

All Together HEALTHY

elderplan|homefirst.
a participating agency of MJHS Health System

Winter 2025

5 Signs of Hearing Loss

Many people experience hearing loss as they get older. In fact, about one-third of older adults have some level of hearing loss and it often goes unnoticed or untreated. Ignoring hearing problems can make them worse and impact your safety and quality of life.

Signs You May Have Hearing Loss

Get your hearing tested by your primary care physician, an ear, nose and throat doctor (ENT), or a qualified audiologist if you experience any of these signs:

- Having trouble understanding what people say in person or on the telephone and having to ask them to repeat themselves.
- Finding it difficult to follow conversations in person or on television.
- Finding it harder to hear what people say if you're not looking directly at them.
- Needing to turn the volume up on the television, radio, and phone.

If you notice these signs, talk to your doctor. Having a hearing test done is easy and the doctor can refer you to an audiologist (a hearing specialist) if necessary. A qualified audiologist can help diagnose and treat any hearing issues you may have. The earlier you address hearing loss, the sooner you can improve your quality of life.

Call HomeFirst Member Services at 1-877-771-1119 (TTY: 711), Monday to Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., to find out how to have a hearing screening in the comfort of your home.



Because we care about your health, Elderplan/HomeFirst has partnered with HearUSA, giving you access to a network of providers who can examine your hearing and cover hearing aids. HearUSA's online store, Hearing Shop, also has hearing care products to help keep you safe. Call HearUSA at 1-800-442-8231 (TTY: 711) or visit <https://members.hearusa.com/elderplan> to find out more.

Source: National Institute On Aging - www.nia.nih.gov/health/hearing-and-hearing-loss/hearing-loss-common-problem-older-adults

In This Issue...

As we begin 2025, I would like to personally welcome our new members to Elderplan/HomeFirst and thank our existing members for continuing to entrust us with your care. Our entire leadership team and staff are committed to helping you be as healthy as possible and ensuring your satisfaction with our plan.

It is with that commitment in mind that in this issue of *All Together Healthy* we have included important information about identifying hearing loss, receiving your annual flu and COVID-19 vaccinations, and the value of filling out an Advance Directive. Far too many people don't have Advance Directives – which outline your medical wishes in the event you cannot speak for yourself. This simple form allows you to make your wishes clear to the physicians providing your care and can take the burden of making often difficult decisions off your family's shoulders.

I'd like to also extend my appreciation to the members who have taken time to share feedback about their experiences with Elderplan/HomeFirst by responding to surveys and participating in Member Advisory Council (MAC) sessions. Your feedback plays a very important role in our ability to provide continuous improvement in our benefits, services and overall member satisfaction. We continue to encourage all members to respond to future surveys you may receive about the plan and invite you to participate in upcoming MAC sessions.

If you have questions or suggestions about any plan features or benefits, feel free to call us at 1-877-771-1119 (TTY: 711), Monday to Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

Sincerely,



David Wagner
President & CEO
MJHS Health System

What You Can Do to Prevent Falls

Falls in older adults are very common and can lead to injuries that could affect your overall health and participation in social activities.

What can you do to prevent falls?

- **Stay active.** Regular exercise helps build muscles and increase strength. Exercises like Pilates and Tai Chi can improve balance and muscle strength.
- **Get enough sleep.** If you are tired, you are more likely to fall.
- **Have your eyes and ears tested.** Even small changes in sight and hearing can increase your risk of falls. When you get new eyeglasses, take time to get used to them and wear them as advised. If you have hearing aids, be sure they fit well and make sure you wear them.
- **Use assistive devices if you need help feeling steady.** Using canes and walkers correctly can help prevent falls. If your doctor tells you to use a cane or walker, make sure it's the right size for you. Also, make sure the walker wheels are rolling smoothly.
- **Wear the right footwear.** Non-skid, rubber-soled, low-heeled shoes offer the best support.

If you have fallen, even if you don't feel pain or have balance issues, speak to your doctor. They can check for health problems and suggest physical therapy, assistive devices, or other measures to help prevent future falls.



If you have any questions or concerns about fall prevention, call HomeFirst Member Services at 1-877-771-1119, 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday to Friday, and ask to speak with your assigned care manager.

