot can give you the flu.

Fact: It's impossible to get influenza from a flu shot because it doesn't contain a live virus. However, you may experience mild soreness or swelling at the injection site. Feeling slightly achy or feverish for a day or so after an injection is a normal reaction of your immune system to the vaccine. It just means the shot is working.

It can take up to two weeks for your body to develop full protection from the vaccine, so it's possible to become infected during that time.

Myth: A flu shot can cause serious side effects.

Fact: The flu vaccine is very safe, and severe side effects are extremely rare.

Myth: If you're healthy, you don't need a flu shot.

Fact: Anyone can get the flu, even healthy people. The strains of the influenza virus that circulate change each year, so everyone age six months and older should get an annual vaccine.

Myth: The flu shot doesn't work very well.

Fact: While a flu shot can't guarantee you won't get the flu, it significantly reduces your risk and protects you from several of the most common types of influenza.

Myth: If you're pregnant, you shouldn't get a flu shot.

Fact: Pregnant patients should get a flu shot since pregnancy can weaken the immune system. A flu shot is safe at any stage of pregnancy.

Myths and Facts about the Flu Shot:
https://www.lung.org/blog/myths-and-facts-about-the-flu-shot

2022–2023 U.S. Flu Season: Preliminary In-season Burden Estimates:
https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/burden/preliminary-in-season-estimates.htm

Flu Shots Are Free! *

* Flu shots are 100% covered when you stay in-network for High Option members. Visit our website at www.apwuhp.com for more information!



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Postal Service Health Benefits (PSHB)



The Postal Service Reform Act of 2022 (PSRA) was signed into law in April 2022. Since then, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), in conjunction with the Postal Service, has been working to implement the new Postal Service Health Benefits (PSHB) Program, as required under the new law.

PSHB is a new, separate program within the Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) Program and will be administered by OPM. Coverage under the PSHB Program will be effective January 1, 2025.

If you are a **postal** employee or retiree, you are required to select a health insurance plan in the PSHB Program during the 2024 Open Season period, which will run from November 11, 2024, to December 9, 2024. If you do not actively select a PSHB plan, you will be automatically enrolled in a comparable PSHB plan.

PSHB plan options and premium information will be available in fall 2024. Information on how and where to enroll will be available as we approach the 2024 Open Season.

To learn more about the PSHB program visit our website at www.apwuhp.com.

If you are a **federal** employee or retiree, no action is needed. You will stay enrolled in the High Option.

How to help kids overcome a fear of needles

Vaccines are an essential part of well-child care. In addition to being safe, vaccines have eradicated many diseases and continue to prevent other medical conditions from becoming life threatening.

For many children, the thought of getting a shot causes anxiety. If your child is afraid of needles, getting the recommended immunizations can be challenging. Here are some tips on helping kids overcome a fear of needles.

Be honest. Explain why your child is getting a shot today and acknowledge their fear. Let them know it might hurt for moment but will be over before they know it. Make it clear that shots help kids stay healthy.

Read books to your child. Ask a librarian at your local public library to recommend children's books about going to the doctor and overcoming fear.

Talk to your pediatrician. Doctors are used to helping children deal with a fear of needles and can help you and your child get through the appointment.

Stay calm. Kids often take cues from parents, so remaining calm can help ease your child's anxiety. When the vaccine is being administered, hold your child's hand or allow your child to sit in your lap.

Offer a distraction. A favorite stuffed animal, toy, or book lets your child focus on something other than the shot.

Practice deep breathing. Taking slow, deliberate breaths has a calming effect on the brain. Encourage your child to take a deep breath before the shot and then slowly exhale. Turn it into a game by using a pinwheel.

Reward your child. After the visit, thank your child for being brave and celebrate with a visit to a playground or park.



Child immunizations and vaccines as recommended by the CDC are covered at 100% when you stay in-network.

Taking Fear and Pain out of Needles—for Your Child and You
https://www.healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/immunizations/Pages/managing-your-childs-pain-while-getting-a-shot.aspx

Losing weight can help lower your blood pressure

Tens of millions of adults in the United States live with high blood pressure, but only about half have it under control. High blood pressure—or hypertension—can damage your blood vessels and lead to serious health problems, including heart attack, stroke, kidney disease, and eye disease.

