

No Flu for You! Easy Ways to Avoid Germs

PROTECT YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY WITH THESE SIMPLE WAYS TO SIDESTEP NASTY BUGS

You know that washing your hands is one of the best ways to protect yourself from germs that cause the cold, flu, and even COVID-19. But don't stop there.

First, support your immune system with plenty of sleep, a balanced diet packed with fruits and vegetables, and exercise.

Next, try these lesser known but highly effective strategies for avoiding the viruses and bacteria that make us sick.

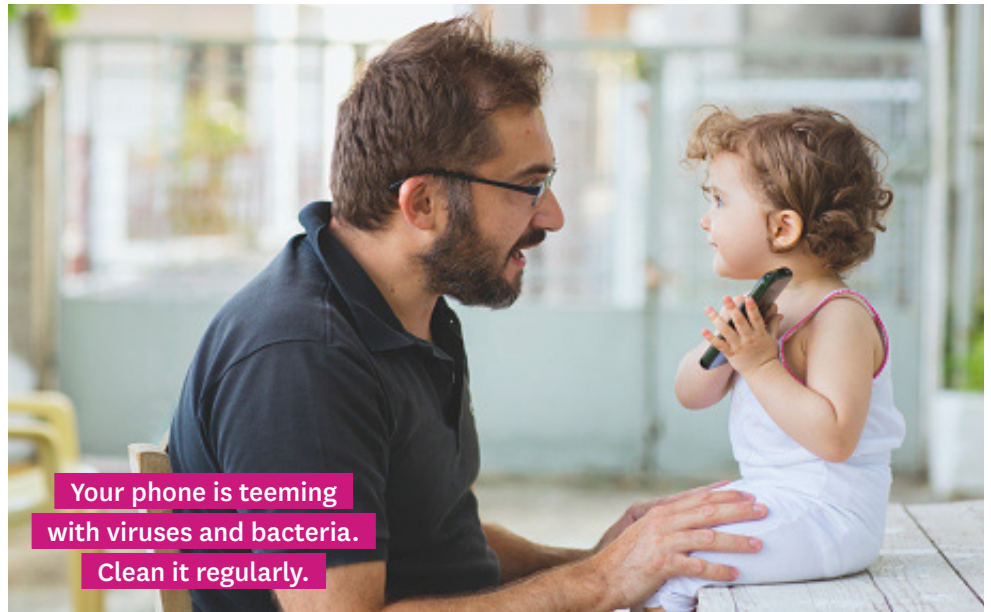
1. CLEAN YOUR CELL PHONE

Did you know our cell phones are crawling with tens of thousands of germs? It makes sense, considering we pick them up an average of 52 times a day.

That's why you should clean your phone daily. For many popular devices, it's safe to gently wipe down your phone with a microfiber cloth that's been spritzed with a 70 percent isopropyl alcohol solution.

2. ASSIGN EVERYONE IN THE HOUSE THEIR OWN HAND TOWEL

Think about it: "You're using it to rub yourself dry, which can leave germs on the towel," says registered nurse Connie Steed, M.S.N., president of the Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology (APIC). "If someone else picks it up and uses it, those germs can spread between you."



In addition, wash your towels every three to four days—more often if you or another family member is not feeling well.

3. CARRY YOUR OWN PEN

It's a smart strategy: When you grab any available pen to, say, fill out paperwork at the bank, you have no idea how many unwashed hands have touched it first.

4. SWITCH FROM CONTACT LENSES TO EYEGLASSES

If you're not always super buttoned-up about your hand hygiene, switching to your spare eyeglasses could minimize your risk of infection by cutting down on how often you touch your eyes throughout the day.

When Steed's son was a teenager and there was a bug going around her house,

for example, she would ask him to switch to specs. "I knew he wasn't going to put his contact lenses in properly every time," she says, so wearing his glasses helped stop him from spreading germs.

5. USE A STRESS BALL

According to APIC, people touch their faces about 23 times an hour. That's 23 opportunities every hour for germs to make their way into your body.

Steed has found that a stress ball helps keep her hands busy, so she's less likely to absentmindedly touch her face.

"What puts you at risk is where your hands go after you touch a surface," Steed says. That's why avoiding touching your face and washing your hands is so important.

