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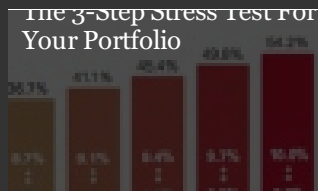


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8 Easy Ways To Save On Health And Wellness

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By Barbara Brody

This post originally appeared on [LearnVest](#).

Your body is your greatest asset, and taking good care of it can help you live longer and better—and also avoid costly conditions, like diabetes and heart disease, down the road.

But in addition to scheduling regular visits with your M.D., there are plenty of other proactive measures you can take to keep your health in check—without sabotaging your budget in the process. We spoke to doctors, dietitians and other health care pros for their top money-saving tips for hacking costs on everything from pricey prescriptions to mind-and-body-healing massages.

Health Cost Hack: Get Meds for Less

Even if you're relatively healthy and have decent insurance coverage, the cost of prescription co-pays can really add up. Before you shell out for next month's batch of birth control pills or allergy meds, ask your doc if she has some to give you gratis. "We often have free samples in the office, and it never hurts to ask," says Sandra Adamson Fryhofer, M.D., an Atlanta-based internist and adjunct associate professor of medicine at Emory University School of Medicine.

Another smart option is to inquire about switching from a brand-name drug to the generic version. For even greater savings, fill the script at Target, Walmart or Kroger—these retailers offer hundreds of generics for just \$4, compared to the \$15 to \$30 you'll likely pay for prescription meds through other pharmacies, says Fryhofer.

RELATED: [A \\$300K Med? The Skinny on Prescription Drug Pricing](#)



Wellness Cost Hack: Book a Massage-

Therapist-in-Training Session

Getting regular rubdowns can help alleviate a variety of ailments, from headaches and insomnia to back pain and sports injuries—plus it feels really good. An appointment with an experienced practitioner doesn't come cheap, but a student can unkink those muscles for less. Just don't expect fluffy robes and spa amenities!

Many massage schools throughout the country host clinics that are open to the public, which means you can get a treatment for as little as \$30 a session, while also helping a wannabe therapist work toward a degree. A few programs to check out: Swedish Institute College of Health Sciences, The Massage School and the National Holistic Institute.

Health Cost Hack: Set Aside Pre-Tax Dollars for Medical Care

The next time open enrollment comes around, consider signing up for a flexible spending account (FSA) or health savings account (HSA). The money you sock away (tax-free) in either account can be used toward medical expenses, including co-pays, contact lenses, dental work, mental health counseling and even acupuncture if recommended by your doctor. So “get a rough idea of how much you might spend monthly, and make sure the right amount is set aside,” says Martin B. Rosen, executive vice president and cofounder of Health Advocate, Inc., a health-care advocacy and assistance company.

Just keep a couple of things in mind when choosing your account: With a traditional FSA, you need to be careful not to overestimate, since you'll lose any funds you don't use up by the end of the year, [unless your employer determines otherwise](#). HSAs, on the other hand, provide more flexibility—the money rolls over from year to year and collects interest—but you can only open one if you have a high-deductible insurance plan.

RELATED: [Checklist: I Want to Get Health Insurance](#)

Wellness Cost Hack: Buy Frozen Fruits and Veggies

Healthy food doesn't have to cost a fortune. Frozen produce is usually much cheaper than the fresh stuff—and you may be surprised to learn that it can be just as good for you. “In many cases it's even more nutritious because fruits and vegetables are taken straight from the fields to the manufacturer and frozen,” says Libby Mills, R.D., a spokesperson for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. “‘Fresh’ items may have traveled all over the country, then sat in the supermarket for days, losing nutrients before you buy them.”

When you do opt for fresh produce, buy what's in season. Strawberries, for example, are very pricey in the winter—and aren't especially tasty. But come springtime, it's a different story. “Eating seasonally means better flavor and a better price,” Mills says.

And while we're on the topic of fruits and veggies, although organic produce might be worth the extra cost if you're intent on avoiding pesticides, it doesn't have to be an all-or-nothing proposition, says Mills. Save cash by choosing conventional (non-organic) fruits and veggies that are “prepackaged” in their own skin, such as avocados, bananas and melons.

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Health Cost Hack: Head to an Urgent Care Center for More Routine Medical Conditions

Unless you can't breathe, are bleeding profusely or suspect that you're having a heart attack or stroke, consider bypassing the hospital for more routine medical issues. “If you go to the E.R. for a

non-life-threatening concern, you could be waiting around a long time for care and spending a lot more money—especially if you have a high deductible to meet,” Rosen says. Health-care providers at urgent care centers are well-equipped to treat common problems, like sprains, such minor allergic reactions as hives, the flu and strep throat.

