

Beyond Vaccines and Masks: Staying Healthy During the Pandemic

By McLaren Health Plan

Looking for a little extra motivation to start eating better and living healthier?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, World Health Organization and other public health experts say that good nutrition and healthy lifestyle habits can reduce the risk of developing COVID-19 and its serious complications.

McLaren Health Plan (MHP) Chief Medical Officer Dr. Dennis Perry notes that while getting vaccinated and wearing a mask in indoor settings are still the most important approaches to safeguarding against the disease, there is a direct relationship between COVID-19 outcomes and a person's diet, lifestyle and overall health.

"A person's nutrition, physical activity and other health habits help the immune system function and have been shown to contribute to COVID-19 prevention and the avoidance of life-threatening cases," Dr. Perry said. "Healthy behaviors can amplify the effects of the vaccine so people can protect themselves, their loved ones and their communities."

Be Good to Your Body

Findings from a 2021 [study](#) published by Gut, a leading international journal in gastroenterology and hepatology, showed that people who reported eating the most fruits, vegetables and legumes had a 9% lower risk of getting COVID and a 41% lower risk of developing severe COVID during the study period, compared with people who reported eating the least amount of fruits and vegetables. MHP has partnered with farmers markets across the state, encouraging healthy eating habits. People with [SNAP](#) benefits are eligible for twice the amount of fruits and vegetables at farmers markets, which is a great way to double the amount of healthy eating options for their families.

Increasing fruits and vegetables in your diet can also help curb weight gain. The CDC [reports](#) that obesity worsens outcomes from COVID-19. Obesity in adults is linked to impaired immune function and decreased lung capacity, and it may triple the risk of hospitalization due to a COVID-19 infection. Children diagnosed with obesity may suffer even worse effects. In a study of COVID-19 cases in patients ages 18 years and younger, being obese more than tripled the risk of hospitalization and led to a higher risk of severe illness when hospitalized.

Living a healthy lifestyle is more than just eating right. Smoking is known to put people at greater risk for respiratory infections like colds, influenza, pneumonia and tuberculosis. According to the [WHO](#), early research indicates that a history of smoking may increase the chance of adverse health outcomes for COVID-19 patients, including being admitted to intensive care, requiring mechanical ventilation and suffering severe health consequences like acute respiratory distress syndrome, a key complication for severe cases of COVID-19.

Support Your Health With MHP

MHP members have access to many free programs and services to help manage and improve their health and wellness:

- **COVID-19 Drive-Through Vaccine Clinics** — McLaren continues to offer drive-through COVID-19 [vaccination clinics](#) at McLaren Health Management Group in Davison.
- **COVID-19 Test Kits** — MHP will reimburse group and individual health plan members for [over-the-counter COVID-19 test kits](#).
- **Weight Management** — MHP's [Taking It Off](#) program provides members with educational materials and support from its nursing staff to create a healthy lifestyle and obtain a healthy weight.
- **McLaren Moms** — MHP offers its [McLaren Moms](#) program for pregnant and postpartum members that connects them with a special nurse who provides information and is available to answer questions and address problems. McLaren Moms participants may also be eligible for free services through the [Women, Infants and Children](#) (WIC) program.
- **Stop Smoking** — MHP members are entitled to a free [Stop Smoking](#) program, which covers tobacco cessation prescriptions and over-the-counter medications, nicotine gum, lozenges, patches, inhalers and nasal sprays.
- **McLaren Helps** — MHP can [connect](#) members with thousands of free or reduced-price community services like housing support, healthy foods, job assistance and legal aid.
- **Lead Testing** — MHP partners with local organizations throughout the state to host [free lead blood testing](#). For more information, call 888-327-0671 (TTY: 711).

“No lifestyle approach can totally shield us against COVID-19,” Dr. Perry said. “But healthy habits, good diet, adequate exercise and routine visits to a primary care physician — combined with the effectiveness of the vaccines — can provide robust protection against severe illness and death.”

Need health insurance? McLaren Health Plan covers preventive and wellness programs, provides access to thousands of doctors, specialists, clinics and hospitals throughout Michigan and has a friendly and helpful customer service team ready to answer questions. Go to mclarenhealthplan.org or call 888-327-0671 (TTY: 711) for more information.