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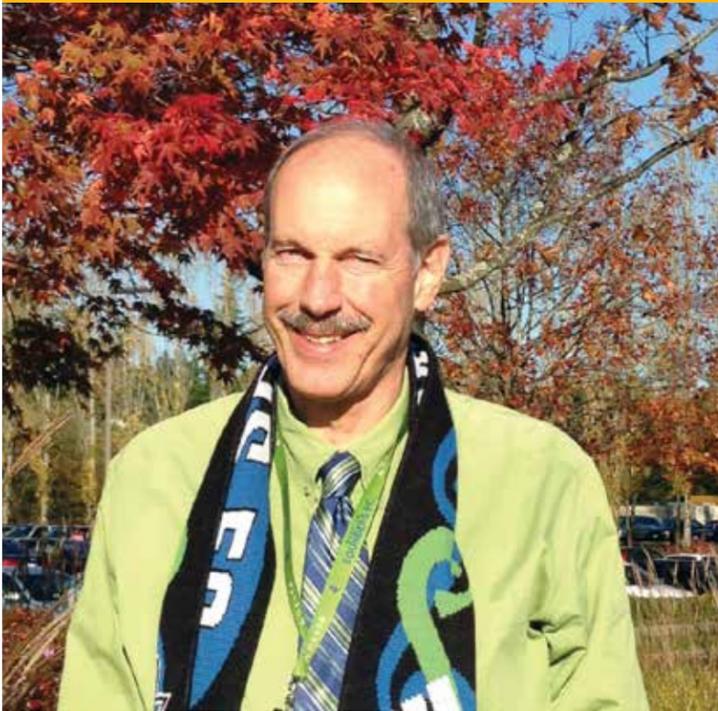


For Your Health

Winter 2015

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embrace WINTER

When the skies turn dark and the mercury drops, I have a pep talk with myself about **staying active despite the wet and cold**. Here are some of my favorite tips for staying healthy during winter:

- Make sure to warm up before exercising. Our bodies are colder and stiffer than other times of the year so this is even more important.
- Ditch the blue jeans and get a pair of warm rain pants for walking outdoors. Blue jeans just get soggy and cold.
- Wear an attachable blinking light and reflective vest if you are walking or running near cars.
- Speaking of cars, get your brakes and tires checked so you know they can handle the slick roads safely.
- If you're feeling low and you want to understand if you are experiencing seasonal mood swings or maybe some depression, call your doctor.

I also advise shaking things up a little every winter. Try a new genre of book or go see a play or do a puzzle you haven't tried before. My new thing this year is getting back into the kitchen to try to cook "Mediterranean" a bit more. My wife is skeptical!

Here's to your good health!

Dr. Dan Kent, MD (Internal Medicine)
Premera Blue Cross Medical Director



winter MOOD SWINGS

When our days become shorter and sunlight is harder to come by, some of us can begin to feel anxious or down. When spring comes back, life gets better. Why?

"It could be a form of depression called seasonal affective disorder (SAD), which is now officially called major depressive disorder with seasonal pattern," says Dr. Robert Small, Behavioral Health medical director and psychiatrist for Premera. "It can be properly diagnosed by your doctor or mental health specialist after two consecutive winters of specific symptoms, followed by remission of those symptoms during spring and summer."

Those symptoms may include depression, anxiety, mood change, sleeping and eating problems, lethargy, sexual problems, and avoiding social contact.

The change in the body's production of the hormones melatonin and serotonin during the darker months is thought to be the root cause of SAD. The body makes more melatonin, a hormone linked to sleep, when it is dark. But it makes less serotonin, and that decrease is linked to depression.

Common treatments for SAD include **phototherapy** (bright-light therapy) or **spending time outdoors** during the day. "And if these don't work, an **antidepressant medication** may help," says Dr. Small.

According to the American Academy of Family Physicians, 4 to 6 in every 100 people experience SAD.* Women between the ages of 18 and 30 seem most susceptible. The severity of SAD depends on a



person's susceptibility and geographic location. In the Northern Hemisphere, people who live north of 33 degrees latitude (southern California) are more vulnerable to SAD. That's most of the United States. And the incidence is higher in the northernmost states, including the Pacific Northwest and Alaska.