Losing weight is one of the most effective ways to lower your blood pressure. Even dropping just 10 pounds can make a big difference.

Reduce the salt in your diet

Limiting your intake of high-sodium foods and eating a healthy diet can help you lose weight. It's also important to watch your portion sizes and lower the number of calories you consume.

According to the American Heart Association, common foods that often contain high amounts of sodium include:

- Breads and rolls
- Cold cuts and cured meats
- Pizza
- Poultry
- Soups
- Sandwiches

If you're trying to lower your blood pressure, eat a wholesome, low-sodium diet that focuses on healthy foods, like fruits and vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, and low-fat dairy.

Move more, sit less

Getting the recommended amount of physical activity can also help you lose weight and keep it off. While cardiovascular activities like biking and walking are effective for weight loss, housecleaning, dancing to your favorite music, and gardening count as exercise too. Any activity that gets you moving and raises your heart rate is good for your health.

Most adults should try to get 30 minutes of moderate aerobic activity per day at least five days a week. But you don't have to exercise for 30 minutes at a time. If you're busy at work, try taking three 10-minute brisk walks over the course of a day.

Experts also recommend that you get two sessions of strength training each week because maintaining healthy muscle mass can help you reduce body fat, burn calories more efficiently, and control your weight.

Haven't been active for a while?

Talk to your doctor about what type of activities are right for you and how many calories you need for weight loss.

High Blood Pressure
https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/high-blood-pressure

Statin alternative lowers cholesterol and reduces heart attack risk

According to a study published in the New England Journal of Medicine, a cholesterol-lowering drug called bempedoic acid has been shown to lower low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol and reduce the risk for heart attack and stroke in patients who can't tolerate statins.

Researchers emphasized that patients shouldn't take bempedoic acid instead of statins, which were approved for commercial use in the United States in 1987 and are meant to be taken for the rest of your life. Statins are clearly more effective drugs for people who can tolerate them.

However, for those who can't tolerate a high enough dose of statins to lower their cholesterol levels, bempedoic acid may offer a solution.

Lowering your cholesterol levels can reduce the risk of heart attack and stroke

As LDL cholesterol builds up in the walls of blood vessels, it can create blockages that raise the risk of heart attack and stroke. Statins lower cholesterol levels in the blood and are the standard treatment for helping to prevent complications of heart disease.

Unfortunately, some people are unable to tolerate statins at recommended doses because of troublesome side effects, including muscle pain, headaches, and weakness.

Bempedoic acid reduces LDL cholesterol by up to 25%

In 2020, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved bempedoic acid, sold under the brand name NEXLETOL, as an additional treatment in patients who have high cholesterol despite using statins. Researchers followed participants for an average of more than three years and found that bempedoic acid reduced heart attacks by 23%.

As the first drug created specifically for statin-intolerant patients, bempedoic acid reduces LDL cholesterol by 20 to 25%, while patients on statins typically achieve reductions of 40 to 50%.

However, for people who can't tolerate statins, bempedoic acid can significantly reduce the risk of serious cardiac events.

Cleveland Clinic-led Trial Shows that the First Drug Designed for Statin-Intolerant Patients Reduces Serious Cardiovascular Events
https://newsroom.clevelandclinic.org/2023/03/04/cleveland-clinic-led-trial-shows-that-the-first-drug-designed-for-statin-intolerant-patients-reduces-serious-cardiovascular-events/

5 reasons to get a colonoscopy

Colorectal cancer is one of the few cancers that can be prevented—and getting a colonoscopy is the most effective way to prevent, diagnose, and treat the condition. No other screening option is as thorough and comprehensive.

One in every 20 Americans will develop colorectal cancer, so it's vital to be screened. For healthy people with an average risk of developing the disease, the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recommends screening for colorectal cancer starting at age 45 and continuing until age 75.

What is a colonoscopy?

