

Understanding Obesity and Diabetes

Obesity is a serious health issue that can increase your risk of developing type 2 diabetes. In fact, it has played a major role in the rise of diabetes cases over the past 20 years. It is also linked to about half of all new diabetes cases in the U.S. each year.

How does obesity increase your risk of diabetes?

Carrying extra body fat, especially around the belly, can lead to changes in how your body uses insulin, a hormone that controls blood sugar. When insulin doesn't work properly, blood sugar builds up in the body. This is what leads to diabetes.

Two main reasons for this are:

- **Inflammation:** Extra fat in the body can cause long-term inflammation, which affects how insulin works.
- **Hormonal changes:** Being overweight can disrupt hormones that help regulate blood sugar and energy use. Belly fat, in particular, is strongly linked to a higher risk of diabetes.

Does obesity affect your health in other ways?

Obesity doesn't just raise your risk for diabetes. It's also linked to serious health problems such as high blood pressure and high cholesterol, which can increase your risk of heart disease, heart attack, and stroke.

What factors contribute to obesity and what can you do to address them?

Obesity is influenced by genetics, family history, dietary habits, physical activity levels, medications, and lifestyle. The good news is that many of the contributing factors to obesity can be addressed. These adjustments can also lower your risk of diabetes, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol.

See page 3 for valuable
information about
managing diabetes



In This Issue...

Dear Valued Member,

As the seasons change, it's a wonderful time to pause and think about what we can do together to help manage your health.

At Elderplan/HomeFirst, we feel privileged to be part of your health care journey. Whether you are a long-time member or just joined us recently, please know that your well-being is at the heart of everything we do.

In this issue of *All Together Healthy*, we have focused on ways to help you stay strong and care for your health all year long. This includes providing valuable support when it comes to managing conditions like diabetes and high blood pressure, as well as offering simple tips for staying active and protecting yourself against illness.

In addition, for those of you who may not already know, Elderplan/HomeFirst has opened two community offices in Flushing and Washington Heights. These local storefront locations were created to better support our members by offering a convenient place to stop in and learn more about your plan benefits and how to access them, as well as to participate in special programs and events.

Most importantly, I want you to know that your health and well-being remain a top priority for your team at Elderplan/HomeFirst. If you ever have questions or need support, our team is here for you.

Thank you,



David Wagner
President & CEO
MJHS Health System

Managing Diabetes to Help You Stay Healthy

Diabetes is a chronic condition that affects the body's ability to convert food into energy using a hormone called insulin. It occurs when the body does not make enough insulin or the insulin produced doesn't work as well as it should. When this happens, excess sugar (glucose) remains in the bloodstream at high levels.

Although managing diabetes can be tough, it's very possible with the right habits and support. And since Elderplan/HomeFirst cares about your health, we have even developed a Diabetes Disease Management Program specifically for members living with diabetes and their caregivers.

Small Daily Changes That Make a Big Difference

- Eat a healthy mix of vegetables, fruits, lean proteins (like fish, chicken, and beans), whole grains (like brown rice and whole wheat pasta), and healthy fats (like olive oil or avocado).
- Drink water and skim milk instead of juice or regular soda.
- Plan meals each week so you always have healthy options ready to eat.
- Bring nutritious snacks like baby carrots, sliced apples, or nuts with you when you go out.
- Write down what you eat in a food journal—it can help you stay on track
- Monitor, log, and keep track of your blood glucose levels at home.

Work with your health care team:

- Get regular checkups for your eyes, urine, and A1C levels.
- Ask your doctor any questions you may have, especially if you notice any changes in your health.



If you have questions about managing diabetes or want help with a nutrition plan, call HomeFirst Member Services at 1-877-771-1119, 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, and ask to speak with your assigned care manager.

Source:

CDC - <https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/21460>

What Is High Blood Pressure?

High blood pressure, also called hypertension, often has no noticeable symptoms—but it can lead to serious health problems like heart attack, stroke, and kidney disease.

Some health risks linked to high blood pressure—like your race, ethnicity, or family history—can't be changed. The good news is that many other factors can. In fact, small lifestyle changes can help you lower your blood pressure and reduce your risk of complications.

What Do the Numbers Mean?

Blood Pressure Category	Systolic mm Hg (top/upper number)	and/or	Diastolic mm Hg (bottom/lower number)
NORMAL	Less than 120	and	Less than 80
ELEVATED	120 – 129	and	Less than 80
STAGE 1 HYPERTENSION (High Blood Pressure)	130 – 139	or	80 – 89
STAGE 2 HYPERTENSION (High Blood Pressure)	140 or higher	or	90 or higher
SEVERE HYPERTENSION (If you don't have symptoms*, call your health care professional.)	Higher than 180	and/or	Higher than 120
HYPERTENSIVE EMERGENCY (If you have any of these symptoms*, call 911.)	Higher than 180	and/or	Higher than 120

*symptoms: chest pain, shortness of breath, back pain, numbness, weakness, change in vision or difficulty speaking

TIP: A home blood pressure monitor can help you check your numbers often.

