Good Medicine: Tips for Medication Safety

TOUGH TOPICS
Talking with Your Provider

Be Our Next Member Advisor
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Have you ever thought about what Scott and White Health Plan (SWHP) could do better? Do you have ideas about how to make sure others get the best health insurance and healthcare possible? If so, you might want to become a Member Advisor.

What do these advisors do?
A Member Advisor:

- Wants to help improve the quality of health insurance and healthcare for everyone.
- Gives feedback based on his or her own experiences as a Medicare health plan member.
- Helps us plan changes and improvements—for example, suggesting benefits that members might find useful. This work may happen in person, by phone, or over email.
- Serves on a council with other members. The council meets four times a year to give feedback on specific ideas or materials.

You can be an advisor if you are an SWHP Medicare member. You do not need any special qualifications to be an advisor. What’s most important is your willingness to share your experience as a member. We will provide any other training you need.

Thank you for being a member of SWHP. Enjoy this issue of Healthy Life. If you’re interested, please contact us today to apply to become a Member Advisor.

Sincerely,

Jeff Ingrum
President/CEO

Apply Today
To find out how to apply to be a Member Advisor, contact Gary Stubblefield at 254-298-3148 or gary.stubblefield@bswhealth.org.

Other Signs of Skin Cancer

You probably know that a strange mole should be checked out by your healthcare provider. But do you know these other signs of skin cancer?

Bleeding or weeping sores
They might be the most common type of skin cancer, called basal cell carcinoma. Typically found on the sun-exposed areas of the head and neck, the sores may be oozing, crusted, and either don’t heal or heal and then come back.

Rough, scaly spots
These might be precancerous areas. The pink-red or flesh-toned spots generally grow slowly. They tend to occur more often in people who are fair-skinned. Usually found on the face, ears, backs of the hands, or arms, they may feel itchy or sore.

Bumps and growths
Small, pinkish, pearly bumps with blue, brown, or black areas could be skin cancer. Also watch out for pink growths with raised borders and lower middle areas, which might have small blood vessels spreading out like wheel spokes.

A dark band on your fingernail
Melanoma is the most dangerous type of skin cancer. It is more likely to start on the torso in men and on the legs in women, but it can start anywhere. If you notice a dark band growing on or under your nail, see your provider.
EMERGENCY ROOMS (ERs) ARE BEST FOR TREATING severe and life-threatening conditions. The wider range of services offered through ERs, and the hospitals they are connected to, make emergency care a more expensive option. But sometimes it is the best option for you.

It’s important to understand your options, and to use your best judgment when deciding which option is right for you. Here are some tips to help you know when to go to the ER, or when other kinds of care will do just fine.

Checking In with Your Regular Provider
Whenever possible, make your primary care provider your first choice. This is especially true when you need treatment for chronic conditions, or preventive care like immunizations and checkups. This helps you build a relationship with your provider, which can lead to better care on future visits. If you don’t have a primary care provider, choose someone whose office is open during times that are convenient for you.

Understanding Urgent Care
If your provider’s office is closed or if you can’t get an appointment, visiting an urgent care center may be an option. Urgent care centers can treat problems such as:

• Minor cuts that require stitches
• Animal bites
• Nausea
• Rashes
• Flu

Urgent care centers usually are open on nights and weekends. This may make them convenient. Ask your provider to recommend a clinic near you.

When Timing Is Everything: Emergency Care
Some symptoms can’t wait for treatment; they need immediate care. These include:

• Difficulty breathing
• Fainting or sudden dizziness
• Chest pain or pressure lasting two minutes or more
• Uncontrolled bleeding
• Coughing or vomiting blood
• Sudden or severe pain
• Changes in vision
• Confusion or changes in mental status or ability to speak

When should you call 911? Dial 911 if you think a health problem is life-threatening, or if it could get worse on the way to the hospital. Examples include severe bleeding that won’t stop with direct pressure or chest pain.

Your coverage documents contain additional information about emergency treatment and definitions of the terms, including a definition of emergency care. The coverage documents also contain information related to state-mandated consumer protections for facility-based provider charges.

OUT-OF-NETWORK EMERGENCY CARE COSTS MORE

To save on out-of-pocket costs, visit in-network emergency care facilities when possible.
Follow Directions to Avoid Medication Mistakes

**Following Directions: Two Words We Associate with Success.** And yet 50 percent of Americans don’t follow directions when taking medication.

