

# For Better Health

For Paramount Elite Members



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Spring 2008



## Seasonal Sneezes

Flowers and trees bud in spring, and allergies are also in full bloom. Allergies can be more than annoying—they can disrupt everyday activities and even lead to painful sinus and ear infections.

### Take Steps to Avoid Pollen

In springtime, the source of allergy problems is typically pollen from grasses, trees, weeds, and flowering plants. You can't avoid airborne pollen completely, but you can lessen your exposure. Take steps to shut drifting pollen out of your home and car by keeping windows and doors closed. An air conditioner can help filter and dry the air you breathe. It's also helpful to know when it's safest to go outside. Check pollen counts in the newspaper, on the TV news, or on the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology Web site at [www.aaaai.org](http://www.aaaai.org). Limit your time

outdoors when pollen counts are high—especially on dry, windy days.

### Which Medicine Is Right for You?

Taming annoying allergy symptoms with medicine is easier once you know the types of allergy drugs available. Talk with your doctor to see which of these medicines may help.

- **Antihistamines.** These relieve sneezing, runny nose, itchiness, and rashes. Ask about brands that won't make you sleepy for daytime use.
- **Decongestants.** These shrink

swollen nasal tissues so that you can breathe easier. They're available in pills, nose drops, and nasal sprays.

- **Antihistamines/decongestants.** These combine the benefits of two medicines in a single product.
- **Corticosteroid and cromolyn sodium nose sprays.** These are used to reduce nasal swelling.

### Tips for Staying Sneeze-Free

Did you know that your clothes can collect pollen when you hang them outside to dry? Use a dryer instead. For more allergy relief tips, visit our Web site at [www.paramounthealthcare.com](http://www.paramounthealthcare.com), click on "Better Health for Life," the letter "A" at the top of the page, "Allergies," and scroll down to the self-care section.

- **Allergy eyedrops.** Various formulas are available to relieve itching, redness, and tearing.
- **Allergy shots.** These are a series of regular injections given for three to five years to help reduce your immune system's reaction to allergens.

## Heartening News for Gardeners



Many of us love to dig in the dirt, particularly as we grow older. Happily, gardening can give us the exercise we need to help prevent heart disease.

Working in the yard or garden burns between 250 and 500 calories an hour. Digging, spreading mulch, pruning, raking, and weeding are moderately aerobic activities, so they help your heart and lungs work better.

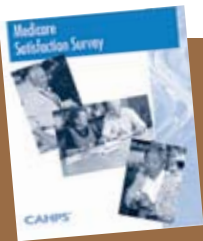
But if you have a heart condition, talk with your doctor before gardening. He or she can tell you which activities are safe for you and which ones you should avoid.

# We Want Your Opinion!

Check your mailbox. The 2008 Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (CAHPS®)\* survey has already begun. Every year, a survey company hired by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) conducts the survey to see what health plan members around the U.S. think about their plan. A large sample of members receives the survey, and the company follows up with a phone call if a member doesn't complete and return the form.

You or someone you know may have been surveyed for CAHPS® before. If you're included in the sample again this year, it's OK to respond because CMS and we at Paramount want to know about recent care and services. We're proud of our members' high response rate. We look forward to finding out what you think about us.

\*CAHPS is a registered trademark of the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality.



## Watch for This Survey

If you do receive this survey in the mail, please be sure to fill it out and return it. Your feedback will tell us how we can better serve you.



## Break Down Your Exercise Barriers

Ready to shake off the winter doldrums? Spring is in the air, and it's the perfect time to get physical. Maybe you find obstacles in your way when you think about getting more exercise. Here are common barriers—and tips for overcoming them.

### “I don't have time.”

- Break it up: Walk for 10 minutes in the morning and 10 minutes in the afternoon.
- Build exercise into your day: Take the stairs, park farther away, or bike to the store.

### “My neighborhood's not safe.”

- Walk inside a shopping mall.
- Work out indoors with a video or television program.

### “Exercise hurts my joints.”

- Swim at a community pool.
- Do chair exercises.

### “Exercise is boring.”

- Work out with a friend.
- Take a dance class.
- Vary your routine with new activities.

## Mark Your Calendar

Senior Dances for 2008 will be held on April 18, September 12, and December 5, at 7 p.m., at the Great Stranahan Theater and Great Hall, 4645 Heatherdowns Blvd., Toledo, Ohio.

The Johnny Knorr Orchestra will provide the music. There will also be free door prizes and snacks and a cash bar.

This event is FREE for Paramount Elite members who bring their ID card and \$5 for guests.





# Take Care *When You Have* Heart Failure

Having heart failure doesn't mean your heart doesn't work. It means your heart isn't pumping as well as it should. Take steps now to help it get stronger.

Heart failure is a serious condition that affects about 5 million Americans. When your heart gets weaker, it can't push blood and fluid out of the lungs properly. This makes it harder to catch your breath. It may cause your feet, ankles, and legs to swell. You may also feel tired. Although there is no cure for heart failure, you can do a lot to feel better and stay as healthy as possible. Even simple changes may make a difference.