A colonoscopy is an examination of the lining of the rectum and colon, where colorectal cancer usually starts. During the procedure, your doctor uses a narrow, flexible tube equipped with a camera at the end to evaluate the lower part of the digestive system and look for precancerous growths called polyps.

Why you should schedule a colonoscopy

Here are five reasons to get this recommended preventive screening:

1. **The prep is not that bad.** A colonoscopy is most effective when you prepare as directed. The steps required to prep your digestive system may involve adjusting your diet before the procedure and taking a laxative. However, new kits to clean your system may make it easier. Talk to your healthcare provider about your prep options.

2. **A colonoscopy is painless.** You'll be given anesthesia before the procedure, so you won't feel a thing. If your doctor finds any polyps, they can be removed before they become cancer.

3. **The procedure is quick.** If you're healthy and without symptoms, a colonoscopy can take as little as 15 minutes. However, your doctor will recommend you take the whole day off from work to recover from the anesthesia.

4. **A colonoscopy is the most effective option for colorectal cancer screening.** While there are other screening methods for colorectal cancer, including flexible sigmoidoscopy, if your doctor finds a polyp or suspicious mass, you will need a follow-up colonoscopy.

   At-home stool screening tests include fecal immunochemical tests (FIT) and fecal DNA tests like Cologuard®. Some people may choose to do an at-home test to avoid the colonoscopy prep, but if the test detects cancer, you'll need a colonoscopy.

   Also, if the results of your colonoscopy are normal, you won't need another one for 10 years. Some other methods must be done every five years.

5. **A screening could save your life.** Removing cancer-causing polyps during a colonoscopy can reduce the chance of death from colorectal cancer by 53%.

If you're 45 or older, talk to your doctor about scheduling a colonoscopy.

APWU Health Plan offers 100% coverage for colorectal cancer screenings starting at age 45, when you see a network provider.

Colonoscopy
https://www.cancer.org/cancer/diagnosis-staging/tests/endoscopy/colonoscopy.html

Have you received emergency care for mental health or substance use?

Schedule an appointment with your primary care doctor within 30 days

To help protect your health and safety, Health Plan members who receive treatment in the emergency department or hospital for mental health or substance use must have a follow-up appointment with a primary care doctor within 30 days.

Follow-up appointments give your doctor a chance to:

- Find out why you needed emergency care
- Review the results of any tests that were performed
- Evaluate any potential medication changes
- Check your vital signs or repeat blood work
- Ensure there aren't any complications

Need help finding a primary care doctor?

Visit your member website at apwuhp.com and select Log In or Register to access your member portal. Or, select See Directory under Are my doctors in the network? on the home page to access the provider directory for your plan.

For additional assistance, contact the Health Plan:

1-800-222-2798
1-800-622-2511 (TTY)
8:30 a.m. – 6:30 p.m. ET
Monday – Friday

Diabetes diet: Foods to eat and foods to avoid

If you have type 2 diabetes, a healthy eating plan can help you control your blood sugar, manage your weight, and keep your blood pressure in check. Consuming extra calories and carbohydrates causes your blood sugar levels to rise, which may lead to long-term damage to your nerves, kidneys, and heart. Making healthy food choices is an effective way to keep your blood sugar levels in a safe range.

How to create a healthy eating plan

A diabetes diet focuses on fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and other nutritious foods that are high in dietary fiber, which can help control your blood sugar levels. At the same time, it's important to avoid foods high in saturated fat and cholesterol, including high-fat dairy products and animal proteins, such as beef, hot dogs, sausage, bacon, and liver.

What to eat

- Fruits and vegetables—a whole piece of fruit is better for you than juice
- High-fiber, whole grain breads and cereals
- Steel-cut or rolled oats
- Proteins such as eggs, beans, low-fat dairy, and unsweetened yogurt
- Fish, shellfish, chicken, and turkey
- Healthy fats from nuts, olive oil, fish oils, flax seeds, and avocados

What to avoid

- Packaged and fast foods
- Foods high in salt
- Processed meat and red meat
- Baked goods and chips
- White bread, refined pasta, and white rice
- Sugary cereals
- High-sugar desserts and sweets
- Soda and candy



Eat at regularly set times

Eating healthy meals at regular times helps your body use insulin more effectively. Also, be sure to eat portion sizes that are right for your weight and activity level.

