

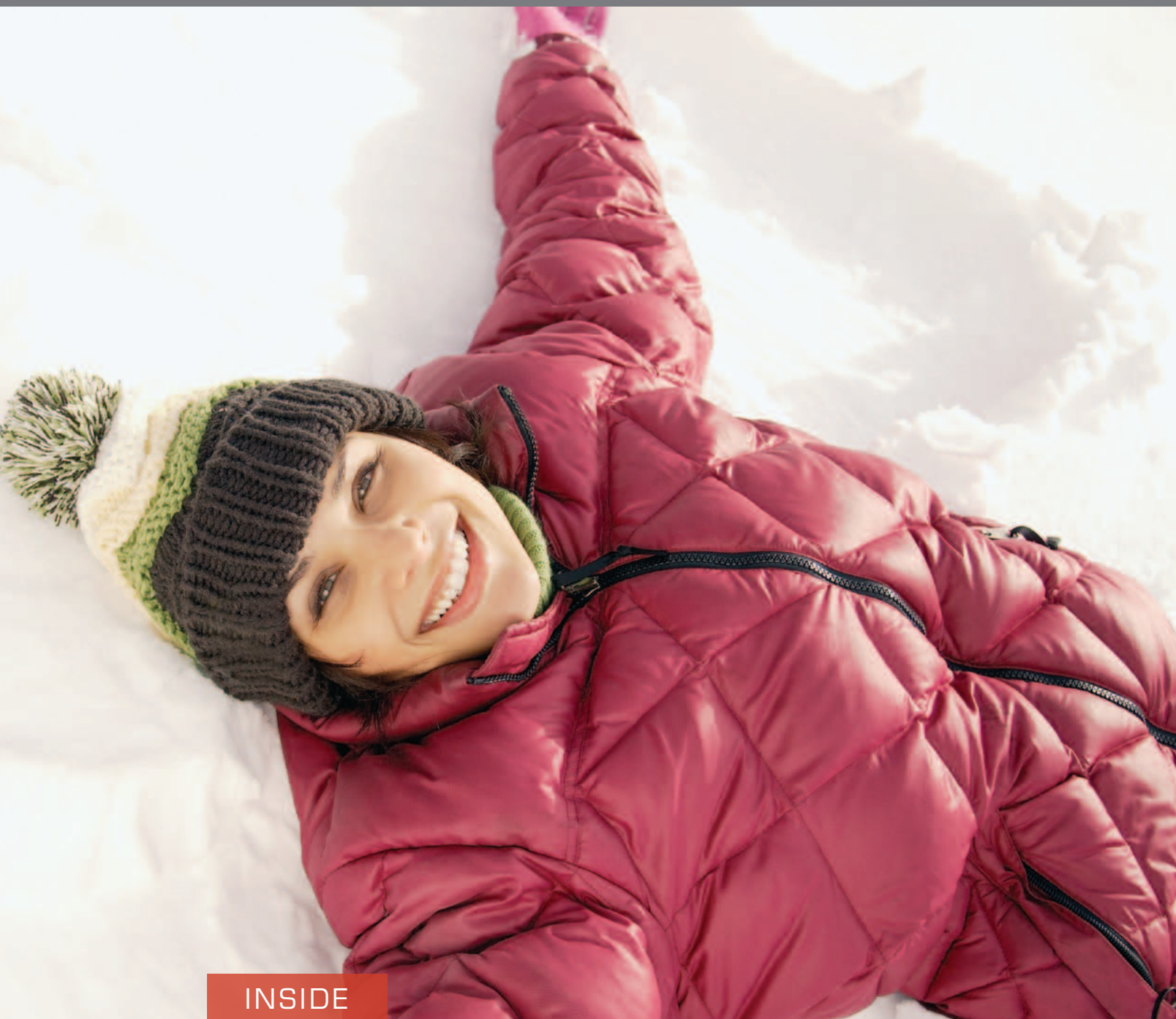
WINTER 2010



# metroplusgold

*health news*

*we care for our own*



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# Winterize your weight-loss plan with **indoor activity**

This winter, don't hunker down. Find ways to get active indoors and drop the extra pounds.

**M**ost adults spend the bulk of their day sitting. At work and at home, few expend much energy, which experts believe fuels the obesity epidemic. But becoming more physically active can help you avoid more weight gain and even lose weight. That's because when you are active, you use calories that would otherwise be stored as fat.

The benefits of physical activity extend beyond weight control, however. It can reduce your risk for diabetes, high blood pressure, cholesterol, heart disease, osteoporosis, arthritis and even some cancers.



What's more, regular physical activity may help you build strong muscles, bones and joints, become more flexible, ward off depression and boost your mood and sense of well-being.

