

## FEBRUARY PREVENTIVE HEALTH TOOLKIT

# Heart Health

February is American Heart Month. Heart disease is the leading cause of death for men, women, and most racial and ethnic groups in the United States. That's why it's so important to take small steps towards a healthier heart. There are several types of heart disease, but the most common one is coronary artery disease, which affects blood flow to the heart muscle and can lead to a heart attack. Sometimes, heart disease can be "silent" and go unnoticed until you experience the signs or symptoms of a heart attack, heart failure, or an arrhythmia (irregular heartbeat). Here are some signs and symptoms to watch out for:

- **Heart attack:** Chest pain or discomfort, pain in the upper back or neck, indigestion, heartburn, nausea or vomiting, extreme tiredness, dizziness, and shortness of breath. If you are concerned you or someone you know is having a heart attack, call 911 right away.
- **Heart failure:** Trouble breathing, tiredness, swelling in the feet, ankles, legs, abdomen, or neck.
- **Arrhythmia:** Feeling like your heart is fluttering or beating oddly (palpitations).



Learn more with the activities in this toolkit:

- **Wear Red Day**
- **Test your knowledge**
- **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](#))

### Questions?

Email us at [Wellness@Medica.com](mailto:Wellness@Medica.com)



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# Health disparities

Health disparities are preventable differences in health between groups of people due to race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, education, economic status, where they live, disability, etc. Health disparities are a complicated and challenging problem around the world. The health of a community is shaped mostly by social factors. For example, having access to healthcare, a safe area to live, racial equity, healthy food, good education, and supportive relationships free of discrimination are all very important to overall health.

People 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 white individuals.
- 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.

(Source: [Cleveland Clinic](#))

For more information, please visit:

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

# Wear Red Day

The first Friday in February is National Wear Red Day.

Wear red on Friday, February 7, 2025, to show your support for, and raise awareness for, heart disease.



# Test your knowledge

Do you know the difference between blood pressure and cholesterol? Better yet, do you know your own numbers? Decide if each statement below is about blood pressure or cholesterol, then keep reading to check your answers and learn more.

Statement	Blood pressure	Cholesterol
1. High _____ is sometimes called the “silent killer” because it doesn’t usually 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 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"/>

## The difference between cholesterol and blood pressure

**Blood pressure** is the force of blood pushing against the walls of your arteries as your heart beats and rests. Arteries are blood vessels that carry blood from your heart to the rest of your body. Blood pressure changes throughout the day based on your activity but, if your blood pressure is high most of the time, you may be diagnosed with high blood pressure (hypertension). High blood pressure is sometimes called the “silent killer” because it doesn’t usually show symptoms. A blood pressure reading is a combination of two numbers:

- **Systolic** (top number): The pressure in your arteries when your heart beats.
- **Diastolic** (bottom number): The pressure in your arteries when your heart rests between beats.

*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*

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

(Source: [AHA](#))

**Cholesterol** is a waxy substance your body needs to build cells, create hormones, and make vitamins. Your liver makes all the cholesterol your body needs, but you can also get it from foods, like meat and dairy. These foods are high in saturated and trans fats that make your liver produce more cholesterol than your body needs, which can lead to unhealthy levels. A blood test is needed to measure cholesterol levels. The two types of cholesterol are:

- **LDL (bad)** cholesterol: This can cause plaque (fatty deposits) to build up in your arteries (atherosclerosis) and lead to heart attacks and strokes.
- **HDL (good)** cholesterol: This helps carry the LDL (bad) cholesterol to the liver, where it is broken down and removed from your body.

## How cholesterol and high blood pressure affect heart disease

When too much plaque builds up in your arteries, it can restrict blood flow. Plaque can also cause your blood vessels to harden and narrow. These things can increase your blood pressure and make your heart work harder. Both high cholesterol and high blood pressure raise your risk for heart disease and stroke.

**Get regular check-ups!** It's important to know your blood pressure and cholesterol numbers. Talk to your doctor to make a plan that includes heart-healthy lifestyle choices. Remember to discuss your health history and any health risks you can't control.

