



October Focuses on Mental Health: Anxiety, Panic Disorder, OCD, and PTSD

LOOKING AHEAD...

You Are Not Your Thoughts

Take control of your anxiety, panic attacks, OCD, or PTSD.

Wellness Webinars

This month is all about finding ways to limit your anxiety by improving your sleep, managing stress, practicing mindful eating, and creating mindfulness practices you can use every day.

October WellRight Challenge

Stay on budget and plan ahead for the holidays by challenging yourself in **Penny Counter!**

Benefits Highlight with Kerri Shorter

Need to make changes to your health or dental coverage after a life event? Find out how!

Fight the Flu

Learn about the benefits of receiving your annual flu shot and how to schedule an appointment at your local CVS

The Wellness Corner

Why buy granola bars when you can make them yourself at home with just five ingredients!

The latest health and wellness news, tips, and updates from the Lay Benefits Department of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston.



Gain Control Over Your Stressors

We have all experienced anxiety at some point in our lives, whether it's that feeling of nervousness before a big presentation or the feeling of electricity in your body when you were at the starting line of a 100-meter dash. Anxiety is a natural stress response to stimuli or stressors that we experience throughout the day and can help us in productive ways, like meeting a deadline. However, anxiety for prolonged periods of time can have detrimental effects on our mental and physical health, as well as our overall quality of life.

It is [estimated](#) that nearly 40 million Americans over the age of 18 suffer from an anxiety disorder, which is approximately 18% of the country's population. [Women](#) are more likely to develop an anxiety disorder than men. [Triggers](#) for anxiety vary from person to person, and can be related to health, finances, occupations, lifestyle, and previous experiences. There are also other phobias that stem from anxiety, and other disorders, such as panic disorder. Some anxiety disorders can be [linked](#) to a variety of comorbidities and health concerns, like obesity, hypertension, ulcers, back or neck pain, heart disease, and headaches, but they can be treated with therapies and medications.

Millions of people in the U.S. also suffer from obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Although the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* has not classified OCD and PTSD as anxiety disorders since 2013, they are still important disorders to discuss and affect millions of people across the country.

To find a therapist or doctor to help you on your mental health journey, log in to your [MyBlue](#) account to search for in-network providers. Go to the My Care tab, select "Find A Doctor & Estimate Costs," and search "Licensed Mental Health Counselor."

Prefer a telehealth visit? BCBS offers telehealth therapy sessions and psychiatry services through Well Connection. You can choose the day, time, and provider without leaving home or having to wait weeks for an available appointment. Co-pays are lower for telehealth appointments compared to traditional in-person services. To sign up and schedule your first appointment, log in to [MyBlue](#), go to the My Care tab, and select "Well Connection Video Visits."

You Are Not Your Thoughts

Multiple types of anxiety disorders can take hold of our thoughts, our physical health, and even our lives, including generalized anxiety, panic attacks, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).



For those who suffer from a generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), worry becomes excessive, leading to uncontrolled thoughts, restlessness, lack of concentration, and sleep disturbances. With GAD, the worry becomes out of control and [often](#) “is intrusive [and] causes distress or functional impairment”. [Anxiety](#) affects women (7.7%) more than men (4.6%) and can affect those dealing with multiple life stressors. Anxiety can be caused by a variety of factors including environment, genetics, and brain biology. GAD also has a high misdiagnosis rate as the symptoms of anxiety can often resemble symptoms of other diseases or conditions, like hyperthyroidism, depression, or bipolar disorder.

The great news about anxiety is that it can be treated by medication and psychotherapy, which are usually the first line of defense against intrusive thinking patterns leading to worry. Medicines, like selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) and serotonin-norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRIs), have been [effective](#) in alleviating symptoms of GAD. Psychotherapy can include CBT (cognitive behavioral therapy), exposure therapy, and cognitive restructuring.



Obsessive compulsive disorder ([OCD](#)) affects a person’s ability to control thoughts and behaviors, urging the person to perform certain tasks repeatedly or in a certain order. This can become so intrusive that it impacts a person’s ability to live a normal life. [Symptoms](#) of OCD vary depending on severity of the disorder and are divided into two categories: obsessions and compulsions. Symptoms of an obsession include fear of contamination or germs, fear of forgetting something or losing an object, unwanted or aggressive thoughts, and desire to have items in perfect order. Symptoms of compulsions include excessive or compulsive counting, repeated checks (locking the doors, turning off the oven, etc.), arranging items in a particular way, and excessive hand washing. [Researchers](#) believe that genetics, brain structure, and a person’s environment can affect their likelihood of developing the disorder. OCD can be [treated](#) with therapy and medication. [SSRIs and SRIs](#) can help to reduce the obsessive and compulsive symptoms of OCD, while CBT and exposure therapies can help reduce triggers and repetitive behaviors.