Sources:

Merck - www.merckmanuals.com/professional/geriatrics/falls-in-older-adults/falls-in-older-adults, National Institute on Aging - www.nia.nih.gov/health/falls-and-falls-prevention/falls-and-fractures-older-adults-causes-and-prevention

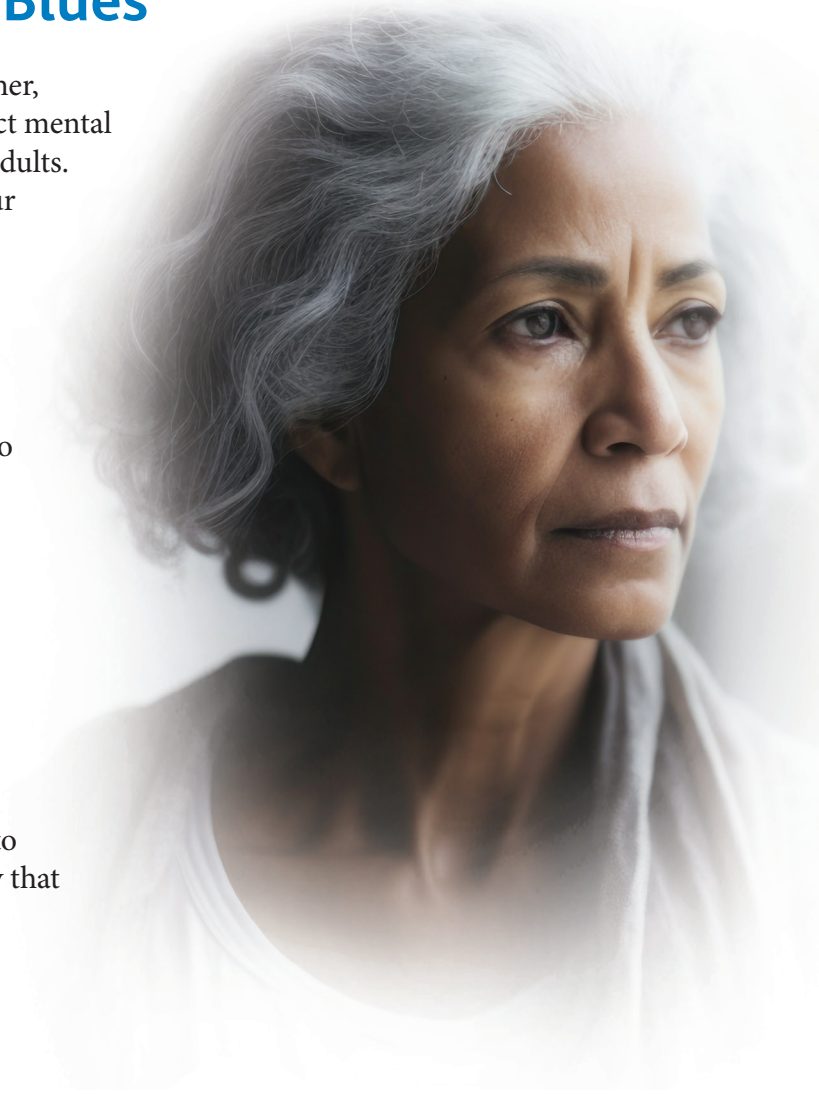
How to Beat the Winter Blues

Winter can be a tough time for everyone. Cold weather, fewer outdoor activities, and less sunshine can impact mental health and increase depression, especially for older adults. That's why it's important to find ways to improve your mental well-being during the winter months.

Causes of Depression in the Winter

Several factors that occur during this time of year may contribute to depression. These include:

- **Weather** – Cold weather makes it difficult to do outdoor activities such as running errands, attending doctor's appointments, or simply enjoying some fresh air.
- **Time change** – Less sunlight and changing the clocks as daylight saving time ends affect our biological clocks, which can cause mood, sleep, and hormonal changes.
- **Vitamin D deficiency** – Sunlight helps our bodies produce vitamin D. If you are exposed to less sunlight, it can lead to a vitamin deficiency that affects your mood.



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HomeFirst cumple con las leyes federales de derechos civiles aplicables y no discrimina por motivos de raza, color, nacionalidad, edad, discapacidad o sexo. ATENCIÓN: si habla español, tiene a su disposición servicios gratuitos de asistencia lingüística. Llame al 1-877-771-1119 (TTY: 711).