It’s Time to Stop Ignoring Your Hearing Loss

THREE GOOD REASONS TO SPEAK UP AT THE EARLIEST SIGN

Age-related hearing loss is extremely common. In the United States, one-third of adults between the ages of 65 and 74 experience it, and almost half of those over 75 struggle to hear what’s going on around them.

Yet, the early signs of hearing loss tend to go largely unnoticed—or ignored. Audiologist Jael Hall, Au.D., who is with the American Academy of Audiology, says that, on average, people wait about seven years to seek treatment.

That delay can have some pretty serious health consequences. Hearing loss that goes unchecked, for example, is tied to a higher risk of both faster cognitive decline and dementia. Here are three more top reasons to seek help.

1 YOUR MENTAL HEALTH No surprise, when you have trouble hearing it can be tempting to avoid conversations and get-togethers. But going that route can set you up for social isolation, which can trigger anxiety or even depression.



In fact, age-related hearing loss is significantly associated with depression in older adults, according to a 2019 analysis of prior studies that appeared in *The Gerontologist*. Another study showed that, compared to people with normal hearing, those with even mild levels of hearing loss had a higher risk of developing anxiety.

2 YOUR SAFETY Not hearing well means you might miss out on important warning sounds,

like a car honking or a smoke detector beeping. Or, you might misunderstand your doctor’s instructions for taking a new medicine—including how much to take and how often.

A risk of falling is another concern. Research shows that hearing loss, particularly in advanced stages, directly impacts a person’s mobility, prompting them to take both shorter steps and fewer steps per minute.

3 YOUR OVERALL HEALTH Dementia and depression aren’t the only serious health conditions with ties to hearing loss. A 2018 study revealed links to an increased risk of arthritis, cancer, emphysema, heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, and stroke.

If you’re having trouble hearing, make an appointment with your doctor or a hearing specialist to get a proper diagnosis and treatment plan. Protecting your hearing is as important as eating right, exercising regularly, staying socially connected, and getting plenty of sleep every night.



Protect Your Children Accidents at home are a top cause of emergency room visits for kids. If you have children, check every room for danger and take steps to make sure your home is a safe space. Start here:

- If you have guns, keep them locked up and unloaded.
- Secure tall furniture (like bookcases) by bolting it into the wall.
- Keep medication and household cleansers out of kids’ reach.

HEALTHY HABITS CAN KEEP YOU ON YOUR A-GAME

Fall’s here. That means it’s time for pumpkin-flavored treats and leaf-peeping. But along with the fun stuff, we also have to get ready to outsmart the sneezes, fevers, and coughs that are part of the seasonal package.

By now, we’ve all learned the importance of good handwashing, but there are many more simple habits that can help lower your risk for colds, flu, and other viruses. Things like going for a walk, turning in early, or enjoying an extra serving of vegetables. In this issue, discover a few new habits that might be doable for you. Your good health matters to us. If you have questions about your health plan, visit our website mhswi.com, or call us at **888-713-6180**.

Ken Schellhase, M.D., M.P.H.
Chief Medical Officer, MHS Health Wisconsin

4 Things to Know About Vaccines

WORRIED ABOUT GIVING YOUR CHILD A SHOT? LET’S SET YOUR MIND AT EASE

New parents face many unknowns, but one thing is clear: Vaccinations are one of the best ways to keep your child healthy.

“Vaccine-preventable diseases have declined dramatically in the U.S., but they still occur and cause pediatric hospitalizations and deaths every year,” says Ritu Banerjee, M.D., Ph.D., a pediatric infectious diseases specialist from Vanderbilt University Medical Center.

“Vaccines are safe and effective, and staying up to date with them is one of the most important things you can do to protect your child’s health,” she adds. Check out Dr. Banerjee’s answers to common questions about vaccines.

What’s the hurry to vaccinate babies? Shots are given to infants and young children because they have the highest risk of having complications or dying from these diseases. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends a schedule of childhood vaccinations to prevent 16 infectious illnesses—from chickenpox to polio to measles.

Are they safe for infants? Yes. A baby’s immune system is fully developed—meaning it has all of the parts needed to fight diseases—but it’s inexperienced. Vaccines expose the child to the antigens, which are “live” versions of the bacteria and virus. Antigens work by tricking the immune system into thinking it has been exposed to the disease.