## **Get moving**

To lose weight, try to get 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity on most days of the week. But don't forget to consume fewer calories than you burn each day. Have a go at activities such as walking briskly, dancing and jumping rope. To make sure you're working hard enough, use the "talk test." As a rule of thumb, you should be able to talk, but not sing, if you're doing moderate-intensity activity. If you're doing vigorous-intensity activity, you should be able to say only a few words before having to pause for breath.

To maintain weight loss, get 60 to 90 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity every day while keeping calories in check.

## **Winter workouts**

Try bringing your winter workouts inside, where it's warmer. Here are some low-cost ideas to get you moving:

- ☀ Take the stairs instead of the elevator.
- ☀ Sign up for an exercise class, like aerobics or yoga.
- ☀ Put on your dancing shoes and hit the dance floor. Maybe try a salsa dancing class.
- ☀ Set up a home gym with a few free weights and a stability ball.
- ☀ Channel your inner Jane Fonda with a fitness video.
- ☀ Join an intramural sports league.

Before you begin your winter fitness routine, check with your doctor to make sure it is right for you. ☀

## **Just do it already!**

In a study of men and women ages 42 to 77, sedentary people thought a lot more about exercise as something they should do and/or always had a reason why they couldn't exercise. In contrast, the people who exercised regularly were those who thought the least about it. One exerciser's advice: "Work out first thing in the morning so that you can't talk yourself out of it... don't think about it. Just do it!"



## SAD about winter?

**D**o you tend to get depressed during the fall and winter months, but feel better once spring arrives? If so, you might be suffering from seasonal affective disorder, or SAD.

### Know the symptoms

SAD is a type of depression that is triggered by the seasons. Symptoms can range from mild to severe and most often begin when there is less sunlight. Although most people with SAD start to feel better by summer, symptoms return year after year around the same time.

Symptoms may appear slowly or come on all at once.

They include:

- ✦ Fatigue
- ✦ Loss of interest in activities you enjoy
- ✦ Social withdrawal
- ✦ Weight gain
- ✦ Possible craving for sweet or starchy foods

You might also experience symptoms of other forms of depression, such as feelings of guilt and hopelessness. You may even have physical symptoms, like headaches.

### SAD linked to light

Experts have linked SAD with a biochemical imbalance in the brain caused by the shorter daylight hours and lack of sunlight in winter. They think SAD occurs when the body's

daily rhythms are upset by short days and long nights. January and February tend to be the hardest months for people with SAD.

### Get treated, feel better

You can manage SAD with the right treatment. More exposure to sunlight can help improve symptoms. Try going for long walks outside or finding a window that you can work near during the day.

Light therapy is an option for more persistent symptoms. During the winter months, you would sit in front of a special light box every day for about 30 minutes, usually in the morning. Exposure to the light seems to help reset the body's daily rhythms. Talk therapy and medication may also help.

Don't wait for spring. Talk with your doctor now if you suspect that you have SAD.

To find a mental health specialist near you, visit <http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/databases>. ✨

### How common is SAD?

In the U.S., about 4 to 6 percent of people—or close to 2 million Americans—may have winter depression.

Another 10 to 20 percent may have mild SAD, which affects women four times more often than it affects men. Although some children and teenagers get SAD, it usually begins affecting people between the ages of 20 and 30. Your chances of getting SAD decrease after age 30, although it is still possible for SAD to develop in people older than 30.

SAD is also more common the farther north you go. For example, it's seven times more common in Canada than it is in Florida.



# This winter, avoid indoor asthma triggers

If you are like most Americans, you'll probably spend much of your winter indoors. Snug by the fire is great when it's cold outside. But if you have asthma, indoor allergens and irritants can trigger asthma attacks. This winter, stay warm and asthma-free by reducing your exposure to these common triggers.

**Secondhand smoke** can trigger and worsen asthma attacks. Experts think that it irritates the already inflamed bronchial passages—or airways—of people with asthma.

**Tips:**

- ☀ Don't smoke in your home or car and don't let others do so.
- ☀ Ask day care providers, babysitters and other caregivers not to smoke in your home or

near your children, who are the most vulnerable to the effects of secondhand smoke.

**Dust mites** are microscopic insects that are found in every home. They live in mattresses, pillows, carpets, upholstered furniture, bedcovers, stuffed toys and fabric. They can trigger asthma in people with allergic reactions to them.

**Tips:**

- ☀ Cover mattresses and pillows with dust-proof zippered covers.
- ☀ Wash bed sheets, blankets, bedcovers and stuffed animals weekly in hot water.
- ☀ Look for cuddle toys that carry the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America "asthma-friendly" certification. These toys are available at

major retailers and have a logo picturing a smiling boy with clear lungs.

