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# In touch

Healthy Endeavors<sup>SM</sup>  
Fall 2011

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BlueShield.**  
Federal Employee Program

## You can maintain **healthy eating habits** this season

We're about to enter the time of year that puts even our best habits to the test. With a little planning, you can get through this holiday season while sticking to healthy eating patterns.

### Enjoy — In moderation

Do you have a weakness for your sister's pumpkin pie or your cousin's casserole? The holidays are filled with tasty obstacles that can trip you up. Try these tips:

- **Be realistic.** Set daily calorie goals and keep a food diary.
- **Shop smart.** Look for apple cider, unsalted nuts, whole-grain crackers, vegetable and fruit platters, fat-free eggnog and low-fat dips. (Watch the "Grocery Shopping" segment of "Be a New You with Blue." See details, below right.)
- **Don't skip meals.** Keep hunger in check. Before going to a party, have a healthy snack, such as a few nuts and a piece of fruit, so that you won't overdo it.
- **Enjoy yourself.** Eat your favorites but in small portions. Be choosy at the buffet: Plan what you are going to have.
- **Focus on family and friends, not food.** It's hard to talk and eat at the same time.
- **Skip alcohol.** It weakens willpower — and adds calories.
- **Delay dessert.** With a little time, your craving may pass.
- **Stand away from the food.** The closer you are, the more likely you are to nibble.

### Avoid empty calories!

You may have read the term "empty calories" or heard it used by talk show hosts. But what exactly are empty calories?

This term describes foods that are high in calories but low in nutrients (aka junk food!). Such foods lack vitamins, minerals, fiber, protein and healthy carbs and fats. Avoid these:

- **Deep-fried foods.** One item can contain a day's worth of fat or sodium. Instead, choose baked or broiled items.
- **Sweetened drinks, canned drinks and soft drinks.** They are loaded with sugar plus additives and colorings. Choose brewed iced tea or 100 percent fruit juice.
- **Refined grains, like cookies and white bread and rice.** Switch to whole-grain items (such as whole wheat bread or brown rice) for their beneficial fiber and antioxidants.
- **Candy.** For something sweet, snack on fruit! Better yet, dip it in low-fat yogurt for extra calcium and protein.

### *More tips online*

Watch our "Be a New You with Blue" videos for tips on grocery shopping, healthy cooking and eating out. Go to [bcbsnc.com/fep](http://bcbsnc.com/fep) and click on "Information and Resources," then choose "Health Coach" on the left side.



## Stress-fighting strategies for every stage of life

The latest findings on stress are in, and they paint a harried picture. The American Psychological Association's Stress in America survey reports that most of us are moderately to seriously stressed. We know it's unhealthy, but we aren't sure how to escape it.

The sources of strain change over time. But one thing doesn't: its damaging effects on our health. Chronic tension can boost the risk for heart attack or stroke, diabetes, obesity, skin conditions, autoimmune diseases and even suicide. Here's what bothers us or our loved ones at different life stages, and what we can do about it.

### The teen years

**STRESSORS:** This is a turbulent time of changing bodies, peer pressure and new responsibilities.

**SOLUTIONS:** Help your teens list their sources of tension. Strike out the ones they can't change, such as a friend's behavior, and address the ones they can, like cutting back on work hours.

### If you're a young adult

**STRESSORS:** Money, workplace woes and/or job security topped the list of worries for 75 percent of young adults.

**SOLUTIONS:** Take stock of where you are financially. Make a plan for solving your most pressing money problems. Develop emergency on-the-job stress busters. When you feel the pressure rising, count to 10 before you speak or take three to five deep breaths.

### For couples and parents

**STRESSORS:** The ongoing recession has left this group financially unstable. The challenges of balancing family and work create guilt and distress.

**SOLUTIONS:** Use tough times to come together. A tactic that helped: finding a religious home or other community support. Set boundaries: Communicate your nonavailable hours to coworkers.

### Caregiving and older age

**STRESSORS:** Older adults are less stressed overall. But they're the most likely to cite health problems, their own or a relative's, as pressure points.

**SOLUTIONS:** If you're caring for a sick loved one, enlist a support team and create a schedule.

The best caregivers also care for themselves. Get enough sleep and make healthy food choices. Schedule time to do at least one thing per day that you enjoy.