This recognition allows the immune system to protect against future infections from the disease you’re vaccinated against. Modern vaccines contain far fewer antigens than the original versions decades ago. As science progresses, vaccines keep getting safer.

Are additives in vaccines safe? All ingredients for vaccines, including any additives, are tested for safety. In fact, additives help vaccines last longer and work more effectively.

Do vaccines cause autism? No. The majority of autistic individuals have abnormal brain development. They are born that way, and vaccines don’t change that. Previous generations were not tested for autism. Today, testing is more common, leading to improved detection and a rise in autism cases.



Don’t Delay the Care You Need

Waiting is no fun. We’ve created the following guidelines to ensure you can efficiently access the care you require. You should not be asked to wait longer than what’s listed. If you feel you’re waiting too long, call **888-713-6180** to talk to a Member Advocate.

PRIMARY CARE PROVIDER (PCP) APPOINTMENTS	
Appointment Type	Access Standard
Routine visit	Within 30 calendar days
Non-urgent visit	Within 7 calendar days
Urgent care visit	Within 24 hours
Emergency visit	Immediately, 24 hours per day, 7 days per week without prior authorization
Initial high-risk prenatal care	Within 2-3 weeks
After hours coverage	24 hours per day, 7 days per week
Office wait times	Within 30 minutes of scheduled appointment
SPECIALIST APPOINTMENTS	
Appointment Type	Access Standard
Routine referral visit	Within 60 calendar days
After-hours coverage	24 hours per day, 7 days per week
Office wait times	Within 30 minutes of scheduled appointment

5 Nutrition Myths—Busted!

DON'T BE FOOLED BY THIS OUTDATED HEALTHY EATING ADVICE

When it comes to nutrition, there tends to be a lot of misinformation floating around. While many eating myths have been debunked over the years (no, carbs aren't evil after all—and neither is fat) there are some myths that just won't die. Here are five of the most common.

Myth: Brown eggs are healthier than white.

TRUTH: They're actually the same nutritionally. Brown eggs just come from a different breed of chicken.

Myth: Sea salt is lower in sodium than regular salt.

TRUTH: Both kinds contain about 2,300 milligrams of sodium per teaspoon. So using sea salt won't help you reduce your sodium intake. Regular table salt is also fortified with the mineral iodine, while sea salt isn't.

Myth: Saturated fat is bad for you.

TRUTH: There are some kinds of saturated fat that don't negatively impact your heart health (the kind found in chocolate and

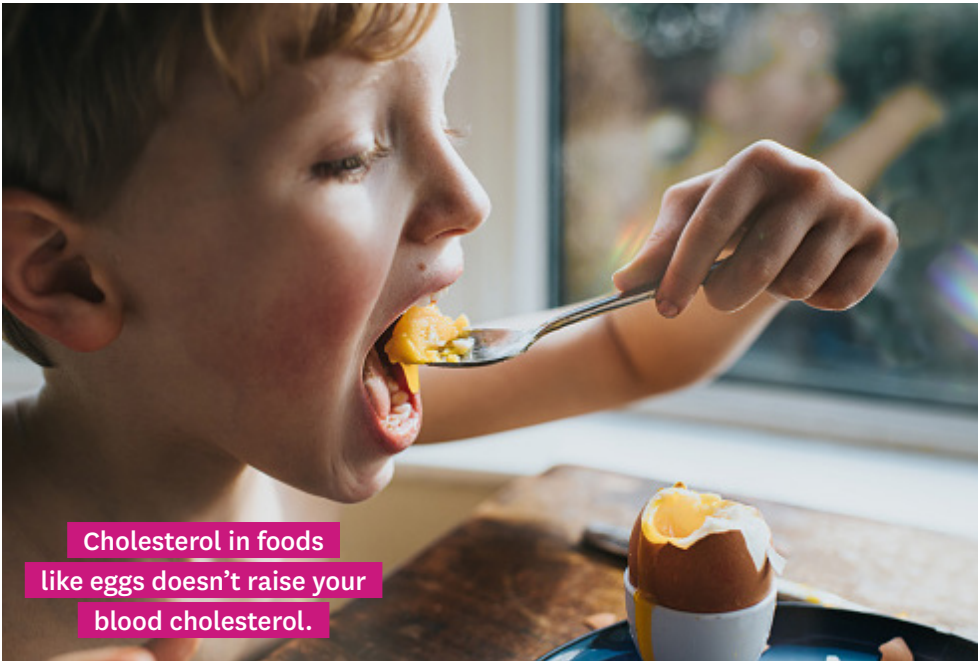
dairy foods, for example). Recent research suggests that full-fat dairy products, like the slice of cheese you add to a sandwich, have anti-inflammatory properties that may help prevent heart disease. That's also why enjoying a small piece of chocolate is okay (yay!).