If you think you may be experiencing SAD or other forms of depression, talk to your doctor. You can also get more information from:

National Institutes of Health

www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/seasonalaffective-disorder.html

Mental Health America

www.mentalhealthamerica.net/conditions/sad

*familydoctor.org
(familydoctor.org/familydoctor/en/diseases-conditions/seasonal-affective-disorder.html)



COPD and SLEEP

Breathe easier with COPD knowing you're getting a good night's sleep

Getting enough sleep is vital to staying healthy and those with COPD are no exception. When you lie down to sleep, you may not breathe as effectively as when you're awake and a lack of sleep can lead to both mental and physical fatigue. For tips on getting better rest, we talked with Premera Medical Director (and pulmonologist) Don Storey.

Recognize the signs of sleep apnea

Obstructive sleep apnea, a temporary disruption in breathing while asleep, occurs in approximately **20 percent of patients with COPD**, says Dr. Storey. Symptoms include daytime sleepiness, excessive snoring, and abnormal pauses or gasps while sleeping. Sleep apnea can have a major impact on your health when it goes undiagnosed. As you age and your weight increases, the likelihood of developing sleep apnea also rises.

If you have those problems, talk to your doctor about doing a sleep study (either at home or in a lab) to uncover nighttime issues. A common treatment for

sleep apnea is a continuous nasal airway pressure device (often called a CPAP mask), worn over the nose during sleep delivering compressed air gently into your nose to keep the airway open.

Set the stage for sleep

Dr. Storey recommends the following to help encourage a restful sleep:

- Go to bed at the same time every night
- Treat related issues that impact sleep quality, such as sinus infections and heartburn or the more chronic, gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD).
- Get your annual flu shot, because people with COPD who get the flu often develop a more serious illness, such as pneumonia, and a vaccine can help prevent this from happening.
- Sleep on your side and elevate your upper body using a wedge or body pillow
- Avoid caffeine, alcohol and smoking
- Make sure your bedroom is as free as possible of air pollutants like pet dander, dust, and smoke
- Watch your weight. Excessive weight contributes to sleep disruptions, including sleep apnea and GERD. Talk to your doctor or a nutritionist to design an eating plan for you. A helpful online tool is choosemyplate.gov, where patients can develop a daily food plan based on their weight and height.

Relax and know you have support

Obviously, excessive worry can keep you awake at night. Anxiety makes you feel short of breath and Dr. Storey says, breathing gets "dis-coordinated." When you feel anxious, read a good book or listen to classical music before going to sleep – **whatever you know works for you**.

Keep in mind that Premera offers help dealing with any major condition such as COPD, and related complications like poor sleep. Consider consulting with a personal health support specialist by calling **888-742-1479**.

asthma in the WINTER

5 things to alleviate asthma flare-ups this winter

Identifying and reducing triggers that cause asthma flare-ups for you (or your child) is an important part of managing your condition. Winter brings a seasonal mix of allergens and illnesses that can cause asthma distress. Premera's Dr. Neil Kaneshiro provides five things you can do now to help reduce asthma triggers this winter.

1. **Get a flu shot.** Your annual flu shot helps prevent winter's most common and preventable illness. Call your doctor's office to get a flu shot and at the same time, check to ensure your pneumonia vaccine is up-to-date. If you prefer, you can also get a flu shot from your local pharmacy. Either way, your health plan covers the cost.
2. **Wash your hands often.** Practice frequent hand-washing before every meal and use anti-bacterial wipes when soap and water is unavailable (grocery store, malls, outdoor sports activities). Also, avoid or limit exposure to those who are sick with a cold or flu.
3. **Reduce exposure to indoor allergens.** In wintertime, people spend more time indoors where allergens and irritants can trigger asthma flare-ups. Cover pillows (and mattresses) with allergen-proof cases as they create a barrier between you and dust mites which are extremely common and a leading cause of respiratory ailments. Also, wash your pillow case and sheets in hot water at least every two weeks. Last, don't let your pet sleep in the bedroom with you – he/she carries allergens that can aggravate your asthma.