## How to avoid holiday stress

Making a to-do list is often touted as a way to gain control over stress. But a holiday task list full of "should-dos" may set you up for an anxiety-filled season. Here are tips to create a holiday list that promotes health and joy:

- ❑ Scratch out the rituals you can live without. For instance, if you don't really enjoy baking, skip the cookies this year.
- ❑ Start some tasks early if you can. Sending cards can be very time-consuming, so begin addressing them as soon as possible.
- ❑ Create a gift list that cuts down on shopping trips. For example, buy a book for everyone on your list and you can get all your presents in one stop.
- ❑ Make time for a brisk walk or other exercise — one of the best stress busters available.
- ❑ Having low stress levels may even help you save money. The American Psychological Association reports that stress-related health problems account for 75 to 90 percent of all doctor visits. Keeping your stress in check will help eliminate unplanned and unwanted health care expenses.

### Manage stress

For tips and support in coping with stress, call a nurse health coach at 1-888-392-3506.



Kim Walsh, M.D., M.P.H.  
Medical Director

## Ask the doctor: Conquering cold and flu season



### **Q: Is it true that things like zinc and vitamin C can help me fight off colds?**

**A:** Yes, science shows that some basic remedies can help you dodge a cold or reduce the length of one. Consider these:

- **Hand washing.** Above all, the simplest, most effective way to prevent catching a cold is to frequently wash your hands with soap and water.
- **Sleep.** Talk about sick and tired! In one study, people who got less than seven hours of shut-eye a night were almost three times as likely to catch a cold as those who got eight hours or more.
- **Exercise.** People who work out five or more days a week are about half as likely to catch colds. And when they do start sneezing, their illnesses are shorter and less severe. Researchers speculate that aerobic exercise boosts the production of virus-targeting cells in the immune system. If you're already sick, postpone intense workouts until several days after your symptoms have gone away.
- **Zinc.** This mighty mineral may make your cold shorter. For best results, suck on a zinc lozenge at the first sign of a snuffle. But beware: Zinc supplements can reduce the effectiveness of some antibiotics and arthritis medications.

### ■ **Vitamin C.**

Regularly getting about 1 gram of vitamin C daily can reduce your cold symptoms by a day or two. Real foods are the best sources: Choose citrus fruits, broccoli, potatoes and tomatoes. Avoid supplements if you have kidney disease or are being treated for cancer.

### **Q: How can I tell whether I have a cold or the flu?**

**A:** Influenza (the flu) and the common cold are both respiratory illnesses, but they are caused by different viruses. The flu and colds share many of the same symptoms, such as cough, congestion, aches and fatigue, so it can be difficult to tell the difference between a cold and the flu based on symptoms alone.

But these differences can provide clues to whether an illness is a cold or the flu. In general, cold symptoms come on gradually, about two to five days after infection, while flu symp-

toms come on abruptly — without warning.

Flu symptoms tend to be more intense, causing a high fever of 100 to 102 degrees, a dry cough that can be severe, chills and body aches, headache and extreme fatigue. Colds are generally milder, and people with colds are more likely to have a sore throat for a couple of days and sneezing with a stuffy and runny nose.

Colds last about a week and typically don't cause serious health problems. Symptoms of the flu usually start improving in two to five days, but cough and fatigue can drag on for several weeks, and some people may develop complications like pneumonia.



## Get your flu shot

Don't delay in getting your annual flu shot. Check with your health benefits officer at your worksite, or call your health department or doctor's office. The best time to get the flu shot is in October or November — before flu season typically starts. But you still can get it in December or later. The 2011–2012 flu vaccine will protect you against three groups of influenza viruses, including the 2009 H1N1 virus. It's important to get a flu shot every year because immunity decreases over time.



## A SIMPLE GUIDE TO DIABETES PREVENTION

Nearly 10 percent of the U.S. adult population, or 659,000 men and women, had diabetes in 2009.

Who is at risk of developing the disease? Adults who are overweight and not physically active. In 2007, that included more than half of adults in North Carolina, with 65 percent of them overweight or obese and 56 percent physically inactive.

The crisis is not limited to adults. If current trends continue, one in three children born in North Carolina after the year 2000 will develop diabetes in his or her lifetime. For minorities, this number is nearly one in two. These children will face shorter lives than their own parents.