Myth: Brown sugar is better for you than white sugar.

TRUTH: Most brown sugar is just white sugar with molasses added to it. It's true that molasses contains calcium and magnesium—but in tiny amounts. You'd have to eat about a cup of packed brown sugar to get the amount of calcium found in just half a glass of milk.

Myth: Eggs raise your cholesterol level.

TRUTH: Egg yolks do contain cholesterol, but researchers have discovered that it's not the cholesterol in food that raises your blood cholesterol levels. It's more likely saturated and trans fats. So don't toss the yolk down the sink—it contains valuable nutrients that aren't found in the whites, such as vitamin A.



Watch Your Numbers

A cholesterol blood test measures your LDL (“the bad”), HDL (“the good”), and total cholesterol levels. Get yours checked once a year, and ask your doctor to check your blood pressure, too.

If your doctor tells you that your numbers are too high, you can take these steps to help bring them down.

1. Take your prescription medication, even if you feel fine.
2. Eat a healthy diet that is high in fiber and low in salt and fats.
3. Don't smoke. Your doctor can suggest ways to quit tobacco.
4. Exercise at least two to three times a week. Ask your doctor for ideas to get started.



Get Your Flu Shot

A flu shot is recommended

for everyone over the age of six months. It helps you, your family, and your community stay healthy. New research shows that, when healthy people get vaccinated, it reduces the spread of the flu. Other ways to avoid colds and flu this season include:

- Wash your hands often
- Don't touch your face
- Avoid big crowds and sick people
- Eat healthy foods
- Get plenty of sleep



Resources for You

The Member Handbook is available

on our website, mhswi.com. You also can log in to our secure member portal to view your authorizations and claims. Prefer paper copies? Call **888-713-6180**, and we'll send what you're looking for.



Healthy Recipe: Potato, Kale, and Chorizo Soup

A HEARTY FALL SOUP THAT'S CHOCK-FULL OF GOOD-FOR-YOU VEGETABLES—AND FLAVOR

SERVINGS: 6

Prep time: 10 min

Cook time: 20 min

Per serving:

293 calories
3 g saturated fat
473 mg sodium
375 g carbs
16 g protein
8 g fiber

INGREDIENTS

- 1 Tbsp olive oil
- 3 oz. Spanish chorizo
- 1 cup diced onion
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 6 cups low-sodium vegetable or chicken broth
- 5 gold potatoes, peeled and cut into ½-inch cubes
- 1 15-oz. can navy beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 bunch baby kale, stems removed and leaves chopped
- Salt and pepper, to taste

DIRECTIONS

1. In a large, heavy-bottom pot, heat olive oil over medium heat. Add chorizo and cook, stirring, until browned, about 3 minutes. Add onion and cook until softened, about 5 minutes. Add garlic and cook until just fragrant, about 30 seconds.
2. Add the broth, potatoes, beans, and kale. Bring soup to a boil, turn heat down and simmer until potatoes are tender, about 15 minutes.
3. Season with salt and pepper. Serve with slices of crusty whole-grain bread for dipping.



Our Care Management Team Is Here for You

If you have more than one health problem, you may see several doctors for treatment. If you'd like help understanding each condition—and keeping track of the different treatment plans—our nurses and social workers are on hand to help you. They will work with you and your doctor to make sure you get the care you need. They can even set up home health services. Call **888-713-6180** to speak with a care manager.

