

Small Steps to a Healthy Heart

February is American Heart Month. Heart disease is the leading cause of death for men, women, and people of most racial and ethnic groups in the United States, which is why it's so important to take the small steps to a healthy heart. Several types of heart conditions fall under the term heart disease. The most common type of heart disease is coronary artery disease, which affects blood flow to the heart and can cause a heart attack. Heart disease may be "silent" and go undiagnosed until you experience signs/symptoms of a heart attack, heart failure, or an arrhythmia. When these events happen, symptoms may include:

- **Heart attack:** Chest pain or discomfort, upper back or neck pain, indigestion, heartburn, nausea or vomiting, extreme fatigue, upper body discomfort, dizziness, and shortness of breath. Call 911 immediately if you notice the symptoms of a heart attack in yourself or someone else.
- **Heart failure:** Shortness of breath, fatigue, or swelling of the feet, ankles, legs, abdomen, or neck veins.
- **Arrhythmia:** Fluttering feelings in the chest (palpitations).

Learn about risks you can control, such as knowing your numbers, eating healthy, and being active, versus those you can't control, age, gender, and family history.

Participate in the following activities to learn more:



Activity #1:
Wear Red Day,
Friday, Feb 3

Activity #2:
Move with a Doc -
Sodium Impact on
Your Body

Activity #3:
Test Your
Knowledge

Activity #4:
Give Your Heart
Some Love

About half of all Americans (47%) have at least one of the three key risk factors for heart disease: high blood pressure, high cholesterol, or smoking. (Source: [CDC](#))

For questions or more information, email wellness@wellfirstbenefits.com.

Health Disparities

“Health disparities” are preventable differences in health among different social or racial groups. Health disparities are a complex and challenging problem across the world. Social factors play the largest role in shaping the overall health of communities. For example, the ability to access healthcare, a safe living environment, racial equity, nutritious food, quality education, and supportive relationships free of discrimination are incredibly important to your overall health.

Those who face health disparities often have a higher risk for certain diseases, such as high blood pressure and high cholesterol. In the U.S., certain racial and ethnic groups experience a higher risk of high blood pressure and type 2 diabetes. These are two major risk factors for heart disease.

Did You Know?

- Black men have a 70% higher risk of heart failure compared with white men.
- Among American Indians, 1 in 4 adults have diabetes, compared with about 1 in 12 whites.
- Filipino adults, Japanese men and Vietnamese men are more likely than white adults to die from a stroke.
- Black women are twice as likely as white women to develop chronic hypertension during pregnancy.

For more information, please visit:

- [Million Hearts®](#)
- [WISEWOMAN](#)
- [American Heart Association: Go Red for Women](#)

Activity 1: Wear Red Day

The first Friday in February is National Wear Red Day. Wear red on Friday, February 3, 2023 to show your support for and raise awareness for heart disease.

Activity 2: Move with a Doc

Join Dr. Shah as she talks about salt intake and the impact sodium has on the body. What is salt, how much should you have, what happens when you consume too much salt, how to reduce salt intake, and salt substitutes.

[Watch Now](#)



Activity 3: Test Your Knowledge

Do you know the difference between blood pressure and cholesterol? Better yet, do you know your numbers?

For each statement, select if blood pressure or cholesterol applies, then read on for more information and check your answers.

Statement	Blood Pressure	Cholesterol
1. High _____ is often called the “silent killer” because it doesn’t show symptoms.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. _____ changes throughout the day to match your activity level.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. HDL is a “healthy” type of _____.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. _____ is a waxy substance found in your cells.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Salt is a major contributor to increased _____.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. A surplus of _____ can build up and form plaque in your arteries (called atherosclerosis).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Your liver creates _____ and makes all that you need.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. _____ is needed to make hormones and vitamins.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. High _____ is also known as hypertension.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. LDL, the “lousy” _____, may lead to the buildup of plaque in your arteries.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Stress can contribute to high _____.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. For _____, a healthy value is under 120 and under 80.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. Some _____ comes from your diet (meats, poultry, and dairy).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. A blood test is needed to know _____.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. _____ has a top number and a bottom number.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

What’s the Difference Between Cholesterol & Blood Pressure?