As World Diabetes Day nears on November 14, you can take charge of your health and prevent or delay diabetes with modest and relatively easy lifestyle changes.

### Diabetes 101

Type 2 diabetes results when the body can no longer make enough of, or properly use, a hormone called insulin. Insulin helps the body convert

sugar and other food into energy. When the body does not have enough insulin, sugar builds up in the bloodstream. This can lead to many serious health problems, including heart disease and stroke.

A blood test may show that you don't have diabetes, but you do have prediabetes. Don't ignore this wake-up call. Many people with prediabetes will go on to develop type 2 diabetes within 10 years, according to the American Diabetes Association.

### The top two risk factors

However, it's not inevitable. You are in control, and your everyday choices can reduce your risk. Being obese and inactive are the top two risk factors. A three-year study to prevent diabetes found that healthy lifestyle changes aimed at weight loss and exercise lowered risk for the disease by 58 percent.

Losing just 5 to 7 percent of your weight may help you ward off diabetes. If you weigh 200 pounds, that's 10 to 15 pounds.

### Four changes you can make today

You don't have to overhaul your lifestyle overnight — try one new thing a week. Follow these tips to reduce your risk:

- 1 Choose foods wisely.** Eat colorful fruits and veggies, whole grains, fish, and low-fat or nonfat dairy products. Pick lean meats, skinless poultry and dried beans as protein. Cut back on fat, sugar, salt and refined grains.
- 2 Move your body.** Exercise helps your body use insulin and burns calories, helping you reach and maintain a healthy weight. Be active for at least 30 minutes most days. Exercise doesn't require a gym — dance as you do chores.
- 3 Eat smaller portions.** This helps control your weight by reducing your calorie intake. Need help? Before a meal, drink a glass of water to help you feel full.
- 4 Ask for help.** High blood pressure, high triglycerides and low HDL, or "good," cholesterol contribute to diabetes risk. So do smoking, depression and too little or too much sleep. Talk with your doctor about these issues.

# BATTLE TEEN OBESITY

## with healthy family meals

The nation's teens face a weighty issue: Almost one in five is obese. A new study in the *American Heart Journal* suggests that it's not genes but unhealthy habits that contribute most to adolescents' extra pounds. And those extra pounds in turn can cause many health problems that could otherwise be avoided, such as type 2 diabetes. Today's children are the first generation of Americans predicted to have a shorter life expectancy than their parents.

Another new study — this one in *Health Education and Behavior* — offers an antidote. What happens at home has a strong influence on teens' health habits. Parents can make a difference in their child's health, one meal at a time.

### Good-food basics

During the turbulent teen years, the family dinner table serves as a source of comfort and stability. And when healthy foods are on the menu, adolescents form positive habits that last the rest of their lives.

Aim to sit down together at least four nights per week. Make sure your meals include the basics for a healthy diet, such as:

- Lots of fruits and vegetables
- Whole grains instead of white or refined breads and pastas
- Fat-free or low-fat dairy products
- Lean meats, fish, beans, eggs and nuts
- Limited saturated fats, sodium and sugar, and no trans fats

### Putting it together

So how do you transform these ingredients into healthy, tasty meals for your whole clan? A little advance planning and some helping hands do the trick.

- **One day each week, sit down and plan seven days of healthy breakfasts, lunches and dinners.** Make a shopping list based on your meal plan. Hit the store when it's less crowded and you're not tired or hungry; it'll be easier to buy only what you need.
- **Make small changes to reduce fat and boost nutrients.** For example, use part-skim instead of whole-milk mozzarella in your lasagna, or swap a chocolate cake for angel food with strawberries.
- **Get your children involved in meal preparation.** This can help motivate them to try healthy new foods. Ask



*Meal-planning help*  
Our nurse health coaches can answer food and nutrition questions over the phone. Call us at 1-888-392-3506.

your teens to peel and slice veggies, flip pancakes or form meatballs.

- **Stock your pantry with healthy basics.** Staples like brown rice, frozen vegetables and canned beans form the foundation of healthy suppers.
- **Need ideas?** Find recipes and cooking tips from *Keep the Beat Recipes: Deliciously Healthy Family Meals*, a free cookbook from the National Institutes of Health, at [http://hin.nhlbi.nih.gov/healthy\\_eating](http://hin.nhlbi.nih.gov/healthy_eating). Or log on to the American Dietetic Association's site at [kidseatright.org](http://kidseatright.org) for more nutritious, delicious meal ideas.



