

Healthy You



Health and wellness information from PacificSource Medicare



SUMMER 2024

In this issue: >

- Your mental health matters!
- Standing up to Substance Use Disorder
- How pets help people prosper
- Prescriptions by mail
- And more

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October 1 – March 31:

8 a.m. – 8 p.m., seven days a week

April 1 – September 30:

8 a.m. – 8 p.m., Monday – Friday

**“Mental health is not a destination, but a process.
It’s about how you drive, not where you’re going.”**

— Noam Shpancer



Healthy You

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Spotlight on mental health



Cultivating emotional wellness

We get it: Between politics, pandemics, and personal problems, life can be...a lot. So in this issue we're taking a thoughtful look at mental health—how to maintain and even improve it as time goes by.

To start you off, we've compiled some super-simple tips for keeping your mind healthy and happy.

9 tips for a more resilient you





Stay connected



This one tops our list for a reason: Your relationships with friends and family can have a huge impact on mental wellness. When you're feeling down, talking to someone you trust can do wonders for your mood. Make time to be with friends or enjoy a meal with family. Call someone you haven't spoken with for a while—it may boost their mental health as well as yours.

Get moving



When you exercise, your brain releases chemicals that make you feel happier and less stressed. You don't need to run a marathon—even going for a walk or playing outside can help your mood.

Eat well



Healthy, natural foods give our brains the fuel they need to work their best. Aim for a balanced diet that features fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins. And don't forget to stay hydrated—your brain is mostly water!

Sleep well



When you don't sleep enough, you can feel cranky, anxious, or sad. Make it a practice to go to bed and wake up at the same time every day, and aim for the right amount of "quality" sleep (around 7-8 hours daily for people age 65+).

Manage stress



We can all get overwhelmed at times, so it's important to find healthy ways to deal with it. Try deep breathing exercises, meditation, or doing something you enjoy, like drawing or listening to music. And ask for help when you're stressed—talking to a friend or counselor can make a huge difference.

Have goals



Setting and working toward a goal can give you a sense of purpose and accomplishment. Start small: Maybe take up a game (pickleball, anyone?) or learn a new skill—and break your goal down into manageable chunks. That lets you notice your progress along the way.

Take breaks



Give your brain a rest when it needs it, with a walk in nature, a hot bath—whatever calms and restores you. Giving yourself permission to take breaks can actually help you be more productive in the long run.

Stay positive



Try to focus on the happier aspects of your life, even when things are tough. Keeping a gratitude journal can help you notice and appreciate the good things that happen every day. And remember—it's okay to make mistakes. Nobody's perfect!

Get help if you need it



Anxiety, depression, substance use disorder: These are serious issues. So remember that if you're struggling with your mental health, help is available. A good first step is to talk with your primary care doctor about what you're going through.

Resources:



[Cleveland Clinic—Sleep: How Much You Need and Its 4 Stages](#)

[NIH: The value of maintaining social connections for mental health in older people](#)

[USCF: Maintaining Wellness for Older Adults and Caregivers](#)

Substance Use Disorder: Are you at risk?



Addiction can happen to anyone. Here are some risk factors.

If you're like most adults, you have regular screenings for things like cancer, heart disease, diabetes, and other conditions. One serious condition overlooked by many screenings: Substance Use Disorder (SUD).

Let's be clear: SUD is not a character flaw but a medical condition, where the use of substances like alcohol or drugs causes problems. SUD can affect anyone, regardless of age. In fact, there are additional risk factors for seniors.

"As you get older, there are physiological changes and your brain becomes much more sensitive. Your tolerance goes down as your body changes. It can put you at risk," said Dr. Benjamin Han, a California geriatrician interviewed for a 2023 *New York Times* story.



"Although most people with substance use problems don't die from overdoses, the health consequences can be severe: injuries from falls and accidents, accelerated cognitive decline, cancers, heart and liver disease and kidney failure."

New York Times, July 9, 2023



A problem on the rise

The substance most likely to cause problems: Alcohol. The *Times* reports that in a 2022 study among more than 900,000 Medicare beneficiaries who reported a substance use disorder or dependence, more than 87 percent abused alcohol. And alcohol accounted for 11,616 deaths among seniors in 2020, an 18 percent increase over the previous year.

Troublingly, drug-related fatalities have risen among seniors. From 2002 to 2021, the rate of overdose deaths quadrupled to 12 per 100,000, reported *JAMA Psychiatry* in March, using data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Given the scope and severity of SUD, you're wise to be on the lookout for it in your own life.

Risk factors: How many do you have?



History

Reflect on your past relationship with substances. If you've struggled at some point, even years ago, it's relevant. Awareness of personal history is a good first step in gauging risk.



Mental health

If you're facing depression, anxiety, or similar issues, be aware there's a link between mental health and substance use.