Some forget to take a dose. Others don’t think their medication is working, so they don’t take the directions seriously. Some take fewer doses in order to save money. And others dread the side effects so much that they avoid taking the medication at all.

Can you relate? If so, consider this. The success of your medication relies on you to take it correctly. Failure to do so can cause some serious damage.

**Risky Business**

Taking your medication as directed is vital to treating illnesses and preventing further complications. For example, you must finish antibiotics completely, even if you start to feel better. This is because bacteria are likely to still be alive in your body. If those germs multiply and spread, a new strain of resistant germs may make you sick again.

Not taking medication for chronic conditions as directed is even more dangerous. Let’s say you have high blood pressure, for instance. Taking your medication incorrectly puts you at risk for stroke, heart disease, and kidney failure.

**Set Yourself Up for Success**

Luckily, there’s a lot you can do to better follow your medication’s directions:

• **Cut costs.** Ask your provider if there’s a generic option. Generic drugs use the same active ingredients but can cost 30 to 80 percent less.

• **Find a routine.** Keep a written or computerized schedule to remind
you when to take your medication. Store your medications in a place where you’ll notice them.

• Don’t split pills. Several medications are not FDA-approved to be split. The actual dose in each half of these pills often varies. The two halves may look the same but not contain equal amounts of medicine. Always check with your provider before splitting a tablet.

• Talk it out. Speak with your provider about what’s preventing you from following your medication’s directions. If you’re having side effects, he or she can help you find an alternative.

Most of all, motivate yourself by thinking about why you’re on this medication. Is it because you want to be healthy and have a better quality of life? In that case, your medication’s directions may just be the most important ones you’ll follow.

Medication Questions?
Your pharmacist is a great resource for any questions about your medicines or how to take them. Make sure to take advantage of your pharmacist’s knowledge. To find a pharmacy near you, go to advantage.swhp.org and click on “Pharmacy Info.”

5 RULES FOR Taking Prescription Painkillers

Opioids are strong prescription painkillers that can help after surgery or an injury. They can also be used for cancer pain. But opioids come with a big responsibility. When these drugs are misused, they can lead to overdose and addiction. Sadly, 70 to 80 people die from an opioid overdose every day in the U.S. Follow these rules to stay safe while taking opioids:

1 Keep these drugs in a safe place. Keep them locked up to help prevent accidental poisonings and misuse. Friends, family, and acquaintances may look for painkillers in your house. Some people may want to use these drugs to treat their own pain or for fun.

2 Follow your provider’s instructions. This rule goes for all prescription medications, but is especially important for opioids. Don’t increase your dose or take more than you should. Take the painkillers exactly how your provider tells you to do so. In addition, don’t mix opioids with alcohol, sleeping pills, or anti-anxiety drugs. These all increase your risk for an accidental overdose. Check with your provider to make sure other medications you take are OK to use while taking an opioid.

3 Ask questions. Make sure you understand your prescription before you start taking opioids. Know how long you will be taking the painkiller. Ask about side effects and what to do if the opioids don’t relieve your pain.

4 Don’t ignore side effects. Unpleasant side effects of opioids include nausea, feeling “foggy,” and constipation. For some, the side effects can actually be worse than the pain itself. Always talk with your provider about any side effects you feel.

5 Understand opioids aren’t a miracle cure. Opioids don’t work well for all chronic pain conditions. And if you take them for a long period of time, your body may get used to the drug. That means you may need higher doses to get the same relief. In fact, some people who take opioids for chronic pain find that their pain increases as the dose is increased. Talk with your provider about other solutions to take care of chronic pain.
let’s cook!

Baked ‘Fried’ Fish

Friday fish fry, anyone? Try this healthier take on an old favorite to kick off your next weekend.

**INGREDIENTS**

- 1/2 cup cornmeal
- 1/2 cup bread crumbs, preferably whole-grain
- 2 tsp. onion powder
- 2 tsp. garlic powder
- 2 tsp. paprika
- 2 tsp. black pepper
- 1/2 tsp. sea salt
- 1/4 tsp. chili powder
- 1 lb. white fish fillets, such as tilapia or Dover sole
- 2 eggs, beaten
- Olive oil spray

**DIRECTIONS**

Preheat oven to 425 degrees. Line a baking sheet with aluminum foil or a silicone baking mat. Place a metal rack on top of the sheet.