The health coach program is a win-win!

I had to comment on this program, and my only motivation in this is one of gratitude.

First and foremost, the program is working for me to focus on better health, and I am improving with glee. This is certainly a win-win effort for every client. It can save money. And maybe save lives.

Second, the process is an encouragement, just knowing that a follow-up contact will be made to review results. Someone cares enough to outline a custom-fit plan and encourages you repeatedly. You just have to give it your best effort.

Lastly, and perhaps the most value added, is the

quality of a health coach like Lynn Frost. Her work speaks very well of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina (BCBSNC) as a health care company. She demonstrates the great professional and competent image of BCBSNC. Her style of support and communication made this a very desirable venture.

Please accept my compliments for a promising program and the quality of your personnel. Just another reason I will stay with BCBS.

Very Respectfully,  
Kenneth R. Brahmer

Call 1-888-392-3506 to speak with a health coach, who can help you create a plan to meet a health goal. It's FREE!

# RESPIRATORY DISEASE

## now third-leading cause of death



Move over, stroke. You might still cause more than 130,000 U.S. deaths a year, but the latest statistics suggest that respiratory disease — especially chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) — has taken over as the third-leading cause of death in America.

Deaths from stroke have been in decline since the 1950s, thanks to advances in the diagnosis and treatment of stroke and related conditions.

In contrast, deaths from respiratory disease rose almost 8 percent in the past year. One person dies of COPD every four minutes. Luckily, there are ways to protect yourself.

### Know your risk for COPD

COPD refers to two lung diseases: chronic bronchitis and emphysema. They often go hand in hand. Both are serious conditions that get worse with time, blocking airways with swelling and mucus.

About 12 million Americans have been diagnosed with COPD, and experts think about 12 million more may have it and not yet know it. The condition often develops slowly, taking your breath away before you realize it. Eventually, activities like walking and cooking become too strenuous.

There's no cure for COPD, and doctors don't know how to reverse lung damage. But they do know that smoking accounts for up to nine of 10 deaths from COPD. Prolonged exposure to chemicals at work or other

pollutants can also contribute to its development.

Our COPD health coaching program can help you manage COPD if you've already been diagnosed with it. Call **1-888-392-3506** to speak with a nurse health coach.

### Kick the habit, protect your lungs

Here's another way to run the numbers: Smokers are 12 times as likely to die of COPD as nonsmokers. Still, quitting is easier said than done. Willpower isn't always enough.

Talking with your doctor is the best place to start. He or she can recommend support groups, medications or nicotine-replacement products. Go to **feplblue.org**, take the "Breathe" session and your tobacco cessation medications will be free when prescribed by your doctor.

In addition, scientists continue to study ways to help smokers quit. The latest findings show:

- Online and telephone counseling may be just as helpful as face-to-face sessions. And it's convenient, private and free if you call a nurse health coach at **1-888-392-3506**. (Our nurse health coaches are "Freedom From Smoking" American Lung Association facilitators.)
- Text messages delivered at tempting times could remind you not to reach for a light. Track your cravings, then ask a friend to hit "send" when they're most likely to strike.

## Need help quitting?

The American Cancer Society is marking the 36th Great American Smokeout on November 17 by encouraging smokers to use the date to make a plan to quit, or to plan in advance and quit smoking that day. For details and support, visit **cancer.org/healthy/index** and click on "Stay Away From Tobacco."

Our nurse health coaches can provide on-site "Freedom From Smoking" classes at your work or community location for FEP members. Talk with your health benefits officer at work to arrange a class (must have a minimum of 15 FEP members for an on-site class).

## Fresh fruits and veggies — Near you

Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Carolina has partnered with the North Carolina Recreation and Park Association to launch a community garden program called Nourishing North Carolina.

Community gardens are simple plots of land — of all shapes and sizes — that residents and organizations maintain. They provide:

- Greater access to locally harvested fresh vegetables and fruits
- Opportunities for neighborhood and community development
- Sites for physical activity and education

For more information, visit [bcbsnc.com/content/campaigns/nnc](http://bcbsnc.com/content/campaigns/nnc).