Loneliness

Are you frequently feeling alone or isolated? These emotions can raise your risk. Staying connected with friends, family, or social groups can be a protective factor.



Chronic pain

While managing pain is important, frequent use of prescription painkillers, if not closely watched, can raise your risk for dependence.



Boredom

If you're experiencing an absence of meaning or purpose, substances can be used to fill a void.



Preventing SUD: Self-awareness is key

Want to increase your likelihood of avoiding SUD?
Start here:



Communication

Have an ongoing dialogue with your doctor. Discuss any concerns, changes in health, or medications. Get regular check-ups to address potential risk factors.



Education

Understand the effects of medications prescribed for pain or other health issues. Knowing the risks and potential side effects enables better decisions. If you use alcohol or cannabis, educate yourself about what they do to your brain and your body.



Socialization

Try being a people person (even you introverts). Join a club. Start a new hobby—online or in person. Social engagement protects against loneliness and isolation.



Lifestyle

Do things that promote physical and mental well-being, like regular exercise.



Coping skills

Seek out healthier ways to cope with boredom, stress, or pain. Going outside, meditating, or immersing yourself in art or music can do the trick.



Now that you know more about the risk factors for SUD, you'll be able to keep an eye out for them—and keep yourself safe down the road.

*If you think you have Substance Use Disorder, talk with your doctor or another healthcare provider. You can also call the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's National Helpline: **800-662-HELP (4357)**.*

References: [NY Times: Substance Abuse Is Climbing Among Seniors](#)
[Substance Abuse & Seniors: How Addiction Impacts Older Adults Differently](#)
[Science Direct: Substance Use Disorders in Later Life](#)
[National Institute on Drug Abuse](#)



Paw-sitive impact: How owning a pet can help your mental health



There's something about the bond between people and animals. A loyal dog, a charismatic cat—even an exotic reptile—can add a rich, new dimension to your life. In fact, research shows that caring for a pet can help build mental resilience.

Pets give unconditional love and companionship. No matter how tough your day has been, a pet can lift your spirits with a wagging tail or contented purr. Their company can help ease feelings of loneliness, and bring a sense of purpose and belonging.

Pets add structure and routine to your life. From feeding and grooming to walking and playing, your pet depends on you for their daily needs. These routines can help distract you from negative thoughts, and provide a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction.

Interacting with pets is therapeutic. The simple act of petting a dog or cat can release feel-good hormones, such as oxytocin and serotonin, which reduce stress and anxiety. Additionally, the presence of a pet can lower levels of cortisol, fostering a sense of calm and relaxation.

Pets can help you be more active. Whether it's going for a walk with your dog or playing fetch in the yard, owning a pet often means engaging in physical activity. Regular exercise has been shown to improve mental well-being, reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety.

Pets lend emotional support. They are often excellent listeners, offering non-judgmental companionship, allowing us to express our thoughts and feelings freely without fear of rejection or criticism.

Beyond these day-to-day benefits, owning a pet can foster responsibility and empathy. Taking care of another living being teaches us valuable skills, such as compassion, patience, and empathy, which can translate into better relationships with others and improved self-esteem.



If you're looking for a fun, natural way to boost your mental health, consider welcoming an animal into your life.





Prescriptions by mail: a win/win



Save money, save time—what's not to like?

With home delivery by CVS Caremark,[®] you'll enjoy:

- \$0 copay on preferred generic (Tier 1) and select care drugs (Tier 6)
- 90-day supply for 60-day cost for generic (Tier 2) and preferred brand (Tier 3)
- Free shipping and optional auto-refills



Getting started is easy:

Just visit the [Pharmacy](#) page at our website.

You can also sign up through [InTouch](#) by choosing "Caremark Online Rx" from the **Tools** menu.

Fraud alert: Urinary catheter scam



Heads up: Scammers have been targeting Medicare enrollees with offers of free services, medical equipment, or gift cards upon confirming their personal information and eligibility for Medicare services.

Once scammers obtain your data, they bill Medicare for unnecessary urinary catheters that may or may not actually be sent to you.

You can report suspicious texts, emails, or phone calls to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services by calling 800-447-8477 or visiting [Tips.HHS.gov](https://www.tips.hhs.gov).



Health Outcomes Survey: Help us help you

This July, you may receive something called the **Health Outcomes Survey**. These are sent to a random sampling of members each year, and they're designed to measure your perceptions of your health and your healthcare.

If you get the survey, know that it's legitimate, it's confidential—and your answers can help us improve. So please, take a moment and fill it out. Thanks!



Can we chat?



Our Customer Service team is always happy to help members. (It's what we do.) So we're delighted to introduce Live Chat—with actual humans, not robots, available through our secure member portal, InTouch for Members.

Just click the speech icon in the lower right corner during business hours, and get real-time help on a host of topics. Try it!

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