## **Strengthen Your Heart**

You might think having a weak heart means you shouldn't exercise. But the opposite is true.

A moderate amount of physical activity can make your heart stronger. Rather than tire you out, exercise boosts your energy level and mood. It also improves circulation and helps you maintain a healthy weight. When you get regular exercise, high blood pressure and cholesterol are likely to drop, too.

Staying active could be as simple as putting on some comfortable shoes and taking a walk a few times a week. But not everyone with heart failure can safely exercise. Ask your health care provider what kind of exercise—and how much—is right for you.

## **Watch Your Plate**

A healthy diet will help keep your heart failure in check. It's especially important to limit sodium. Sodium makes the body hold on to fluids, so it makes heart failure worse.

Packaged foods such as chips, rice mixes, and canned soups are high in sodium, either from salt (salt is 40 percent sodium) or food additives. Restaurant foods are often loaded with salt, too. Even some drugs have sodium in them. If you're not sure how to limit sodium, talk with your health care provider. He or she may also want you to limit fluids; eat more

potassium-rich fruits and vegetables; and consume less fat, cholesterol, and alcohol.

### Take It Easy

When you're feeling stressed, your heart works harder. This can make symptoms worse. These tips can help you manage stress:

- Spend time with friends regularly, talk with a counselor, or join a support group.
- Learn to relax with deep breathing or tai chi.
- Do something pleasurable every day, such as reading or gardening.
- Learn to be more comfortable saying no so that you don't take on too much.
- Schedule rest time every day—take an afternoon nap or sit with your feet up.

When you're able to feel relaxed during the day, take your medications on time, and make a few simple lifestyle changes, you'll be at your best.

### Heart Failure Warning Signs

Call your health care provider if:

- You gain 3 or more pounds in a day
- Symptoms such as shortness of breath, swelling, or tiredness get worse
- You wake up at night feeling out of breath

## Find Relief from Incontinence

Bladder disorders are a common condition that people don't like to talk about. One common bladder disorder is urinary incontinence—the loss of bladder control. An estimated 25 million Americans are incontinent. The good news is that it's treatable.

### There Are Different Types

The main types of incontinence include:

- **Stress incontinence.** This is when you leak urine while you cough, sneeze, laugh, lift a heavy object, or exercise.
- **Urge incontinence.** This is when you have strong, immediate urges to urinate.
- **Overflow incontinence.** This is when your bladder is usually full and at times leaks urine.

No matter what type of incontinence you have, in most cases you will get better once the cause is found and treated. Some of the main causes of all types of incontinence include neurological diseases, damaged or weakened pelvic muscles from menopause or childbirth

by vaginal delivery, urinary tract infections, chronic illnesses, excess weight, and certain medications.

### Managing It on Your Own

Your doctor can talk with you about treatment. Here are some tips for helping control urinary incontinence on your own:

- **Lose weight, if you're overweight.** And start exercising on a regular basis.
- **Avoid foods that may irritate your bladder,** such as coffee, tea, alcoholic and carbonated beverages, and chocolate.
- **Learn how to do Kegel,** or pelvic muscle, exercises for stress incontinence. These strengthen muscles near the urethra, helping you achieve better urinary control. You do them by tightening the pelvic floor muscles—as if to control urination—for about three seconds at a time and resting for about three seconds. Repeat this 10 to 15 times.

After talking with your doctor, you may find that certain medications will help your urinary incontinence.

### Test Yourself on Bladder Matters

Learning more about incontinence may encourage you to talk with your doctor about it. Start by taking an online quiz. Go to [www.paramounthealthcare.com](http://www.paramounthealthcare.com) and click on “Better Health for Life,” “Interactive Tools,” “Quizzes,” and “Urinary Incontinence Quiz.”



Regular walking can lower your risk for heart disease and diabetes and help you lose excess weight. It's good for all ages and all fitness levels. But there are a few do's and don'ts you should review before you start walking.

### Do's

- **Check with your doctor.** Talk with your doctor about starting a walking program if you haven't worked out for a while. This is especially true if you have a heart condition, chest pain, or joint problems, or if you often lose your breath after you've been physically active.

- **Set the right pace.** Remember the tortoise and the hare? Your walking speed should be somewhere in between. Studies show that total walking time is more important than your pace for heart health. Speed up your walk to get your heart pumping.

- **Warm up and cool down.** Five to 10 minutes of gentle activity,



## Walking Do's and Don'ts

You don't need a rule book or any fancy equipment to reap the health benefits of exercise. Just put one foot in front of the other ... and start walking.

such as slow walking, preps your muscles for the challenge ahead. When you're done walking, reduce your speed and cool down for another five to 10 minutes. Then stretch your leg muscles to boost

sneakers have a slightly raised heel that doesn't let your foot wobble. They're snug but have enough room up front for your toes to wiggle. Thick, flexible soles provide cushioning and support.

flexibility and prevent injury.

- **Use proper form.** Keep your chin up and shoulders slightly back. Your abdominal muscles should be gently tightened and your spine straight. Point your toes straight ahead, touch your heel to the ground, and then roll your weight forward. Keep your arms bent and swing them as you go.