To follow a healthy eating plan, the American Diabetes Association recommends that you:

- Fill half of your plate with non-starchy vegetables, such as spinach, carrots, and tomatoes.
- Fill a quarter of your plate with chicken, salmon, pork, or another lean protein.
- Fill the last quarter with a healthy carbohydrate, such as brown rice, or a starchy vegetable like green peas.
- Include healthy fats in small amounts.
- Add a serving of fruit or dairy.
- Drink water, unsweetened tea, or coffee.

Type 2 diabetes is usually preventable and in some cases can even be reversed. Whether you're trying to prevent diabetes or control your blood sugar levels, paying attention to your food choices and adopting a healthy eating plan can help lower your blood pressure and cholesterol levels, improve your mood, and enhance your sense of well-being.

Diabetes diet: Create your healthy-eating plan
https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/diabetes/in-depth/diabetes-diet/art-20044295

Prenatal care FAQs

Prenatal care is the healthcare you receive when you're pregnant. Regular prenatal visits can help you have a healthy pregnancy, so be sure to make an appointment with a healthcare provider as soon as you think you may be pregnant.

Who can you go to for prenatal care?

You can get prenatal care from different kinds of providers, including an obstetrician/gynecologist (OB/GYN). An OB/GYN is a medical doctor who specializes in taking care of pregnant patients and delivering babies.

Other providers of prenatal care include family practice doctors, certified nurse-midwives, family nurse practitioners, and maternal-fetal medicine specialists.

What is a typical schedule for prenatal visits?

The first prenatal care appointment usually takes place four to eight weeks into a pregnancy. In general, you can plan on having appointments as follows:

Weeks 4 to 28: One checkup every month

Weeks 28 to 36: One checkup every two weeks

Weeks 36 to 41: One checkup every week

Feel free to bring your spouse, partner, a friend, or family member to your prenatal checkups.

If you have a pre-existing medical condition or a complication during your pregnancy, you may need more frequent visits.

How should you prepare for your first prenatal care checkup?

Your first prenatal visit usually involves a physical exam, pelvic exam and Pap test, weight and height checks, blood and urine tests, blood pressure check, and an ultrasound to confirm that you're pregnant.

Be ready to talk with your provider about:

- Any health conditions you have
- Your family health history
- Medicines you take, including prescriptions and over-the-counter medications, vitamins, supplements, and herbal products
- Whether you have been pregnant before or have had any pregnancy complications, including a premature baby, miscarriage, or stillbirth
- Your options for labor and delivery
- Your use of alcohol or tobacco
- Symptoms of stress or anxiety
- Your safety at home and at work

You'll also have a chance to ask questions.

Enroll in Healthy Pregnancies, Healthy Babies®

As a High Option member, this program supports you throughout your pregnancy and in the weeks following your baby's birth. You can speak to a maternity specialist by phone and receive education about delivery options, birthing class, maternity benefits, and more.

For more information:
Visit apwuhp.com
Select **Members**
Select **Health Management Programs**

Or call:
1-800-222-2798
1-800-622-2511 (TTY)
8:30 a.m. – 6:30 p.m. ET (Monday – Friday)

Prenatal care checkups
https://www.marchofdimes.org/find-support/topics/planning-baby/prenatal-care-checkups

A step-by-step guide for creating an asthma action plan

Everyone with asthma should have an asthma action plan. In addition to spelling out what you need to do if you experience symptoms, a plan can help protect you from an asthma attack.

What is an asthma action plan?

An asthma action plan is a written document that explains how to treat your condition, what to do if your symptoms get worse, what to do before you exercise, and steps to take if you need medical care.