Blood pressure is the amount of pressure pushing against the walls of your arteries as your heart pumps and rests. Arteries are blood vessels that carry blood from your heart to other areas of your body. Blood pressure changes throughout the day based on your activities. Having blood pressure that consistently measures higher than normal may result in a diagnosis of high blood pressure (or hypertension). High blood pressure is often known as the “silent killer” because it shows no symptoms. The blood pressure reading is recorded as two numbers:

- **Systolic** (top number) is the amount of pressure exerted each time your heart beats.
- **Diastolic** (bottom number) is the amount of pressure in arteries when your heart is resting between beats.

	Blood pressure category	Systolic mm Hg (top number)		Diastolic mm Hg (bottom number)
	Normal (healthy blood pressure)	Less than 120	and	Less than 80
	Elevated	120-129	and	Less than 80
	High blood pressure (Hypertension) Stage 1	130-139	or	80-89
	High blood pressure (Hypertension) Stage 2	140 or higher	or	90 or higher
	Hypertensive crisis (consult your doctor immediately)	Higher than 180	and/or	Higher than 120

Source: <https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/high-blood-pressure/understanding-blood-pressure-readings>

A few years ago, medical experts changed how we think about blood pressure levels. Stage one high blood pressure is now classified as above 130/80, not 140/90 like before. This change was made because blood pressures in the 130s/80s are now understood to bring twice the risk of cardiovascular complications as people with normal blood pressures. However, most people in this category won't require medication unless they already have had a heart attack, stroke, or kidney complication.

Cholesterol is a waxy substance your body needs to build cells and make vitamins and other hormones. Cholesterol comes from two sources: your liver, which makes all the cholesterol you need, and from your diet: meat, poultry, and dairy products. These foods are high in saturated and trans fats and cause your liver to make more cholesterol than it otherwise would and may lead to an unhealthy level. A blood test is needed to measure cholesterol. Two types of cholesterol are:

- Low-density lipoprotein or LDL cholesterol (also called the “lousy” or “bad”) may cause plaque (fatty deposits) to build up in your blood vessels (atherosclerosis).
- High-density lipoprotein or HDL (also called the “healthy” or “good”) carries the LDL(bad) cholesterol away from the arteries and back to the liver, where it is broken down and passed from the body.

Cholesterol and High Blood Pressure and their impact on Heart Disease:

When there is too much plaque buildup in your arteries, it starts narrowing blood flow, and an area of plaque can rupture. If that happens, your body creates a clot to fix the rupture, which blocks blood from flowing through a critical artery, ultimately causing a heart attack. The plaque can also cause your blood vessels to harden and narrow, increasing blood pressure, which causes more strain on your heart and body overall. High blood pressure also increases the risk of plaque ruptures. Both are important in lowering your risk for heart disease and stroke.

Get regular health screenings! It is important to have regularly scheduled preventive health visits to know your blood pressure and cholesterol numbers. Work with your Primary Care Provider to make a heart-healthy lifestyle plan and discuss health history and uncontrollable risks.

You can improve both your cholesterol and blood pressure by:

- Eating a heart-healthy diet—specifically reducing sodium (salt) for blood pressure and reducing cholesterol and saturated/trans fats for cholesterol
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Reducing or quitting tobacco and substance use
- Creating and maintaining healthy relationships
- Getting adequate sleep
- Getting regular physical activity (increases HDL and lowers LDL, and reduces blood pressure)
- Reducing stress (can significantly help to improve blood pressure)