In a large bowl, stir together cornmeal, bread crumbs, and all spices. Dip a fillet in crumb mixture. Then dip in egg wash. Then dip in crumb mixture again. Spray with olive oil spray, then place on rack. Repeat with all fillets.

Bake for 20 to 25 minutes or until golden brown and crispy.

**PER SERVING**

Serves six. Serving size is one large fillet or two small fillets. Each serving contains: 176 calories, 4 g total fat (1 g saturated fat, 0 g trans fat), 108 mg cholesterol, 327 mg sodium, 16 g carbohydrates, 2 g fiber, 1 g sugar, and 20 g protein.

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YOU’RE INVITED: HealthSpeak Education Series

**Heart Health**

Join internal medicine resident physician Niki Ryman, M.D., to learn about common heart conditions, signs/symptoms, and treatments, and what you can do to keep your heart happy.

**WEDNESDAY, APRIL 10, 3 TO 4 P.M.**

Affinity at Round Rock
30 Cypress Blvd., Round Rock

**Mature Driving**

Learn about changes—in cars, roads, and our bodies as we age—and how those changes affect driving. Receive tips on what you can do to drive more safely. Learn about CarFitSM, a 12-step checklist that can help drivers feel more comfortable and safer in their cars.

**THURSDAY, APRIL 25, 3:30 TO 5 P.M.**

Baylor Scott & White Clinic – Georgetown
4945 Williams Drive, Georgetown

**WEDNESDAY, MAY 8, 3 TO 4 P.M.**

Affinity at Round Rock
30 Cypress Blvd., Round Rock

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RSVP for these events at 1-844-BSW-DOCS (1-844-279-3627) or bswhealth.com/healthspeak.
Talking with Your Provider About the Tough Stuff

Talking openly with a doctor or other healthcare provider can help you get what you need and what you want from a visit. Some topics are harder to bring up than others. Sometimes we are embarrassed. For example, it can be tough to talk about urine leakage. Other times, we think what is bothering us is a normal part of getting older. For example, some people incorrectly think there is nothing that can be done about falling down sometimes as we get older.

But taking charge of our health means being a partner in our own care, including talking about topics that are hard to bring up. Go ahead, talk about the tough stuff!

When to talk with a provider about urine leaks:
- Your daily routine has changed because of urine leaks.
- You have a hard time sleeping sometimes because of urine leaks.
- You notice more leaking than before.

When to talk with a provider about falling:
- You have been falling or tripping lately.
- You feel off-balance.
- You are having trouble getting up or down without help.

When to talk with a provider about other concerns:
- It is getting in the way of you doing what you want to do.
- You are worried.
- You are not sure who you can talk to.

Need a Nudge?
Try these helpful prompts when talking about tough topics with your provider.

Bring It Up:
- “Something has been bothering me that is a little hard to talk about.”
- “This is a little embarrassing, but I would like to get your opinion.”
- “I have noticed some changes, and I am not sure if I should be worried.”

Say Your Concerns:
- “I have been feeling off-balance lately. I am concerned that this might not be normal.”
- “I have been tripping sometimes. I am curious to know if this is normal.”
- “I am frustrated because I can't do the things I used to do without dealing with urine leaks.”

Ask for Ideas:
- “What do you think could be causing this?”
- “What can I do to prevent falling?”
- “What can I do to control my urine leaks?”
Good News: A Positive Outlook May Bolster Heart Health

Improving your overall psychological outlook may have a positive effect on your heart. This is according to a recent published review.

Positive People Reap Rewards

The review looked at how mental well-being affects the seven components of heart health, as defined by the American Heart Association.

Researchers found that, in general, people with a positive outlook tended to have lower blood pressure levels and healthier cholesterol and blood sugar levels. They were less likely to smoke. They were more likely to eat a healthy diet and exercise.

How Does It Help?

It’s not entirely clear how optimism and heart health are connected. But researchers believe optimistic people may have greater buffers against stress, a factor in heart disease risk. For example, they may have stronger social support to draw from during hard times.

Here are some ideas to boost your own positive outlook:

Try mindfulness training, such as yoga, tai chi, or meditation. These activities have been shown to reduce stress, depression, and anxiety.

Adopt habits to increase your optimism. Try making a list of what you’re grateful for. Identify and build on your personal strengths.