Did You Know?

Almost half of adults with high blood pressure don't know they have it.



"I didn't feel any symptoms, so I'm glad I got it checked"

Source: American Heart Association - <https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/high-blood-pressure/understanding-blood-pressure-readings>

Small Changes Can Make a Big Difference

Healthy Habits to Lower Your Blood Pressure - And Why They Help



Eat less salt

Salt raises blood pressure



Don't smoke

Smoking harms your heart and blood vessels



Be active

Moving helps your heart and weight



Take your medicine consistently

Medicine helps control your numbers



Get enough sleep

Sleep keeps your body healthy



Check your blood pressure daily

Know your numbers so you can act early



Manage stress

Stress can make blood pressure go up

If you notice a change in your blood pressure, please talk to your doctor.

Source:

Mayo Clinic - <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/high-blood-pressure/in-depth/high-blood-pressure/art-20046974>

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Visit Our Elderplan/HomeFirst Community Offices

We're here for you — right where you need us.

Earlier this year, Elderplan opened two convenient Community Offices – one in Flushing and the other in Washington Heights.

These Community Offices are yet another example of Elderplan's commitment to our members. They are a valuable resource, providing support and guidance for members seeking answers to questions about their plan benefits and how to access them. They also provide the opportunity to socialize with other members and participate in special events. In addition, these two convenient storefront locations offer your friends in the community, who are not currently enrolled in Elderplan, the opportunity to stop in at their convenience to ask questions about our plans and the valuable benefits we offer.

Flushing

36-59 Main Street, Flushing, NY 11354
Hours: Monday–Friday, 9 AM to 5 PM

Washington Heights

564 West 181st Street, New York, NY 10033
Hours: Monday–Friday, 9 AM to 5 PM

Ways We Can Help



Member Support!

Personalized assistance with
Elderplan/HomeFirst benefits



Exciting Programs and Events!

Stop by and say hello!

No appointment needed—just walk in!

We're open Monday to Friday, from 9 AM to 5 PM.

How to Protect Yourself from Pneumonia

Pneumonia is more than just a cold. It's a serious lung infection caused by bacteria, viruses, or fungi. It can range from mild to life-threatening and is caused by inflammation in the air sacs in one or both lungs, causing them to fill with fluid. This may result in a cough with phlegm, fever, chills, and breathing difficulties. But the good news is that you can reduce your risk of getting very sick with the right knowledge and precautions.

Signs of Pneumonia

Recognizing the symptoms of pneumonia can help you get care sooner.

- Chest pain when you breathe or cough
- A cough with phlegm
- Shortness of breath
- Fatigue
- Fever, sweating, and chills
- Nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea

Adults aged 65 and older and people with weak immune systems may also experience:

- Changes in mental awareness
- Lower than normal body temperature

When to See a Doctor

If you experience breathing problems, chest discomfort, a continuous fever of 102°F or higher, an unusually low body temperature (below 95°F or 35°C), or a lasting cough, especially if it's producing phlegm, see a doctor.

It's important for people who are at high risk of complications to seek medical attention if they suspect they have pneumonia. This includes adults aged 65 and over, people with pre-existing health issues or compromised immune systems, and those undergoing chemotherapy or using medications that weaken the immune system.

Vaccinations Prevent Pneumonia

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that adults aged 50 or older get vaccinated against pneumonia. Vaccination guidelines periodically change, so speak to your doctor about whether you should get vaccinated, even if you've had a pneumonia vaccine before.



If you have questions about the pneumonia vaccine, 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.

55 Water Street
New York, NY 10041

elderplan.org
1-877-771-1119

What's Inside

Obesity and Diabetes



Managing Diabetes



High Blood Pressure Risks & Tips



Preventing Pneumonia



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Exciting News to Help You Save Money on Your Health Care

SPS Community Solutions (also referred to as Senior Planning Services or SPS) specializes in helping people find and enroll in government programs that can save them money. They've already helped numerous Elderplan and HomeFirst members save thousands of dollars each year. Now we're expanding our partnership to assist even more members like you. SPS can help you with:

- New York State Medicaid application and enrollment
- Medicare Savings Program (MSP)
- Extra Help (Low Income Subsidy - LIS)
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
- Elderly Pharmaceutical Insurance Coverage (EPIC) Program
- Lifeline Program
- Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)

SPS services are free for you and this service is entirely voluntary (Elderplan/HomeFirst covers all costs).

If you have any questions about this program or wish to enroll, call HomeFirst Member Services at 1-877-771-1119, 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m, Monday to Friday.