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Wellness Cost Hack: Work Out Without Limits

You don’t need to belong to a fancy health club to stay fit, especially if your insurance doesn’t help shoulder any of the cost, says Panteleimon Ekkekakis, Ph.D., associate professor of kinesiology at Iowa State University. Instead, simply aim to move more—and sit less. “Be mindful of how modern ‘conveniences’ have engineered physical activity out of our lives: Walk or bike instead of driving short distances, use a manual lawnmower, and wash your car instead of going through the automatic car wash,” he says. “You can actually save money if you choose these physically active options over the mechanized ones.”

Another tip: If you do belong to a gym, talk to your HR representative about whether your health insurance provider will cover part of the cost of your annual membership. In some cases, you can receive a portion of the fee reimbursed if you attend the gym a predetermined amount of visits in a six-month period.

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Wellness Cost Hack: Buy Store-Brand Sunscreen

A higher price tag doesn’t necessarily translate to better skin protection. In fact, testing conducted last year by Consumer Reports revealed that two of the least expensive products on the market—Up & Up (Target) Sport SPF 50 spray and Equate (Walmart) Ultra Protection SPF 50 lotion—did the best job at screening harmful rays. So look for these brands, or simply choose any affordable option with a minimum SPF of 30 with broad-spectrum protection that shields both UVA and UVB rays.

Health Cost Hack: Read Your Medical Insurance Policy’s Fine Print

Many plans offer bonus benefits, like coverage for complementary and alternative medicine offered through acupuncturists, massage therapists, naturopaths and chiropractors. “The key is to check your benefits materials,” Rosen says. “You could be missing out.”

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Are Women Paying The Price For Living Longer?

[+ Comment Now](#) [+ Follow Comments](#)*By Carolyn O'Hara**This story originally appeared on [LearnVest](#).*

Here's some good news: Women are living longer than ever. The bad news? They're paying a hefty price for it.

Nearly 70% of Americans ages 65 or older are expected to need long-term care—either at home or in a facility—at some point in their lives. But whether seniors need help recovering from surgery or a stroke—or simply require assistance with daily tasks like bathing and dressing as they age—the cost of such long-term care can be staggeringly expensive.

In 2013 the median cost of a private room in a nursing home for just one year came in at \$83,950—that's up from \$67,575 just five years ago.

Medicare only covers a very small portion of long-term care costs. And since paying out of pocket could easily decimate many people's retirement savings, an increasing number of Americans may need to protect their nest eggs by buying long-term care insurance, which can cover some or all of the costs of extended elder care.

However, the policies aren't cheap. The average, healthy, 55-year-old man can expect to pay a premium of around \$2,000 a year. But that's nothing compared to what women are being charged for identical coverage.

Last spring, two major providers of long-term care insurance—John Hancock and Genworth—hiked premiums on new policies for women by 20% to 40%, with other carriers following suit. The reason: Women are growing old for far longer.



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An American woman who turned 65 last year is now expected to live to the average age of 87, compared to 85 for men. Women are also less likely to have a caregiver at home when they need it because they often outlive their spouses, making them more likely to end up in a nursing home or assisted-living facility—and more likely to rely on long-term care insurance to pay for that care.

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A Divide Over Gender-Based Pricing

Nationwide, long-term care premiums for women rose 12% in 2013, while rates for men *declined* 14%, according to the American Association for Long-Term Care Insurance (AALTCI). Today, a single, 55-year-old woman pays an average of \$1,225 a year for a \$164,000 policy, while a 55-year-old man pays only \$925 annually for the same coverage.

The industry defends the gendered pricing as a reflection of the fact that the majority of last year's \$7.5 billion in long-term care claims were associated with caring for women. "Prices for insurance are based on risk, which is why men pay more for life insurance, and bad drivers pay more than good drivers," Jesse Slome, director of the AALTCI, said in a statement. "Women have a far greater risk of needing long-term care insurance and, in fact, receive two thirds of the benefits paid by insurers."

But not everyone thinks the new pricing scheme is legal.

In January the National Women's Law Center (NWLC), a legal advocacy group, filed federal sex-discrimination complaints against four of the biggest U.S. insurance companies—Genworth, John Hancock, Transamerica and Mutual of Omaha—claiming that the higher premiums violate protections in the Affordable Care Act prohibiting sex discrimination in insurance plans.

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"By gender rating their long-term care insurance policies, these companies are charging women 20% to 40% more than men for the same product," NWLC copresident Marcia D. Greenberger said when the suits were announced. "Requiring women to pay higher prices just because they are women is wrong, unfair, and, thanks to the Affordable Care Act, is now illegal sex discrimination."