How to create your plan

Here's a step-by-step guide for creating your own asthma action plan:

Step 1: Make an appointment with your doctor

If you don't have a plan, work with your doctor to create one as soon as possible. Your plan should include the following information:

- Your name
- Doctor's name and phone number
- Emergency contact's name and phone number
- Type of asthma and its severity
- Asthma triggers, such as pets, smoke, or exercise
- Peak flow meter readings
- List of medications you take

For each medicine you take, write down:

- What it's called and why you need it
- When to take it and how much to take
- How soon to expect relief
- Potential side effects
- How to use your inhaler or nebulizer device

Step 2: Know your asthma color zone

An asthma action plan is divided into three color-coded zones:

Green zone: Your symptoms are under control, and you are taking steps to avoid your asthma triggers. You're prepared to use a controller medication to prevent symptoms.

Yellow zone: If you experience symptoms, you know exactly what to do and what medications to take.

Red zone: Seek medical care immediately. Contact your doctor. Take the medications your doctor has prescribed for breathing difficulty and other asthma-related symptoms.

Step 3: Share your plan

Give your asthma action plan to anyone who needs it. If your child has asthma, give a copy of the plan to teachers, coaches, and caregivers.

Step 4: Review your plan

Go over the details of your plan with your doctor at every appointment and follow-up visit. You may need to make changes to your plan as your asthma improves or worsens.

Download a printable asthma action plan template

Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) at www.cdc.gov/asthma/actionplan.html to download a free, printable asthma action plan for adults.



Asthma Action Plan
https://allergyasthmanetwork.org/what-is-asthma/asthma-action-plan/

How to avoid back pain when lifting a heavy object

Lifting heavy objects the wrong way is one of the most common causes of lower back pain. When you lift with your back instead of your legs, it places unnecessary force on your lower spine, which can lead to back and muscle strain. If you twist at the waist while lifting, you may damage the muscles and ligaments in your lower back, leading to discomfort and pain.

In some cases, the pressure on the discs in your lower back can cause one to become herniated. Symptoms of a herniated disc include pain and inflammation in the lower back and tingling or numbness in the leg or foot.

The good news is that it's easy to prevent lower back pain when you lift something heavy.

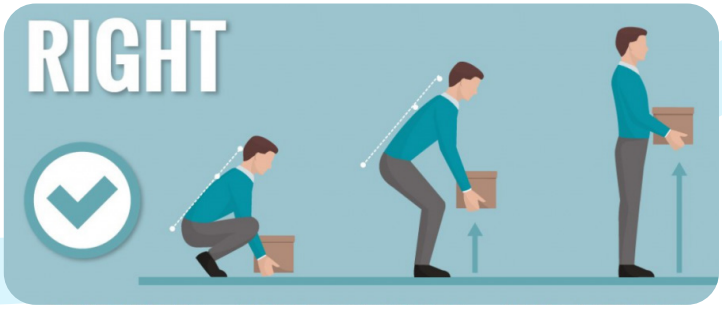
Keep your lower back safe by practicing proper lifting techniques

Proper lifting techniques include engaging your core muscles, keeping your back straight, bending your knees and hips, and lifting with your legs instead of your back.

To keep your lower back safe:

1. **Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart and toes pointed slightly outward.** In addition to keeping you stable, this position will allow your legs to do most of the lifting.
2. **Bend at your knees and squat down near the object.** Never bend at your waist to pick up a heavy object.
3. **Hold the object close to your body and tighten your abdominal muscles.** This helps to spread the load across different parts of your spine.
4. **Make sure your spine is in a neutral position.** Your lower back should be curved slightly toward the front of your body.
5. **Lift with your legs.** The front of your thighs and buttocks generally provide most of the power. Your leg muscles are very powerful and can lift more weight than your back can.

Proper lifting techniques
https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/multimedia/back-pain/sls-20076866





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TOGETHER.
BETTER HEALTH.

We want to hear from you!

*In an effort to improve our future products and services, we are asking for 5 minutes of your time to provide us feedback on your experiences with the APWU Health Plan. To get started just scan the QR code or visit this link: **https://hcsurvey.apwuhp.com***

Manage your High Option health plan with your member portal.

Download the myapwuhp app.

The myapwuhp app is another tool that can help you manage your health plan. See your claims, year-to-date information, prescriptions, and more.

You must register for the member portal in order to use the secure app.

Available on the App Store

GET IT ON Google Play