**Molds** can live almost anywhere if moisture is present. Some molds can grow on wood, paper, carpet and food. If you are sensitive to molds, inhaling mold spores can cause an asthma attack. The best way to control mold is to control moisture.

**Tips:**

- ☀ Wash mold from hard surfaces. Soft material, such as carpet, might need to be replaced.
- ☀ Fix leaky plumbing or other sources of water.
- ☀ Use exhaust fans when showering, cooking or using the dishwasher.
- ☀ Vent clothes dryers to the outside.

## Do you have an asthma action plan?



The Asthma Action Plan helps you and your child keep asthma under control. It tells you what to do when you or your child have no symptoms, when you or your child have symptoms or in an emergency situation.

The Asthma Action Plan must be completed by your doctor. It has three zones: green, yellow and red. The green zone tells you that your breathing is OK. The yellow zone tells

you that you may have asthma symptoms. The red zone is the danger zone, and you should seek help by calling **911**. All children with asthma should have an Asthma Action Plan.

You should also have a peak-flow meter, which measures how well you are breathing. If you do not already have one, ask your doctor for more information.

**Pests** such as cockroaches, can trigger asthma. Save pesticide, which can be harmful to people, for the last resort.

**Tips:**

- ☀ Don't leave food or garbage out.
- ☀ Store food in airtight containers.
- ☀ Clean crumbs and spills right away.
- ☀ Immediately wash dirty dishes.
- ☀ Keep counters, sinks, tables and floors clean and clutter-free.
- ☀ Take out the trash every day.

**Pets**, including dogs, cats and other animals can trigger asthma in people with allergies to animal dander. The best way to control asthma triggered by pets is to find another home for them. However, there are other ways to manage animal dander.

**Tips:**

- ☀ Keep pets out of bedrooms and off furniture.
- ☀ Vacuum at least twice weekly.

**Nitrogen dioxide** is an odorless gas that can come from fuel-burning appliances such as gas

stoves, gas or oil furnaces or fireplaces, wood stoves and unvented kerosene or gas space heaters. It can cause increased bronchial reactivity in people with asthma.

**Tips:**

- ☀ Crack a window or use an exhaust fan when using gas or kerosene space heaters.
- ☀ Have your heating system professionally inspected and cleaned every year.
- ☀ Open the flue on your chimney before making a fire. ☀

**To learn more about asthma:**

Visit the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America at [www.aafa.org](http://www.aafa.org) or call the MetroPlus Health Plan at **1-800-579-9798** to find out more about the AsthmaPlus Program.

**Do people with asthma pay a price for city living?**

Exhaust from cars and factories, smoke, and road dust can irritate the lungs and may worsen chronic respiratory diseases like asthma.

What's more, homes in high-rise apartments and urban settings have higher amounts of cockroach allergens. These allergens can be controlled through pest management and extermination.

Researchers have pegged these allergens as the biggest risk factor for asthma among city dwellers. But before you head for the country, there's help. The Air Quality Index can tell you if the air quality in your area could be a health risk. On unhealthy air days, limit outside physical activity or think about doing outdoor activities in the morning or evening.

To check out the air quality in your area, visit [www.airnow.gov](http://www.airnow.gov).

# Head-to-toe care for your baby

**Cleaning baby's eyes, ears and nose:** Soaps can irritate your baby's sensitive skin. Use a cotton ball moistened with warm water to gently clean these areas.

**Clearing a stuffy nose:** Try clearing his or her nasal passages using a bulb syringe. Keeping a cool-mist humidifier in your baby's room or using saline nose drops can also help alleviate congestion.

**Treating dry skin:** Limit bathing to every two to three days. Ask your doctor if you can apply a petroleum-based lotion to your infant's skin to help retain moisture.

**Treating jaundice:** If your baby's skin and eyes take on a yellowish tinge after the first several days, that's jaundice. Frequent feedings can help push excess bilirubin that causes jaundice out of your baby's system.



**Treating baby acne:** Hormones can cause tiny white bumps to appear on your baby's nose, usually during the first month. Try washing your infant with water or mild baby soap two to three times per week. Blemishes should disappear soon after the first year.

**Caring for the umbilical cord:** Try leaving it alone as much as possible. If it gets dirty, use a baby wipe or cotton swab dipped in rubbing alcohol to clean the area. Sponge bathe your baby until one to two days after the cord has fallen off and the belly button has begun to heal.

**Trimming baby's nails:** If you find nail clippers intimidating, try using a baby nail file to avoid any accidental skin breakage.