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How to Beat the Winter Blues (cont'd)

Feeling sad, lonely, or depressed does not have to be a part of getting older. Here are some tips to help improve your mental health and well-being during the winter months:



Tips to Cope with Feelings of Sadness, Isolation, and Depression

- **Be socially active.** Engaging in social activities can boost your physical, mental, and emotional health. Find an activity you enjoy and connect with others.
- **Eat a healthy diet.** A balanced diet can help prevent illnesses that might lead to disability or depression. Some diets have been shown to reduce the risk of depression.
- **Stay active indoors.** Engage in indoor exercises or hobbies that keep you moving and occupied.
- **Get at least 8 hours of sleep.** Sleep problems can trigger feelings of depression, so maintaining a good sleep routine is crucial.
- **Stay in touch with friends and family.** Let others know when you are experiencing symptoms of depression.
- **Seek professional help.** If your appetite is decreasing or your behavior is changing, it could be a sign that depression is worsening. Don't hesitate to reach out for professional help to maintain your mental well-being.



**Your mental health is just as important
as your physical health.**

**If you need to speak to someone, support is
just a phone call away. Call HomeFirst Member
Services at 1-877-771-1119 from 8:30 a.m. to
5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday and ask to
speak with your assigned care manager.**

Sources:

National Institute on Aging - <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/loneliness-and-social-isolation>

The Kim Foundation - <https://thekimfoundation.org/winter-weather-and-mental-health>

Cleveland Clinic - <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/9293-seasonal-depression>

Peace of Mind: The Value of Advance Directives

Planning for end-of-life care can be tough but it will provide peace of mind for you and your loved ones. It ensures your wishes are followed and takes the pressure of making difficult decisions away from your family.

Why is Advance Care Planning So Important?

- Ensures your health care wishes are followed.
- Provides peace of mind.
- Reduces stress and confusion among family members.

What is Advance Care Planning (ACP)?

ACP includes documenting your end-of-life care preferences and discussing them with your family members, especially before you have significant health care needs.

There are different types of advanced care planning documents available:

- **Health Care Proxy (HCP)** – A document that designates one or more people to make health care decisions for you when a doctor determines you are no longer able to make them for yourself.
- **Living Will** – A written statement of **YOUR** health care wishes in the event you are unable to decide for yourself. This does not appoint a specific person to carry out your health care wishes.
- **Power of Attorney (POA)** – A document assigning a person to make property, financial, and other legal non-health care decisions on your behalf.
- **Court-Appointed Legal Guardian** – A court order that appoints an organization or person to act on your behalf.

Once signed, copies of your advance directive should be given to your health care proxy, health care providers, hospital, and anyone else you feel should have the information.



For questions or assistance with obtaining advance directives in English or other languages, please contact your Care Manager by calling Member Services at 1-877-771-1119 (TTY: 711) from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday to Friday.

Getting Vaccinated Against the Flu and COVID-19 Viruses

The flu is a respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. It infects the nose, throat, and lungs and can cause mild to severe symptoms. COVID-19, like the flu, is a respiratory illness that also comes from a virus and can cause trouble breathing and even lead to pneumonia.

COVID-19 and flu viruses continue to significantly affect members of our community, particularly those who are at high risk, such as older adults and individuals with underlying health conditions. But there are updated COVID-19 and flu vaccines that may help protect you from serious illnesses caused by these viruses.

According to the CDC, receiving the flu and COVID-19 vaccines is safe and effective. Both vaccines prompt the immune system to produce antibodies that recognize and combat the viruses. Therefore, getting vaccinated helps lower the chances of complications, hospitalizations, and even deaths, particularly among high-risk groups.

If you have health conditions or have concerns and questions about receiving the flu and/or COVID-19 vaccines, speak to your provider. Your healthcare provider is here to support and guide you. You can get the vaccines at your doctor's office, health clinics, or through participating pharmacies.

Your health is our priority.

Remember – choosing to get vaccinated is safer than getting the flu or COVID-19.



Get Vaccinated and Get Rewarded

HomeFirst is pleased to offer our members a \$25 gift card for each flu and COVID-19 vaccine they receive.

For more information about this incentive, call the Wellness Team at (718) 759-4413, Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

<https://www.cdc.gov/covid/vaccines/benefits.html> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/prevention/index.htm>

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Join the MAC

The Member Advisory Council (MAC) is a group of members, caregivers, and staff that work together to help us improve member experience and your satisfaction. We thank everyone who dedicated their time to be part of these important meetings and to voice their opinion on behalf of themselves and other members.

For more information about participating in the MAC, please email memberadvisorycouncil@mjhs.org or call 347-254-7700, Monday to Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. We would love to hear from you!