Two states—Colorado and Montana—currently prohibit gender-specific rates for insurance. But if the new pricing scheme is allowed to stand elsewhere, the higher costs "will put these policies out of reach for a significant number of women," says Emily Martin, vice president and general counsel of the NWLC.

Long-term care policies are already expensive, says Bonnie Burns, a policy specialist with California Health Advocates, a nonprofit health and education advocacy. “This could be thousands of dollars a year for people once they are in their sixties and seventies,” she explains. “You start adding a 40% surcharge for gender, and you will price a huge number of women out of this market.”

That’s particularly unfair “because women are already starting out behind financially,” says Martin. “Women only make 77 cents for every dollar made by their male counterparts, they tend to have less in savings, and they tend to have less-secure retirements. There’s already a financial hole that women are standing in, and then you add this gender penalty onto their premiums—this sort of tax on being a woman.”

Another factor: For many couples, the husband often needs long-term care first, and uses up retirement assets to pay for the care, leaving his wife with a depleted portfolio to provide for both the remainder of her retirement and her potential long-term care needs.

Is Long-Term Care Right for You?

The higher prices don’t erase the fact that more women will need long-term care insurance in the future, especially if they don’t have six-figure nest eggs dedicated to paying for elder care. But how do you know if—and when—you should sign up?

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Women typically have four options once long-term care becomes a necessity, says Laura Knolle, a Certified Financial Planner™ with Ballou Plum Wealth Advisors LLC in Lafayette, California. They can deplete their assets to the point where they qualify for Medicaid; rely on family for care; pay for care with their own savings; or depend on a long-term care insurance policy.

Knolle also adds that there’s no “right” age to buy long-term care insurance, although she notes that the majority of new buyers are in their fifties and early sixties. “It depends on each person,” she says, “but the longer you wait, the less chance you have for getting insured.” And the longer you wait, the higher the premium.

People in their twenties, thirties and forties might have other financial priorities they want to put ahead of long-term care insurance, but Knolle says that buying early has its own incentives. “When you are younger,” she explains, “your premiums will likely be lower, assuming that you are in good health.” And young women might want to consider saving for future costs, regardless of whether they intend to buy a policy down the road or not.

6 Factors to Consider When Seeking Coverage

If you do decide that a long-term care policy is right for you, Knolle says, it’s best to follow a few basic steps:

- 1. Check your available coverage.** Research whether your employer offers a group long-term care insurance plan. The benefits may not be extensive, Knolle says, but these plans may be more affordable. And be sure to look into how the coverage and/or premiums may change when you leave your employer.
- 2. Consider your family’s medical history.** “Look at your family history to see if there’s a track record of people needing care,” as well as what type, Knolle says. These details may influence the kind of policy you buy.
- 3. Calculate your costs.** The next step is to estimate what long-term care might cost in your area. There are a number of good online calculators, including this one from [AARP](#), that compare the costs of various types of care by state and metro area. The difference in nursing home care, for instance, can be tens of thousands a year, depending on the state you call home.
- 4. Weigh whether to save or insure.** Inflate your long-term care expenses out to when you will actually need the care—age 80 is a good starting point—and then “ask whether you want to cover that cost yourself,” Knolle says. “Maybe you set money aside, which may be an option for a young

woman. Or you ultimately decide that you want to pass the risk to an insurance company.”

5. Shop around. It’s critical to get quotes from a number of different insurers. A recent study of long-term care insurance rates found that the difference in premiums for identical policies could range between 31% to as much as 114% among insurers. “One insurer will literally charge more than double for virtually the same level of benefits,” Slome says.

But if you do your homework, long-term care “doesn’t have to be unaffordable,” Knolle adds. “There are lots of bells and whistles to tailor it to what you need.”

Four major factors people should consider when shopping for a policy are the daily benefit, the cost of living adjustment, the elimination period and the length of coverage. “Those are the four things we play around with when we run quotes,” Knolle says.

If you decide that a standalone long-term care policy is still too pricey, consider a life insurance policy that includes a long-term care rider. “It’s not perfect,” she says, “but at least you would have some coverage. It doesn’t have to be all or nothing—something is better than saying it’s too expensive and not dealing with it.”

Additionally, you can also consider a policy that covers both at-home care and nursing home care, since the majority of elder care starts in the home. And if it’s offered in your state, look into the benefits of using a [“partnership” policy](#).

6. Finally, talk to loved ones. Regardless of what you decide, discuss your choices with your family, Knolle says. “No one wants to say, ‘I’m going to need help to cook and bathe.’ No one wants to think they will get Alzheimer’s. It’s not a fun topic.”

But your family needs to know what your preferences are, especially since they could be on the hook for costs if you haven’t prepared. Your health “can affect your children and their financial well-being,” Knolle says. “Most women don’t want their kids to feel burdened to take care of them.”

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