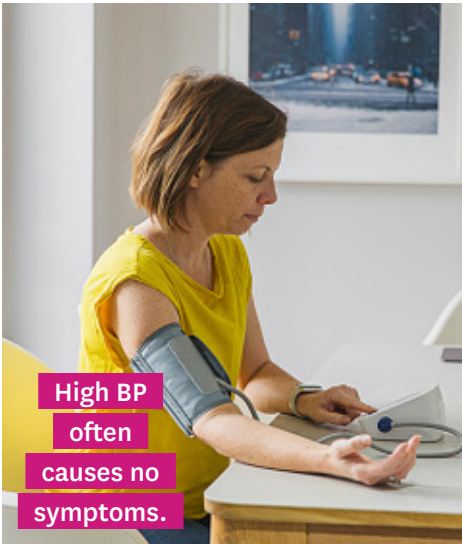
Photo: Jackie Q. Botto

Why You Should Take Your Blood Pressure at Home

KEEPING TRACK LETS YOU STAY ON TOP OF YOUR HEALTH

If you’ve been diagnosed with high blood pressure (BP) or told to keep an eye on it, it’s important to do checks on a regular basis. That’s because, the older we get, the more likely we are to have high BP, says cardiologist Martha Gulati, M.D., chief of cardiology at the University of Arizona and author of *Saving Women’s Hearts*.

Measuring BP at home can provide a more familiar, calmer environment than the doctor’s office, Dr. Gulati says.



TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR BP
Performing home measurements has been associated with a greater decrease in high blood pressure. That’s why the American Heart Association (AHA) encourages everyone with high blood pressure to track their BP at home.

PICK THE RIGHT CUFF
Not all home monitors are equal. Devices that fit onto the wrist are not always accurate, Dr. Gulati says. The AHA recommends an automatic, cuff-style monitor that wraps around your upper arm. Your doctor or pharmacist can help you make the right selection.

After you put on the cuff, you press a button and the device does the rest of the work. Newer models wirelessly connect to a smartphone app and keep a record of all of your readings. Some provide charts, making it easy to spot positive and negative trends.

The AHA suggests bringing your home monitor with you to your next appointment, so your doctor can check to make sure that you’re using it correctly and that the readings are accurate.

7 STEPS FOR A BETTER READING
Blood pressure varies throughout the day. It also can spike because of something you ate or because of sudden stress. Here’s how to take the most accurate reading possible, according to Dr. Gulati.

1. Take measurements at the same times every day. For example, 30 minutes after waking up and again in the evening.
2. Avoid caffeine and exercise for at least 30 minutes beforehand. Both raise BP.
3. Sit up straight in a chair. Place both feet on the floor and relax for five minutes.
4. Slightly bend your arm, and rest it on a table. Keep your upper arm on the same level as your heart.
5. Wrap the cuff around your bare arm, above the bend in your elbow.
6. Stay still and quiet—moving or talking can skew your results.
7. Take three readings, one minute apart. Note the results with the time and date.

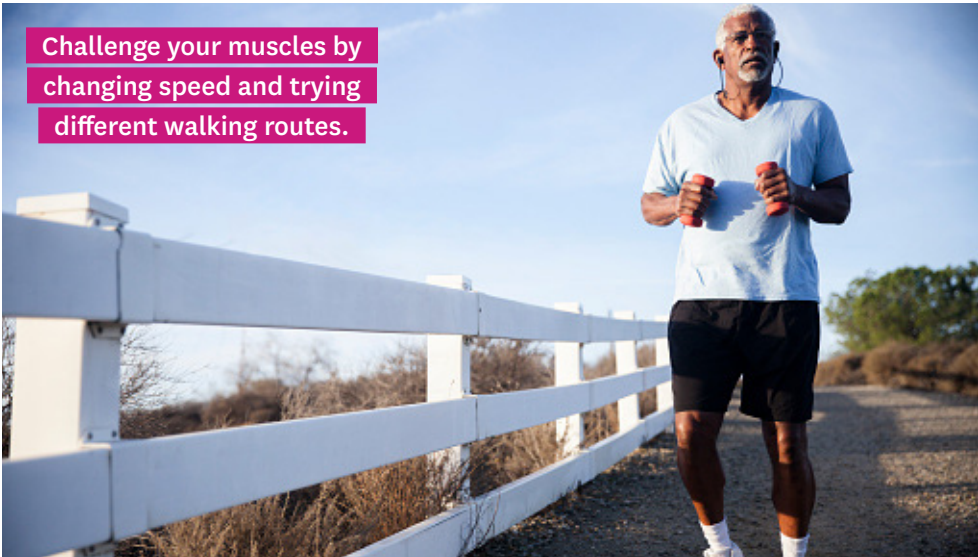
WHAT YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE NUMBERS MEAN

Only a doctor can diagnose high blood pressure, but use this guide to understand your numbers. The top number (systolic) represents the pressure in your arteries when your heart beats, while the bottom number (diastolic) is the pressure between beats.