### Don'ts

- **Don't do too much too soon.** You shouldn't immediately start walking for an hour a day. Such intense activity could leave you injured or overly sore. Begin with five to 10 minutes of moderately strenuous walking and work up to 30 minutes or more.

- **Don't wear the wrong shoes.** The right

## Find Ways to Make Walking Fun

Bringing along a friend, using a pedometer, or listening to music may make walking more enjoyable. Find other walking tips at [www.paramounthealthcare.com](http://www.paramounthealthcare.com). Click on "Better Health for Life" and search for "walking."



# Are Your Medicines a Safe Match for You?

Some medicines react with other medicines in dangerous ways, so they should only be mixed in special cases. Other medicines can cause side effects, especially in older adults.

That's why you need to learn about all your medicines to make sure they're a safe match for you. Your doctor and pharmacist are the best people to help you with this. Don't be afraid to ask—they want you to be safe.

To find out how well doctors manage our members' medicines, we use two Healthcare Effectiveness Data and Information Set (HEDIS®)\* measures.

- **Use of high-risk medications in the elderly.**  
This measure looks at how many Paramount Elite members take one or more of the drugs that experts agree older adults should avoid whenever possible.
- **Potentially harmful drug-disease interactions.**  
This measure checks for medicines that patients with certain conditions shouldn't use. (These are called contraindications.)

The chart below shows the 2007 results for these measures. Lower rates are better. We're about average for most measures, but there's room to improve. Your health is at stake, so won't you help by speaking with your doctor or pharmacist soon?

## Know Your Medicines

Find out more about your medicines with our online drug reference section. You can search by the drug's name or physical description. Go to [www.paramounthealthcare.com](http://www.paramounthealthcare.com) and click on "Better Health for Life," "Library," and "Drug Reference."



Note: Lower rates are better.	Paramount Elite 2007	National Average	Paramount 2008 Goal
<b>Use of High-Risk Medications** in the Elderly</b>			
One drug was given that usually should be avoided (2,892 members).	24.8%	23.1% (sd=4.52 points)	≤24%
Two or more drugs were given that usually should be avoided (632 members).	5.4%	5.9% (sd=2.90 points)	≤5%
<b>Potentially Harmful Drug-Disease Interactions</b>			
Tricyclic antidepressants, antipsychotics, or sleep agents in patients with a history of falls	16.2%	14.6% (sd=3.67 points)	n/a
Tricyclic antidepressants, antipsychotics, or sleep agents in patients with dementia	26.0%	24.6% (sd=4.22 points)	n/a
Non-aspirin or COX-2 selective NSAIDs in patients with chronic renal failure	2.5%	9.5% (sd=3.51 points)	n/a
Combined rate for potentially harmful drug-disease interactions (309 members)	20.7%	19.4% (sd=3.73 points)	≤20%
		sd=standard deviation	

\* HEDIS® is a registered trademark of the National Committee for Quality Assurance.  
 \*\* To request a list of these medicines, call Member Services at 1-419-887-2525 or toll-free 1-800-462-3589 (TTY: 1-419-887-2526 or 1-888-740-5670).

# 5 Easy Steps to keep your Brain Young

Most healthy activities are also brain boosters. To keep a sound mind in your healthy body, take these simple steps.



**1 Eat smart.** Following the Mediterranean diet may lower your risk for Alzheimer's disease. This diet scrimps on meat but features a lot of veggies, legumes, fruits, cereals, olive oil, and fish.

**2 Challenge your brain.** To keep your mind alert, try learning a new language, solving crossword puzzles, playing board games, or reading. And turn off your TV. A study in *Neurology* revealed that older people who watched a lot of TV lost more mental ground than moderate viewers.

**3 Move it so that you don't lose it.** Exercise gets your blood circulating and boosts coordination. If you like variety in your exercise, that's great. Doing both cardiovascular exercise, such as walking or swimming, and mind/body exercise, such as tai chi, aids memory more than doing just one type of exercise.

**4 Quit smoking, if necessary.** Smoking damages blood vessels, including those in the brain. So it could well contribute to vascular dementia.

**5 Beware of excess pounds.** A study in *Age and Ageing* found that the risk for dementia rises along with your body mass index. Need a slimming tip? Substitute fresh or sparkling water for high-calorie sodas and fruit drinks.

**Take a Quick Quiz on Memory.** Did you know that tension and stress can cause memory lapses? Find out what other factors affect your memory with an online quiz. Go to [www.paramounthealthcare.com](http://www.paramounthealthcare.com) and click on "Better Health for Life," "Interactive Tools," "Quizzes," and "Memory Quiz."

ALL MODELS USED FOR ILLUSTRATIVE PURPOSES ONLY.

## Member Services

Monday–Friday  
8 a.m. to 8 p.m.

In Ohio:  
1-419-887-2525  
1-800-462-3589

TTY 1-888-740-5670

In Michigan:  
1-734-529-7800  
1-888-241-5604  
TTY 1-888-740-5670

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1-419-887-2525

Please send suggestions  
for the newsletter to  
[mindy.cross@promedica.org](mailto:mindy.cross@promedica.org).

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