**FARMERS MARKETS, TOO!** They are also great sources of fresh, locally grown produce, and most are still open into late fall — some year-round. At last count, there were 173 in the state, so chances are great that there's one near you! To find one, visit [ncfarmfresh.com](http://ncfarmfresh.com). Or call our health coach line at 1-888-392-3506 and ask for the support staff, who can find the closest one to you.

## Meet our new NURSE HEALTH COACHES!

You can get help from our health coaches easily — and for free! Call 1-888-392-3506. The process starts with an assessment that includes questions about your health, and your coach helps create an action plan: goals for you to work on, with educational materials and support along the way. Meet our new coaches:

### Shannon Austin, R.N.



Shannon has been a registered nurse for four years and has worked to help children manage asthma and diabetes. She is cochair

of the North Carolina Nurses Association's Obesity Awareness and Health Promotion Task Force.

She and her husband are raising two "beautiful" children. "I love to read, practice yoga and play games with my family," Shannon says. "I also like to cook and bake, and I strive to model for my kids how to be healthy and appreciate nature.

"I became a health coach in February, and it is my all-time favorite job! I love helping people overcome challenges and reach their goals," she says.

### Dan Di Meo, R.N.



Dan became a health coach in February, too. He has been a registered nurse for 32 years, spending most of that time in behavioral

health nursing. He has also worked in adolescent and addiction services.

A Philadelphia native, Dan has lived in the South for about 22 years. In addition to nursing, he has a bachelor's degree in psychology and education from Villanova University in Villanova, Pa.

"I served as a hospital corpsman during the Vietnam War," he says. "My hobbies include volunteering, animal welfare and public service. I am proud of co-owning and managing a small business and rooting for any Philadelphia sports team."

These gardens have been selected to be part of the program:

| COUNTY      | LOCATION  |
|-------------|---|
| Avery       | Community Garden of Newland   |
| Brunswick   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leland Community Garden</li> <li>• Spring Lake Park</li> </ul>                                   |
| Buncombe    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Black Mountain Recreation Park</li> <li>• Buncombe County Sports Park</li> </ul>                 |
| Clay        | Clay County Schools   |
| Craven      | Cypress Street Gardens  |
| Davidson    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Davidson Recreation</li> <li>• Thomasville Recreation</li> <li>• Lexington Recreation</li> </ul> |
| Durham      | Morehead Hill Neighborhood  |
| Gaston      | Dallas Park   |
| Guilford    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oakview Recreation Center/Park</li> <li>• Village at Northside Park</li> </ul>                   |
| Hyde        | Mattamuskeet Elementary School  |
| Johnston    | Clayton Community Park  |
| Lenoir      | Kinston-Lenoir County Parks and Recreation  |
| McDowell    | Corpening Memorial YMCA   |
| Mecklenburg | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Matthews Community Garden</li> <li>• Winterfield/Sheffield Community Garden</li> </ul>           |
| Montgomery  | Troy Senior Center  |
| Pitt        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dream Park</li> <li>• Keene Park</li> </ul>  |
| Sampson     | Sampson Community Center Park   |
| Surry       | Mount Airy Fire Department  |

## In touch

Leena Mehta  
Manager

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Healthy Endeavors members will continue to receive this magazine for two years.

Your plan for better health.<sup>SM1</sup>

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## Getting help to eat more healthfully

Watch “Be a New You with Blue” online at [bcbsnc.com/fep](http://bcbsnc.com/fep). Go to “New Health Coach Resources” and watch all three modules: grocery shopping, cooking at home and healthy eating out. There are links for recipes, looking up the nutritional value for foods and other information to help you make healthier food choices. Call **1-888-392-3506** for additional information or to speak with a nurse health coach.

# Cranberry-apple sauce

*Recipe by Cathy Chapman, Healthy Endeavors<sup>SM1</sup> team lead*

Tired of the sugary canned stuff? This fresh cranberry sauce is a great addition to any holiday meal.

### Ingredients

- 2 cups fresh whole cranberries
- 1 Granny Smith apple, cored and chopped
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup agave nectar (or any stevia product equivalent to  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup sugar may be used)
- $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp. cinnamon
- 1 cup toasted pecans or chopped celery

### Directions

In a small saucepan, combine first four ingredients. Bring mixture to a boil. Turn heat to low and simmer for 15 minutes, stirring occasionally. Remove from heat and add the pecans or celery. Serve chilled or at room temperature.