**Treating diaper rash:** It's important to keep your baby's bottom dry, cool and clean. Let your baby go diaper-free when you can, and change his or her diaper every few hours. Use a damp washcloth or alcohol-free baby wipe to clean areas that come in contact with the diaper. 🌸

## Expecting? Get the prenatal support you need.

The MetroMom Program can help a pregnant member choose a doctor for herself and her baby. The program provides an expectant mother with support through her pregnancy and helps to plan care for both her and her baby.

If there are any problems, the MetroMom Case Manager will arrange for services, such as home care or other specialty care. Other pluses include:

- ☀️ Pregnancy keepsake calendars
- ☀️ Family planning
- ☀️ Baby's first year keepsake calendars

- ☀️ Educational materials
- ☀️ Postpartum health information

To find out more about the MetroMom Program, call the MetroPlusGold Care Management Action Line at **1-800-579-9798**.

# Breast-feed for health

**W**ant to give your baby and yourself a health boost, for free?

Consider breast-feeding.

Although any amount of time you spend breast-feeding is good, experts suggest that healthy women breast-feed their infants for at least the first six months of life.

Breast milk contains the right balance of nutrients to help your baby grow and to provide protection from germs. In fact, babies who receive breast milk

get sick less often during their first year of life than babies who are formula-fed. They are less likely to come down with common childhood illnesses, like diarrhea and ear infections. Breast-feeding has also been linked with lower risk for asthma, obesity, diabetes and sudden infant death syndrome.


Breast-feeding also benefits mommy. Some research suggests that mothers who breast-feed are less likely to have postpartum depression. There is also mounting evidence that

breast-feeding may lower the risk for breast and ovarian cancer. In addition, many mothers enjoy the closeness and bonding that take place while nursing.

As an added bonus, there is no formula to buy, bottles to warm or nipples to sterilize.

If you want to breast-feed but are having trouble, get support. Many health centers, clinics and hospitals have staff that specializes in helping mothers to breast-feed. ☀

## Get counted this year



Respond to the 2010 Census, and make a difference. If everyone in your household is included in the Census Form, your community will have more power in Washington. This means New York will get more money for services like education, healthcare, job training and more.

The Census Form will be mailed in March 2010.

Fill it out with information about everyone in your household. Then drop it in a mailbox by April 1, 2010. Postage is prepaid.

The Census is absolutely confidential. The form has only 10 questions, and it does not ask about your immigration status. Get counted.

## Call us to report healthcare fraud

Call **1-888-245-7247** to report fraud or abuse, illegal activities and questionable activity. You may choose to give your name, or you may report anonymously.

## Announcing MetroPlus Platinum Plan (HMO)

Great news! MetroPlus Health Plan now offers MetroPlus Platinum Plan (HMO), a Medicare plan available to those turning 65 or others who are eligible for Medicare and live in Manhattan, Brooklyn, the Bronx or Queens. You do not have to have Medicaid to join.

You can sign up during the Open Enrollment Period from January 1 to March 15 if you qualify. Call us today at **1-866-986-0356** to learn more.



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## How to contact MetroPlus Gold

At MetroPlus Gold, we want to ensure you get the information you need. Contact Customer Service:

Phone: **1-877-475-3795**

E-mail: [mpgCustomerServices@nychhc.org](mailto:mpgCustomerServices@nychhc.org)

For more information about MetroPlus Gold, visit us online at [www.metroplus.org](http://www.metroplus.org) and click on **MetroPlus Gold**.

## Why join MetroPlus Gold?

**J**oin MetroPlus Gold, the health insurance program created just for employees of HHC.

MetroPlus Gold has more than 2,400 primary care providers (PCPs) in private offices, group practices, neighborhood family care sites and hospitals. You can choose where you receive care.

In addition to all of our HHC facilities and other network hospitals, the hospitals of Continuum Health Partners have joined the MetroPlus network. They include Beth Israel Medical Center, St. Luke's-Roosevelt

Hospital, Long Island College Hospital and New York Eye and Ear Infirmary.

During Open Enrollment, see your HR Director or Benefits Manager for more information and to sign up. Call MetroPlus any time at **1-800-475-METRO (6387)**. Check out MetroPlus Gold on our Web site [www.metroplus.org](http://www.metroplus.org). 

Join the health plan where we care for our own!

**metroplusgold**



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### Is your spouse eligible for Medicare?

If you're an active HHC employee with family coverage and a spouse who may be eligible for Medicare soon, there's important information you need to know.

MetroPlus Gold isn't a Medicare HMO. Once a covered person becomes eligible for Medicare, he or she is no longer eligible to participate in MetroPlus Gold. Speak with your HR Benefits Manager to find out what healthcare options are available.