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At Manatee Your Choice Health Plan, we're dedicated to finding ways to help our members live healthier lives. Our Nurse Advocate team of experienced and highly trained nurses and our additional Employee Health Benefits team (including behavioral health, pharmacy, nutrition, fitness and certified diabetes educator) are here when you need someone to guide you.

WHAT IS NURSE ADVOCACY?

OUR NURSE ADVOCATES MAY CALL YOU ON THE PHONE AND HELP YOU:

- Understand your diagnosis and treatment options
- Coordinate your care with your Primary Care Physician, Specialist and other providers
- Understand your medications and how to take them as prescribed
- Address barriers you may have with obtaining your medications
- Understand your plan of care
- Get support for you/your family/caregivers to keep you safe at home
- Understand your benefits
- Link with community resources
- Understand health issues related to aging

WHEN AND WHY WE CALL OUR MEMBERS:

If you've been in the hospital with a serious health condition or experienced complications, are living with multiple health conditions and finding it difficult to manage your daily activities, a NURSE ADVOCATE may call to help:

- Identify what's important to you, to manage your health condition such as asthma, cancer, COPD, diabetes, heart disease.
- Guide you to appropriate resources
- Keep you on the road to recovery by assisting you with your discharge instructions

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Nurse Advocates are provided as part of your plan benefits at no additional cost. If you or a family member could benefit from the Nurse Advocacy program, please call us Monday – Friday, 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. at **(941) 741-2963 option 3.**



Nurse Debbie



Nurse Alison



Nurse Jennifer

EATING WITH HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE: FOOD AND DRINKS TO AVOID

(From [Healthline](#))

Diet can have a big impact on your blood pressure. Salty and sugary foods, and foods high in saturated fats, can increase blood pressure. Avoiding them can help you get and maintain a healthy blood pressure. If you have high blood pressure, the American Heart Association recommend eating plenty of fruits, vegetables, lean protein, and whole grains. At the same time, they recommend avoiding red meat, salt (sodium), and foods and drinks that contain added sugars. These foods can keep your blood pressure elevated.

High blood pressure, or hypertension, affects about 45% of Americans. Hypertension can cause health problems over time, including heart disease and stroke.

This article looks at what foods to avoid or limit if you have high blood pressure, along with ideas for a heart-healthy eating pattern.

SALT OR SODIUM

Salt, or specifically the sodium in salt, is a major contributor to high blood pressure and heart disease. This is because of how it affects fluid balance in the blood.

Table salt is around 40% sodium. The AHA recommends no more than 2,300 milligrams (mg) of sodium — the equivalent of 1 teaspoon of salt — each day.

Most of the sodium in the American diet comes from packaged, processed food rather than what you add at the table, and sodium may be hidden in unexpected places.

The following foods, known as the “salty six,” are major contributors to people’s daily salt intake:

- breads and rolls
- pizza
- sandwiches
- cold cuts and cured meats
- soup
- burritos and tacos

DELI MEAT

Processed deli and lunch meats are often packed with sodium. That’s because manufacturers cure, season, and preserve these meats with salt. According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) database, just two slices of bologna contain 910mg of sodium. One frankfurter, or hot dog, contains 567 mg.

Adding other high-salt foods, such as bread, cheese, various condiments, and pickles, mean that a sandwich can become loaded with sodium very easily.

FROZEN PIZZA

The combination of ingredients in frozen pizzas means they’re high in sugar, saturated fat, and sodium. Cheese is often high in sodium, with just two slices of American cheese containing 512mg of sodium. This is generally in combination with a salty or sugary pizza dough and crust, cured meats, and tomato sauce.



To maintain flavor in the pizza once it’s been cooked, manufacturers often add a lot of salt. One 12 inch pepperoni pizza, cooked from frozen, contains 3,140mg of sodium, which is well above the daily limit of 2,300 mg.

As a substitute, try making a healthful pizza at home, using homemade dough, low-sodium cheese, and your favorite vegetables as toppings.

PICKLES

Preserving any food requires salt. It stops the food from decaying and keeps it edible for longer. The longer vegetables sit in canning and preserving liquids, the more sodium they pick up.

One small pickled cucumber contains 447mg of sodium.

That said, reduced-sodium options are available.

CANNED SOUPS

Canned soups are simple and easy to prepare, especially when you’re crunched for time or not feeling well. However, canned soups are high in sodium. Canned and packaged broths and stocks may contain similar amounts. This means they can elevate your blood pressure.

One can of tomato soup contains 1,100mg of sodium, while a can of chicken and vegetable soup contains 2,140mg.

Try choosing low- or reduced-sodium soups instead, or make your own soup at home from fresh ingredients.

CANNED TOMATO PRODUCTS

Most canned tomato sauces, pasta sauces, and tomato juices are high in sodium. This means that they can cause raise your blood pressure, especially if you already have high blood pressure.

One serving (135 g) of marinara sauce contains 566mg of sodium. One cup of tomato juice contains 615mg.

You can find low- or reduced-sodium versions for most

tomato products. To lower your blood pressure, choose these alternatives or use fresh tomatoes, which are rich in an antioxidant called lycopene. Fresh vegetables have many benefits for heart health.