Panic disorder (PD) presents as unexpected panic attacks that occur without identifiable triggers and [involves](#) a “rapid onset of intense fear (typically peaking within... 10 minutes) with at least four of the physical and psychological symptoms in the DSM-5 diagnostic criteria.” Some symptoms of panic disorder include heart palpitations, increased heart rate, shaking, chest pain, nausea, chills/sweating, numbness, depersonalization, desensitization, and fear of losing control.

Like GAD, [women](#) (7%) are more [likely](#) to develop a panic disorder than men (3.3%). A [study](#) listed common risk factors for developing PD, including smoking, having another mental health disorder, and alcohol consumption. It is important to note that [panic attacks](#) can occur without having PD. Attacks can sometimes occur and resolve completely. Although panic attacks are not deadly, their symptoms can resemble other health concerns. Like GAD, PD is sometimes overlooked and difficult to diagnose because it [displays](#) symptoms of other disorders.



Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) affects 5-10% of the population. While usually associated with military personnel and service in the armed forces, [PTSD](#) can affect anyone who has experienced a traumatic event, violence, accidents, or natural disasters. PTSD affects more women than men, similar to anxiety disorders. Like OCD, PTSD was once classified as an anxiety disorder, but is now classified as a trauma and stress-related disorder. It is estimated that 70% of adults around the world experience a traumatic event and a shocking 31% experience more than four of these events.

PTSD [symptoms include](#) distressing or intrusive memories of the traumatic event, nightmares, avoiding reminders of said trauma(s), irritability, hyperarousal, sleep disturbance, emotional withdrawal, concentration problems, and hypervigilance. PTSD is closely [linked](#) to depression, cardiovascular disease, and stroke. It is also [associated](#) with other comorbidities like dementia, anxiety disorders, mood disorders, and substance abuse. Fifty percent of those with PTSD [report](#) having a disorder (mood or anxiety) or a substance abuse disorder. Therapy and medication can help target certain behaviors or symptoms.

Wellness Webinars

Employees and spouses enrolled in one of the RCAB Health Plans and registered in the Blue Cross *ahealthyme* program can earn \$20 into their HealthEquity HRA or HSA accounts for attending a wellness webinar. Points are awarded for a maximum of five wellness webinars/family activities per Plan Year.

Create Mental Wellbeing with Everyday Mindfulness Practices – presented by Cheryl Jones

AVAILABLE ANYTIME

Cheryl Jones from *The Mindful Movement* introduces you to new wellbeing skills to reduce stress and build resilience through mindfulness. Explore easy-to-implement ways to incorporate mindful awareness into your day and feel empowered with actionable steps.

[Click Here to Access Video](#)

Mindful Eating: Vitamin M!

Thursday, October 7th @ 6pm

Gain a clearer understanding of what determines eating habits. You will learn practical tools and strategies to change the way you look at food and make smarter, healthier, more mindful, and enjoyable food choices. The program includes an interactive activity (how to eat a piece of chocolate).

[Click Here to Register](#)

Manage Your Stress for Optimal Living

Tuesday, October 12th @ 11:30am

Stress can affect our lives in many ways: eating patterns, digestion, mood, sleep patterns, energy level and immunity to disease. Learn about the various types of stress, how to manage it, and how to restore your body's sense of balance.

[Click Here to Register](#)

Rev Up Your Rem: Improving Sleep Hygiene

Wednesday, October 20th at 5:30pm

Trouble with your ZZZ's? Anxiety and other stressors can affect your ability to fall asleep and stay asleep. Learn about the importance of practicing good sleep hygiene using a variety of different practices. The webinar includes various tips to make sure you get enough ZZZs.

[Click Here to Register](#)



In Case You Missed It...

You can still view the recorded webinars from September listed below. After viewing these webinars, please self-report your viewing to Amanda Gately, Benefits Associate, at agately@rcab.org and to earn 20 HRA/HSA dollars. Points are awarded for a maximum of five wellness webinars/family activities per Plan Year. **You can access webinars for 60 days following their live recording date.**

Intermittent Fasting – Health & Harmony

[Click Here to Access Video](#)

Food & Wellness Trends: Stay Up to Date

[Click Here to Access Webinar](#)

Managing Cash Flow & Debt

[Click Here to Access Webinar](#)

October WellRight Challenge

The **Penny Counter Challenge** invites you to track every penny you spend for the next 31 days. Track it on any budget spreadsheet and regularly update your budget to see where you're spending the most money. The goal of this Challenge is to help you control your spending and save for future expenses.