Activity 4: Give Your Heart Some Love

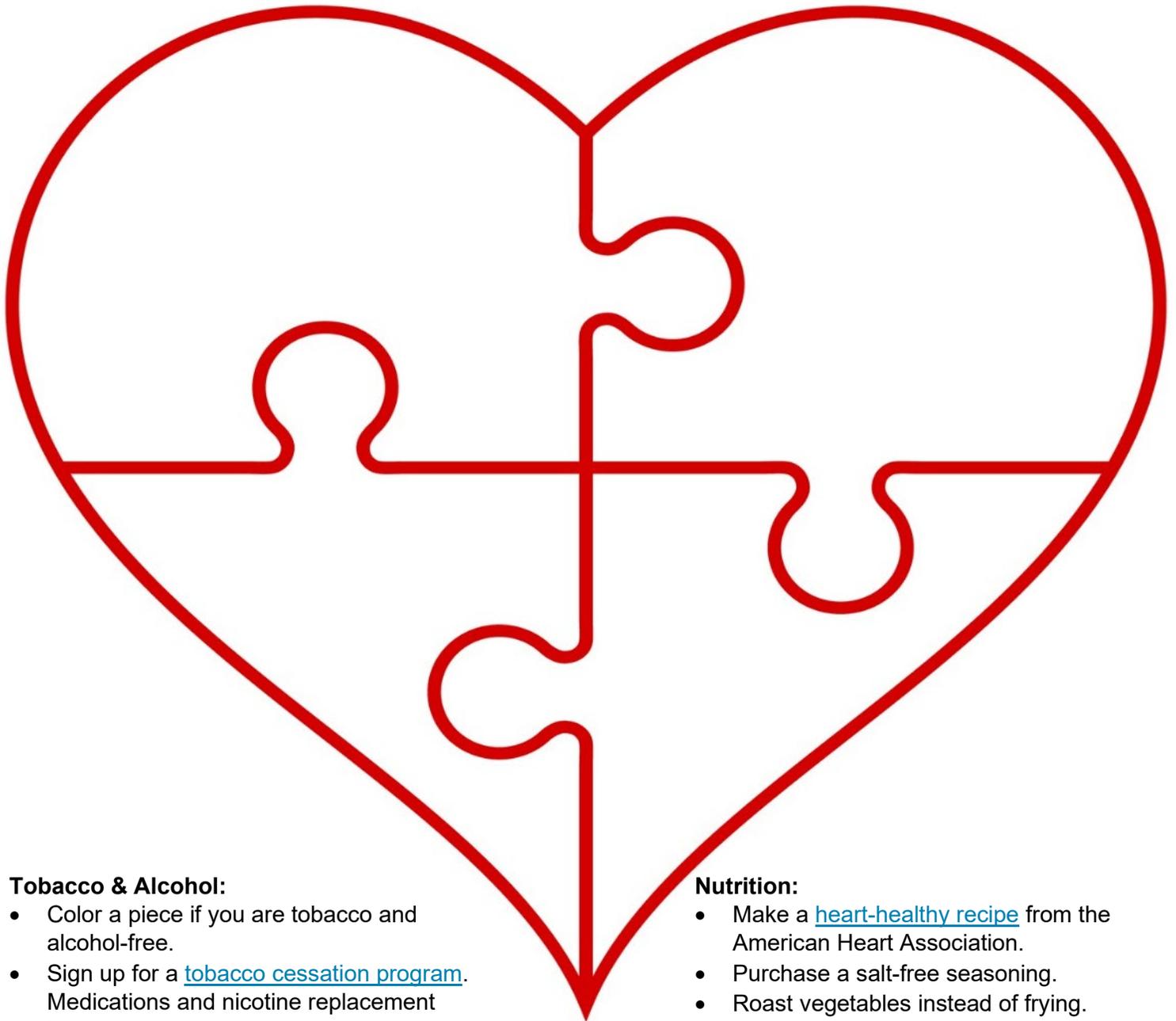
Throughout February, color in a puzzle piece after completing an activity in each category.

Your Area of Choice:

- Find a [program](#) to join to increase your physical activity, reduce stress, make a social connection, or increase positivity.
- Select a [REAL Goal](#) (realistic, easy, attainable life goal) to work toward.
- Fill in your own: _____

Know Your Numbers:

- Check your medical record to see what you are due for.
- Schedule your annual preventive exam.
- Ask your family members about conditions that may run in your family.
- Fill in your own: _____



Tobacco & Alcohol:

- Color a piece if you are tobacco and alcohol-free.
- Sign up for a [tobacco cessation program](#). Medications and nicotine replacement therapies may be available.
- Learn about [available resources](#).
- Reduce your use.
- Fill in your own: _____

Nutrition:

- Make a [heart-healthy recipe](#) from the American Heart Association.
- Purchase a salt-free seasoning.
- Roast vegetables instead of frying.
- Switch to olive oil.
- Fill in your own: _____

Answer Key – Test Your Knowledge
Blood Pressure: 1, 2, 5, 9, 11, 12, and 15
Cholesterol: 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 13, and 14