SUGAR

Sugar can increase your blood pressure in several ways.

Research shows that sugar — and especially sugar-sweetened drinks — contributes to weight gain in adults and children. Overweight and obesity predispose people to high blood pressure.

Added sugar may also have a direct effect on increasing blood pressure, according to a 2014 review. One study in females with high blood pressure reported that decreasing sugar by 2.3 teaspoons could result in an 8.4 mmHg drop in systolic and a 3.7 mmHg drop in diastolic blood pressure.

The AHA recommends the following daily added sugar limits:

- 6 teaspoons, or 25 grams, for females
- 9 teaspoons, or 36 grams, for males

PROCESSED FOODS WITH TRANS OR SATURATED FAT

To keep the heart healthy, people should reduce saturated fats and avoid trans fats. This is especially true for people with high blood pressure.

Trans fats are artificial fats that increase packaged foods' shelf life and stability. However, they also raise your bad (LDL) cholesterol levels and lower your good (HDL) cholesterol levels, which can increase the risk of hypertension. Saturated fats also increase the levels of LDL cholesterol in the blood.

Trans fats are especially poor for your health and are linked with poor heart health, including an increased risk of heart disease, stroke, and type 2 diabetes.

Packaged, pre-prepared foods often contain trans fats and saturated fats, alongside high amounts of sugar, sodium, and low-fiber carbohydrates.

Saturated fats are mostly found in animal products, including: full-fat milk and cream, butter, red meat, & chicken skin

One way to reduce your saturated fat intake is to replace some animal foods with healthful plant-based alternatives. Many plant-based foods contain healthful monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fatty acids. Examples of plant-based foods include: nuts, seeds, olive oil, and avocado.

ALCOHOL

Drinking too much alcohol can increase your blood pressure. If you have high blood pressure, your doctor might recommend that you reduce the amount of

alcohol you drink. In people who do not have hypertension, limiting alcohol intake can help reduce their risk of developing high blood pressure.



Alcohol can prevent blood pressure medications from working effectively through drug interactions.

In addition, many alcoholic drinks are high in sugar and calories. Drinking alcohol can contribute to overweight and obesity, which can increase the risk of hypertension.

If you drink, the AHA recommends limiting your alcohol intake to two drinks per day for males and one drink per day for females.

If cutting back on alcohol is difficult, talk to your doctor for advice.

WHAT ARE THE BEST DIETS FOR HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE?

Following a heart-healthy diet can actively reduce your blood pressure, both in the short term and long term.

Foods that contain potassium can reduce blood pressure, because potassium offsets the effects of sodium. Foods that contain nitrates can reduce blood pressure, too, including beets and pomegranate juice. These foods also contain other health-healthy components, including antioxidants and fiber.

The AHA recommends following the DASH diet to help manage blood pressure. DASH stands for dietary approaches to stop hypertension.

This diet involves eating plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy, and lean protein to help reduce blood pressure and maintain healthy levels.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Diet can have a big impact on your blood pressure.

Foods high in salt, sugar, and saturated or trans fats can increase blood pressure and damage your heart health. By avoiding these foods, you can keep your blood pressure in check.

A diet full of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean protein can help keep your heart healthy.

Do you want help creating an eating plan that will support your health and goals? Adult YourChoice Medical Plan members have access to a network of Registered Dietitians and 5 free visits each year. Learn more at www.manateeyourchoice.com.

DON'T PUT YOUR HEALTH ON HOLD: THE VALUE OF PREVENTIVE CARE

(From [Axia Women's Health](#))

The pandemic has driven a need to adapt to so many new challenges, from learning new ways to get needed supplies, to finding new methods to engage, educate, and entertain one another. Certainly not least among these new obstacles are the limitations surrounding how to access and continue the preventive care you need to maintain your health.

In some ways, preventive care has, itself, become a victim of the pandemic. Health concerns which would have been immediately addressed with a doctor before COVID-19 are suddenly being scrutinized as whether or not they are “worth the risk”.

Thankfully, each day we're all learning to find a new-normal together as social distancing and aggressive mitigation steps to prevent COVID-19 appear to be having a positive effect and research continues at a furious pace to deliver additional protections. While the current environment is one which dictates sensible limitations on day-to-day life in order to flatten the curve, it is critically important to understand that this does not mean your health should be put on hold. In many cases, the benefits of maintaining your health can outweigh your risk or likelihood of obtaining COVID-19 when seeking care with a provider that enforces proper safety precautions in their practice and when taking your own active precautions.

THE DANGERS OF WAITING

The notion of what you'll face when visiting a doctor's office in the current environment can be unsettling—but the risks of ignoring ongoing, preventive health care are not small. Setting aside the basic fact that small health issues can become large health issues if left unchecked, in an atmosphere where patients with chronic or worsening conditions are also at the highest risk for COVID-19 infection, preventive care plays an increasingly important role.

For example, you may consider your annual wellness visit as okay to skip because it's just “routine”—but these visits are often the front line in the battle to detect and treat serious conditions early on—before they worsen or develop to a point that risks additional complications.