4. **Take your routine medications and check with your doctor twice a year.** Always take your regular medication as prescribed, but check in with your doctor at least twice a year to ensure your medication continues to keep asthma under control. If asthma symptoms worsen (chronic cough or wheezing), or you experience a flare-up where you are using a rescue inhaler more frequently (every 4 hours is maximum dose/use), call your doctor.
5. **Lessen the exposure to cold air.** When you go outdoors in cold weather, dress warmly and wear a scarf over your mouth and nose. While indoors, try to keep a comfortable and consistent temperature. Consider using a humidifier periodically if the air in your house seems excessively dry, which can irritate your lungs.

Don't feel like you are stuck indoors all winter just because you have asthma. Outdoor allergens are fairly low during winter, so dress warmly, and take a short walk to help you breathe some fresh air.





the FLU SHOT

Chronic conditions such as heart disease, diabetes and respiratory disease can make your body too weak to fight off the flu. And people with these conditions may have serious complications from seasonal flu.

Flu Widget Fast Facts*

- You cannot get the flu from the vaccine.
- Flu is more than just a nuisance. It can hospitalize you.
- The timing and severity of influenza seasons are unpredictable. Get the vaccine as soon as it becomes available.

Getting a flu shot each year is the first and best way to protect against influenza. There are two reasons you need a new flu shot each year. First, **flu viruses are always changing**, so the flu vaccine is updated from one season to the next to protect against that particular year's likely flu virus manifestation. Second, **immunity declines over time**, so getting the shot each year is best for optimal protection.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that everyone who is at least 6 months of age get a flu vaccine this season. According to the CDC, during a regular flu season (October–May), about 90 percent of flu-related deaths occur in people 65 years and older. Young children, ages 5 and under, are also highly susceptible to the nasty complications of the flu.

This vaccine is part of your preventive benefits so there will be little or no cost to you if you get it from an in-network doctor's office or pharmacy. **Don't delay.** Get your shot soon after the vaccine becomes available, ideally by October. But it is not too late to get your flu shot in December or January.

People with chronic conditions should get the flu shot, not the nasal spray.

Test your flu knowledge with this fun little Flu I.Q. Widget from the CDC.

www.cdc.gov/flu/fluiq.htm/index.html

Over the course of an average U.S. flu season, more than 15,000 lives could be saved with 90 percent vaccination coverage.

*Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, (cdc.gov/flu)

WINTER 2015

Wellness Rewards

Earn cash by staying healthy! The MyBlue® Wellness Card acts as a health debit card that rewards members for taking charge of their own health. The cards are available for up to two adult members (on a contract). To get your card, simply complete the activities (below) that can help improve your health. You can then use your card to pay for specific qualified medical expenses.

Earn \$50 on your card by simply completing the **2015 Blue Health Assessment (BHA)**. Upon completion, you'll get a personalized action plan geared towards improving your health. Then choose activities that help you reach your healthy lifestyle goals. There's even an Online Health Coach available to help you in reaching your goals.

You can earn an additional \$35 on your card when you reach your lifestyle goals from the following areas:

- Exercise
- Nutrition
- Stress management
- Weight management
- Mental health

You can register for **MyBlue® Wellness rewards** and start earning your rewards online. For more information on the reward programs, visit www.fepblue.org or call **888.258.3432**.

RESOURCES

Resource Guide

Recommended health resources available online:

- American Heart Association – www.heart.org
- American Lung Association – www.lung.org
- American Diabetes Association – www.diabetes.org
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – www.cdc.gov
- Juvenile Diabetes Association – www.jdrf.org
- Mental Health America – www.mentalhealthamerica.net
- National Institutes of Health – www.nih.gov

24-Hour NurseLine

When health issues come up, it's reassuring to know that there's someone to call. **24/7 NurseLine** lets you talk to a registered nurse to help you make decisions on when (and where) to seek treatment. It's free and confidential. Just call the number listed on the back of your member ID card.

Questions?

Visit www.fepblue.org or call **888.258.3432** for additional health and member benefits information.

If you would like more information on online health and wellness tools, please visit www.fepblue.org/myblue. You received this newsletter because you enrolled in a program that provides health support to help you manage a condition, based on claims received by your provider. Please call 888.742.1479 to learn more on how to use our services or if you want to discontinue your participation in the program because the services are no longer needed to help you manage your condition.



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