NORMAL	ELEVATED	HIGH STAGE 1	HIGH STAGE 2
SYSTOLIC less than 120	SYSTOLIC from 120 to 129	SYSTOLIC from 130 to 139	SYSTOLIC at least 140
DIASTOLIC less than 80	DIASTOLIC less than 80	DIASTOLIC from 80 to 89	DIASTOLIC at least 90
Congratulations! Keep eating healthily and exercising.	Start to make healthier lifestyle choices.	Make lifestyle changes and, in some cases, you may need to take medication.	Make lifestyle changes, take medication, and see your doctor for regular follow-ups.

Your 4-Week Walking Workout

KICK UP YOUR FITNESS ROUTINE WITH A WALKING PLAN THAT BUILDS STRENGTH AND ENDURANCE



Walking doesn’t always get the respect it deserves. But a daily stroll can help shrink belly fat, safeguard your brain health, and add years to your life. Plus, when you pick up the pace, you’re building endurance, which helps strengthen your heart.

Supercharge your walks with this easy plan that will help you cover more ground and burn more calories along the way.

How to Track Your Effort
To see fitness gains, you’ll need to move at a fairly brisk pace. Use a 1-to-10 effort scale, with 10 being maximal effort and 1 being a rest, to help you adjust your speed.

WEEKS 1 & 2: BUILD YOUR BASE
Do this workout three days a week.

Warm-up: Walk 5 minutes at a speed that feels like about a 3–4 effort level.
Brisk walking intervals: 10 minutes, 5–6 effort level
3 minutes, 3–4 effort level
2 minutes, 5–6 effort level
Cool down: Walk 5 minutes at a 2–3 effort level.

WEEK 3: PICK UP STEAM
Same as above, but add a fourth day.

Challenge yourself: During the last minute of the 10-minute interval portion, speed walk (6–7 effort level) for 60 seconds.

WEEK 4: ADD TIME
Do this workout four days this week.

Warm-up: Walk 5 minutes at a 3–4 effort level.
Brisk walking intervals: 20 minutes, 5–6 effort level
3 minutes, 3–4 effort level
2 minutes, 5–6 effort level
Cool down: 5 minutes of walking (2–3 effort level). Make sure to continue your strengthening exercises on your rest days or in addition to your endurance days.

KEEP IT GOING!
To continue maintaining and building endurance, continue with the Week 4 plan, but try a route that has some small hills. Other options: Do a few more minutes at the 6–7 effort level. Challenge yourself to a longer walk once a week.

HOW TO KNOW IF YOU’RE TOO SICK TO EXERCISE?

Cold and flu can zap you of energy faster than you can change from sneakers to slippers. But what’s best for your body once it’s on the winning side of the virus: Feet up? Or a little blood flow? Here’s how to make the call when you’re feeling...

Low on energy: If you feel like you’re coming down with something, but don’t have a full-blown cold or flu (yet), a walk could be just what you need. Research shows low-intensity exercise three times a week can increase energy levels by 20 percent and reduce fatigue by as much as 65 percent. And what’s more, it may help you stay ahead of viruses.

A cold coming on: If your symptoms are above the neck (sneezing and stuffy nose), you are probably in the clear for a light- to moderate-intensity workout. Stick to home or outdoor workouts so you don’t get others sick.

Like your flu is on its last legs: Your body needs its strength to recover—not to do curl reps. If your symptoms are fever and below the neck (muscle aches, dizziness, nausea, chest congestion), stay in bed. Feeling better? Modify your workout until you’re back to 100 percent.



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As a member, you can take advantage of these exciting benefits:

- Debit card rewards for preventive exams and screenings
- Rewards for pregnant women
- Optional contact lenses or \$100 applied to the retail value of eyeglass frames

To access these extras, go to the “benefits” section of our website, mhswi.com, and click on “rewards.”



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Español: ATENCIÓN: si habla español, tiene a su disposición servicios gratuitos de asistencia lingüística. Llame al **1-888-713-6180**. (TTY: **1-800-947-3529**).

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