As with any facet of your ongoing health, engaging or postponing regular preventive care is a decision that should be informed by up-to-date information regarding the availability of care, and one that is made by both you and your doctor. Your well-being is not elective and should not be ignored.

CAN I SCHEDULE AN APPOINTMENT IF I NEED ONE? SHOULD I?

When it comes to your health needs during the pandemic, you probably have a number of questions.

Does my issue require an in-person visit, or can it wait?

Informed decision making is a crucial part of your ongoing health. If you have a health concern or questions regarding preventive care appointments, contact your provider for information on scheduling both physical and virtual health appointments. Don't decide that your issue isn't serious enough to address without first speaking with a trusted clinical expert.

Is it going to be hard to get an appointment? Can they just help me over the phone?

Virtual office visits...online medicine...telehealth... no matter how you refer to it, this new approach to health care is quickly becoming a proven method to safely, conveniently engage the care you need while maintaining the social distancing safety practices called for during the pandemic.

Your best chance at life-long health remains a combination of informed self-advocacy and an ongoing dialogue with a doctor you trust. This was true before the pandemic and is even more relevant in the tumultuous atmosphere of COVID-19. By now, you understand that your path to ongoing health is one that must include preventive care, and while the pandemic environment has altered what steps you'll need to take to make this happen, please know that you have options!

First, home-health monitoring is an increasingly useful way to inform, but not replace, interaction with your doctor. Performing self-examinations, monitoring your diet and exercise, or tracking your basic vitals (pulse, HR, respiration) can provide valuable information and data to be used to monitor and paint the picture of your health when speaking with your doctor.

Additionally, and most importantly, stay connected with your health care provider to remain informed on the virtual and updated in-office options available to you. Your home-health efforts are definitely important but they are only a portion of what's needed. Preventive care guided by regular, ongoing dialogue with your doctor is your recipe for life-long health.

Your well-being is not elective—don't put your health on hold!



File photo dated March 4, 2018 of Chadwick Boseman arriving for the 90th annual Academy Awards (Oscars) held at the Dolby Theatre in Los Angeles, CA. (Photo by Lionel Hahn/Abaca/Sipa USA via AP Images)

COLON CANCER: MOURNING T'CHALLA & A CALL FOR EARLY DETECTION

Beacon Advocates

Chadwick Boseman was a memorable force as T'Challa in the blockbuster *Black Panther*, but the 43 year-old's legacy includes more than his skillful acting career. His recent death from colon cancer has made him a symbol of the disease.

According to a recent New York Times article, the cancer that ended Boseman's life is the second-leading cause of cancer death in the United States. Let that sink in for a moment. Is colon cancer the taboo cancer topic our young people are avoiding, to their peril? It seems we as a society have no problem talking about breast, brain, or even prostate cancer.

What about colorectal cancers?

Sharing symptoms that can be linked to colon cancer – even with a medical professional – can be difficult. Bleeding from the anus or rectum? Changes in feces structure, constipation, nausea, cramps? None of us want to talk about these things, but based on Boseman's experience, sufferers should be sharing them with medical providers much earlier.

EARLY DETECTION

When Boseman's disease was diagnosed, it had already progressed to Stage 3. Cure rates can be high even at this stage, but they are not guaranteed. Response to chemotherapy largely dictates the survival rate. Had it been detected earlier, the disease may have resulted in a different outcome. We'll never know.

Colon cancer rates are steadily increasing for those under the age of 50, but the cause for the uptick is unknown. Not everyone who suffers from colorectal cancer has common disease factors of obesity, diabetes, smoking, or family history. Those without a family history are often counseled to wait until age 45 before electing a colonoscopy, which can spot tumors. Boseman was years

away from that when he was diagnosed.

Survival rates are so much higher for colorectal cancers when detected early; this fact alone should remove some of the stigma of sharing symptoms with medical professionals. When caught early, survival rates hover in the high ninety percentiles. That's a pretty decent trade to be gained for talking with a physician about changes in bathroom habits or blood present in the stool. It's an extremely worthwhile swap.

THE RACIAL DIVIDE

Black people are much more likely to die from colon cancer than most other ethnic groups; Alaska Natives have the highest rate at 89 per 100,000. The verdict for this is likely a coupling of later-stage diagnoses and access to healthcare.

The takeaway is this: Colorectal cancer does not discriminate. Young people can suffer from it. Older patients, whose 'health radar' is already in tune to the risk, are much more likely to find the disease in its early stages.

TELL SOMEONE

It's time for colorectal cancers to be spoken about openly and with candor. No one wants to talk about blood or changed bathroom habits – but sharing these developments with a healthcare professional could literally save your life.

Chadwick Boseman was an amazing talent. May his memory give all of us – younger people included – the ability to raise our voices if something is wrong.

If you or a family member are in the process of being diagnosed or living with colon cancer, do not hesitate to reach out to oncology professionals who can help you navigate the journey. **Call the YourChoice Nurse Advocate team at (941) 741-2963 option 3 to discuss your options.**