**You can improve your cholesterol and blood pressure by:**

- Eating a heart-healthy diet (less salt for blood pressure, less fat and cholesterol for cholesterol)
- Maintaining a healthy weight
- Reducing or quitting tobacco and substance use
- Building healthy relationships
- Getting enough sleep
- Exercising regularly (increases HDL, lowers LDL and blood pressure)
- Reducing stress (helps lower blood pressure)

# Give your heart some love

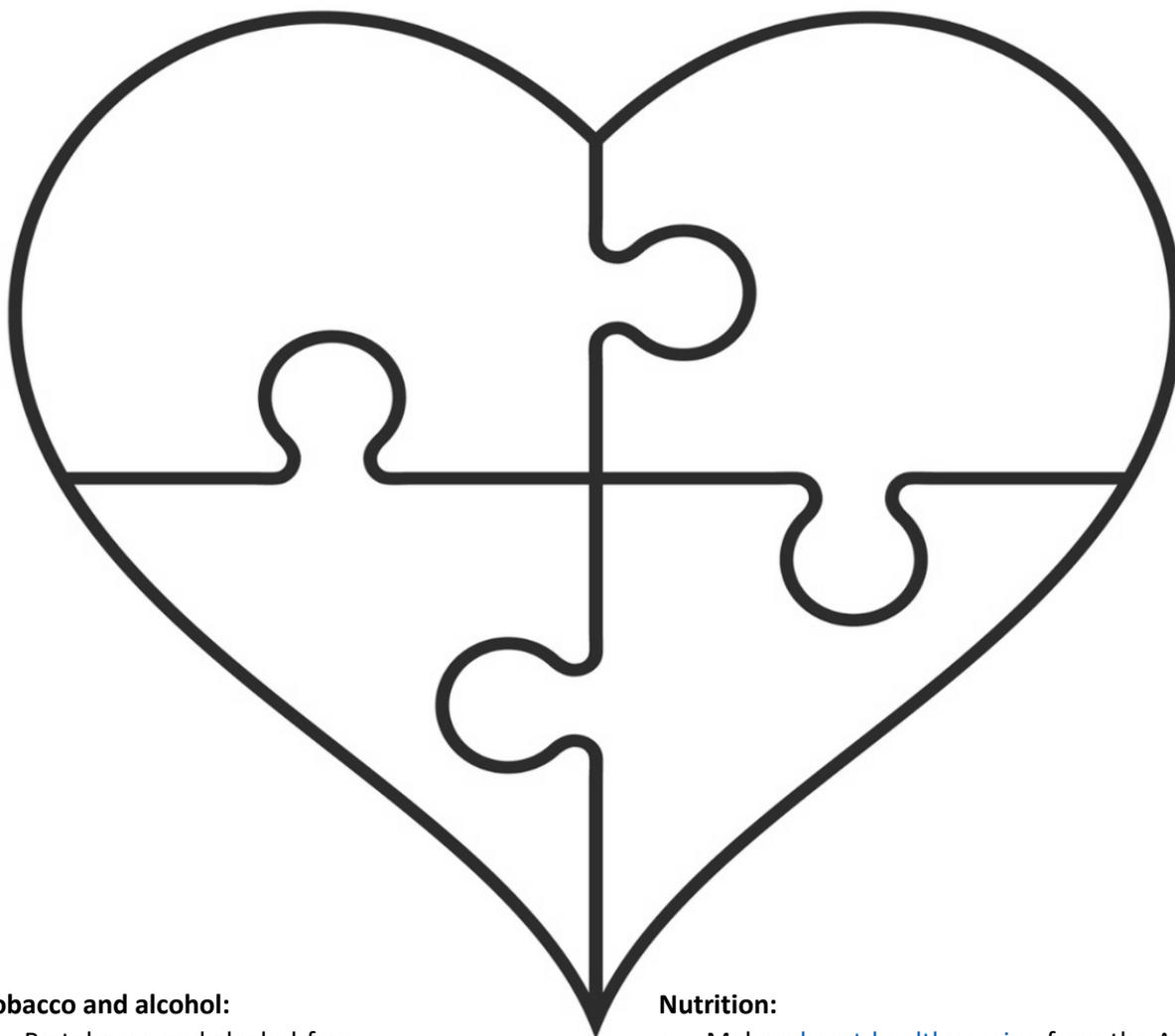
This February, color in a puzzle piece if you complete an activity in the categories below.

## Your area of choice:

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

## Know your numbers:

- Check your medical record to see which screenings or tests you need.
- Schedule a yearly check-up.
- Ask your family members about health conditions that might run in your family.
- Fill in your own: \_\_\_\_\_



## Tobacco and alcohol:

- Be tobacco and alcohol-free.
- Set up a 1:1 [nicotine cessation session](#).
- Learn about [available resources](#) for those struggling with addiction.
- 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 them.
- Switch to olive oil.
- Fill in your own: \_\_\_\_\_

## Resources

[What is heart-healthy living? \(NIH\)](#)

[Heart health resource center \(WebMD\)](#)

[What is cholesterol? \(AHA\)](#)

[Understanding blood pressure readings \(AHA\)](#)