Employees and spouses participating in the Penny Counter Challenge will also need to complete the "Budgeting Fundamentals" and "Controlling Spending; The Behavioral Science of Spending" University courses.

These courses contain a short video and require you to answer 5-7 questions about what you learned. Access your WellRight account at catholicbenefits.wellright.com.

Wellness Program Tip: Locate Your Possible and Earned Points in *ahealthyme!*

Employees and spouses enrolled in one of the Archdiocese of Boston Health Plans can log into *ahealthyme* and view Possible and Earned Points totals of the Wellness Incentives offered during the 2021-2022 Plan Year. Locate the "My Points" tab and select "Incentive Summary." If you scroll toward the bottom of the page underneath the general overview of Wellness Incentives offered this Plan Year, you should be able to see which Wellness Incentives points have already been earned and which points are still eligible to be earned. This is a great tool you can utilize to make sure you earn as many points as possible!

To access or create your account, please visit ahealthyme.com/login.

Benefits Highlight with Kerri Shorter, Human Capital and Systems Manager Submitting a Life Event Request in MyEnroll

Recently married or had a baby? Although these may be busy times, remember to enter a life event into MyEnroll within 30 days of the event to make any changes to coverages and/or update your life insurance beneficiaries.

Additional information can be found at catholicbenefits.org/PDF/myenroll/lifeevents.pdf

Each year, an updated flu vaccine is distributed across the country, but only half of Americans receive the vaccine. Per the [CDC](https://www.cdc.gov), during the 2019-2020 flu season, vaccinations could have prevented 7.5 million cases, 105,000 hospitalizations, and 6,300 deaths related to the flu. The vaccine is shown to reduce your chances of contracting the flu by 40-60%.

The flu vaccine has also been shown to reduce the severity of illness in those who get the vaccine and still become infected, as well as lower the rate of cardiac events, reduce the risk of exacerbating chronic lung disease, and reduce hospitalization for people with diabetes. The flu vaccine protects pregnant women during and after pregnancy by reducing hospitalization and respiratory infection rates.

Receiving the vaccine protects you and your loved ones, co-workers, young children, the elderly, and the immunosuppressed. Get your flu shot this season!



**FIGHT
THE
FLU!**

For more information from the CDC about flu vaccines, how to prevent the flu, vaccine benefits, and who is at high risk for flu complications, visit the CDC's website at [cdc.gov/flu/prevent/flushot.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/flushot.htm).

Employees and family members enrolled in one of the RCAB Health Plans can get a flu shot at any CVS Caremark network pharmacy *at no copay or cost*. Bring your CVS prescription card and valid photo ID. To learn more about flu shots and find a pharmacy in the CVS Caremark network that administers flu shots, visit: [Walk-in Flu Shots | Flu Vaccine | MinuteClinic \(cvs.com\)](https://www.catholicbenefits.org/Walk-in-Flu-Shots-Flu-Vaccine-MinuteClinic-cvs.com).

THE
WELLNESS
CORNER

New health and wellness topics covering exercise routines, recipes, tips, and tricks to spark motivation in your life every month!



ingredients

- 1.5 cups of rolled oats
- 1 cup of unsalted, roasted almonds
- 1/4 cup of natural, creamy peanut butter (or almond butter)
- 1/4 maple syrup
- 1 cup dried, pitted dates
- Optional: chocolate chips, other dried fruit, nuts, etc.

directions

1. Use a food processor to process the dates into small bits. They should be a dough-like consistency.
- *Optional step: toast rolled oats and almonds in the oven at 350°F for 10-15 minutes*
2. Put oats, dates, and almonds in large mixing bowl and keep off to the side.
3. Heat up maple syrup and peanut butter in a small pot or pan over low heat. Stir and pour contents into the bowl containing oats, dates, and almonds. Mix together thoroughly, dispersing dates throughout mixture.
4. Transfer into an 8inch x 8 inch baking pan (or other small pan) and line with parchment paper or plastic wrap (makes for easier removal).
5. Press down mixture in pan until the top is flat.
6. Cover with parchment paper or plastic wrap and place in the fridge or freezer for 15-20 minutes.
7. Remove granola bars from pan, cut into 10 bars, and enjoy! (Keep them in an air tight container to help them stay fresh).

In good health,
Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston Benefits Department