

## Stop Colorectal Cancer Before It Starts

Colorectal cancer is a disease in which cells in the colon or rectum grow out of control. It affects men and women at an equally frequent rate, and your risk of getting colorectal cancer increases as you get older. Your risk may also increase after having: inflammatory bowel disease (such as Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis); a personal or family history of colorectal cancer or colorectal polyps; a genetic syndrome such as familial adenomatous polyposis (FAP) or hereditary non-polyposis colorectal cancer (Lynch syndrome).

The good news is there is a lot you can do to protect yourself from this disease, including:

- Get your screenings (you can now be screened in the comfort of your home)
- Eat lots of vegetables, fruits and whole grains
- Exercise regularly
- Take control of your weight
- Don't smoke
- Avoid alcohol

### The Importance of Colorectal Screenings

The most effective way to reduce your risk of colorectal cancer is to get screened routinely. Almost all colorectal cancers begin as precancerous polyps, which typically don't cause any symptoms and can take years to turn into cancer. Colorectal cancer screenings can find polyps so they can be removed, preventing cancer from developing.

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recommends that adults begin screening at age 45 and continue screenings at regular intervals until age 75. Adults ages 76 to 85 should talk to their doctor about whether to continue screening and how often.

Several colorectal cancer screenings are available, including:

- Stool tests, such as fecal occult blood tests (FOBT)
- Flexible sigmoidoscopy
- Colonoscopy
- CT colonography (virtual colonoscopy)

It's best to talk to your doctor about which screening is right for you.

**Talk to your doctor  
about which screening is  
right for you.**

**Your care manager can  
help you schedule this  
important exam.**



**Source:** Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) - <https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/colorectal/>

## In This Issue...

On behalf of the entire staff at Elderplan/HomeFirst, I would like to wish you and your family a very happy and healthy new year. I'd also like to thank you for choosing Elderplan/HomeFirst as your health plan.

One of our goals for 2023 is to continue helping you stay as healthy as possible. That's why this issue of *All Together Healthy* is filled with information about two very important topics—heart disease and colorectal cancer. As you'll read, you have the power to lower your risk of these medical conditions by making healthy lifestyle changes and getting routine screenings. We've also included valuable tips about managing hearing loss, a common condition that can impact your safety and well-being.

Our second goal for this year is ensuring that you have a great member experience. That's why this issue of *All Together Healthy* will also introduce you to Felicia Dyer Johnson, our Chief Experience Officer. Felicia, along with the rest of the Elderplan/HomeFirst team, is committed to understanding your needs and expectations, so that we can provide you with the best possible care and services.

One way you can help us improve the overall quality of our plan is by filling out the member satisfaction survey that may come from Elderplan/HomeFirst or NYSDOH/IPRO (New York State Department of Health/ Island Peer Review Organization). Members are randomly selected to receive the survey – so not everyone will get it. If you do, we hope you'll provide your feedback. It will help us make continuous improvements.

If you have questions or suggestions, or if you need our support, feel free to call us at 1-877-771-1119 (TTY: 711), 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday to Friday. Your team at Elderplan/HomeFirst is here to support you along the way.

Sincerely,



David Wagner  
President & CEO  
MJHS Health System



David Wagner, President & CEO  
MJHS Health System

## 10 Signs It's Time to Check Your Hearing

Hearing loss is common as you age, but it can be managed with proper screening.

About half of people ages 75 and older have lost enough of their hearing (35 decibels or more) to need a hearing aid, but there's no reason to have to live with hearing loss. That's why Elderplan/HomeFirst offers coverage for hearing aids.

**Here's how to keep your ears—and your hearing—in tip top shape for years to come:**

- **Get regular hearing screenings.** Think of hearing screenings like routine dental or eye exams. You want to make sure everything is functioning as it should, and if there are any issues, you want to detect them early so they can be treated. Hearing exams are recommended every 1-2 years.
- **Be aware of increased risks.** Chronic health conditions, such as sleep apnea, diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and heart disease, all increase your risk of hearing loss. Some medications may also affect hearing. If you are considered to be at an increased risk, you may need more frequent screenings.
- **Maintain your hearing aids.** If you use hearing aids, get them checked by a hearing specialist at least once a year. Daily maintenance is also important.
- **Mind your earwax.** The waxy substance that coats the ear canal gets drier and harder as you age. This can lead to excess buildup or blockages that cause hearing loss, ringing in the ear or a sensation of fullness. Your PCP can safely clear out excess earwax (don't try to do it yourself).

Here are  
**10 SIGNS**  
it's time to have your  
hearing checked:

1. You get irritated at others for mumbling
2. You're having trouble following conversations
3. Talking on the phone is more challenging
4. Some sounds seem louder than normal
5. It's harder to carry on a conversation in a crowded room
6. Everyone is telling you to turn down the TV
7. You feel like you're getting clumsier
8. You don't remember things people tell you
9. You don't get jokes like you used to
10. You get distracted more easily



Elderplan has partnered with HearUSA to provide hearing care services.  
Call 1-800-442-8231 (TTY: 711) to schedule your  
FREE in-person or telehealth appointment.

## Taking Small Steps Towards Better Heart Health

At Elderplan/HomeFirst, your health and well-being are our top priorities. That's why we'd like to take a moment to encourage you to think about what you can do to make your heart healthier. Small steps taken each and every day can lead to big changes in your health and your life. A healthier heart allows you to enjoy time with family and friends, travel, participate in your favorite activities and much more.

In order to improve your heart health, it's helpful to understand what can happen to your heart as you get older. It's also important to recognize the symptoms of heart disease and know what factors increase your risk of developing it.



### What is heart disease?

Although there are several conditions that can affect the heart, the most common is coronary artery disease. This is a buildup of plaque on the walls of the arteries supplying blood to the heart. The plaque makes the opening in the arteries narrower, which can lead to a blockage that causes a heart attack. Coronary artery disease can also weaken the heart muscle over time, resulting in heart failure. If this happens, the heart can't pump blood the way it should.

Heart disease can impact your quality of life by making it difficult to do the things you love to do. It is also the leading cause of death in the United States. That's why it's important to take steps to lower your risk of this disease as much as possible.

### What are the symptoms of heart disease and heart attacks?

Chest pain and discomfort, called angina, is the most common symptom of heart disease and heart attacks. Other heart attack symptoms include:



Pain in the  
arms or shoulder



Weakness or  
light-headedness



Nausea or a  
cold sweat



Shortness  
of breath

**IF YOU HAVE SIGNS OF A HEART ATTACK, CALL 911 OR GET TO A HOSPITAL**

## Heart Disease Risks

The questions and answers below provide valuable information about what increases your risk of developing heart disease—and what you can do to keep your heart healthier.

### What are the risk factors of heart disease?

Understanding risks, and taking steps to manage them, keeps your heart healthier.

#### THE TOP THREE RISK FACTORS:



- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol
- Smoking

#### OTHER RISK FACTORS:

- Diabetes
- Overweight and obesity
- Unhealthy diet
- Lack of physical activity
- Excessive alcohol use

### How can you lower your risk of heart disease?

- Make healthy lifestyle changes – they can have a big impact on your heart health.
- You may need medication to treat conditions that increase your risk of heart disease, such as high cholesterol, high blood pressure and an irregular heartbeat.
- If necessary, surgical procedures can restore blood flow to the heart.

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## From the Chief Experience Officer

Elderplan/HomeFirst is committed to providing you with a wonderful member experience. This year, it's been my honor to assume a role focused on understanding your needs and expectations.

Your input is invaluable to us, and we use it to make important improvements in our plan benefits, the services and member support we provide. So, if you receive a member satisfaction survey from Elderplan/HomeFirst or from NYSDOH/IPRO (New York State Department of Health/ Island Peer Review Organization), please complete it.

If you'd like to take an even more active role in improving Elderplan/HomeFirst for you and other members, consider joining our Member Advisory Council (MAC). The MAC is a group of members, caregivers and staff that work together to help us improve member experience and satisfaction. We welcome interest from existing members or their caregivers. Council participants should be:

- Current members or their family members
- Committed to regularly attending meetings (you can participate via phone or video)
- Willing to work collaboratively with Elderplan/HomeFirst staff
- Focused on providing constructive feedback from a patient/family perspective

For more information about participating in the MAC, please email [memberadvisorycouncil@mjhs.org](mailto:memberadvisorycouncil@mjhs.org) or call 347-254-7700, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.

Sincerely,



Felicia Dyer Johnson  
Chief Experience Officer





## Beef and Sweet Potato Stew

Accented with the deep flavors of coffee and chocolate, this sirloin tip beef stew is a hearty dinner for a winter night. The tender beef will taste like it was cooking all day, but it can be ready in about an hour.

### Ingredients

- 2 Tbsp olive oil
- 1½ lbs beef sirloin tip roast, cut into ½-inch cubes
- ⅛ tsp salt
- ½ tsp black pepper
- 2 cups chopped onion
- 1 medium sweet potatoes, peeled and cut into 1-inch cubes
- 2 cans (14.5 oz each) peeled whole tomatoes, undrained
- 4 cups beef broth (gluten free if needed)
- 3 carrots, peeled and cut into 1-inch chunks
- 2 oz bittersweet chocolate, chopped
- 3 Tbsp strong brewed coffee
- 1 Tbsp minced fresh thyme
- 2 Tbsp minced fresh parsley

### Preparation

In a stockpot, heat 1 tablespoon of the oil over medium-high heat. Season beef with salt and pepper. Add the beef to the pot and cook until browned on all sides. With a slotted spoon, remove the beef. Add the remaining tablespoon olive oil and heat until hot. Add the onion and sweet potatoes. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the onion is softened.

Meanwhile, in a blender or food processor, puree tomatoes and their juices.

Return the beef to the pot. Add the tomatoes and the broth. Bring the mixture to a boil. Add the carrots. Reduce heat and simmer, covered, until the meat and vegetables are tender, about 45 minutes.

Add the chocolate and brewed coffee, stirring until well blended. Add the thyme and parsley.

### Nutrition Facts

**8 servings; Serving size:** About 1 cup

**Per serving:** Calories: 331; Fat: 17g; Saturated Fat: 6g; Cholesterol: 39mg; Sodium: 650 mg; Carbohydrates: 24g; Fiber: 4g; Protein: 21g

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## Your Feedback Is Important to Us

In the coming weeks, you may receive a survey called the **NYSDOH/IPRO Managed Long Term Care (MLTC) Member Satisfaction Survey**. The survey collects information about your experience with care managers, personal care workers and nurses.

Not everyone will receive the MLTC survey—HomeFirst members are randomly selected to receive it. We hope if you receive a survey, you will provide your feedback.

Your individual answers are kept confidential, but we review the collective survey results to help us understand what we're doing well and how we can do better. This helps us continually improve the quality of the care and services we provide to help keep you healthy and safe.



If you receive the MLTC survey, please  
fill it out and return by the deadline.  
Your feedback helps us serve you better.