

STEP INTO WELLNESS



Diocese of Palm Beach
2025 Healthiest Employers Award Recipient



February is American Heart Month

Feb 2026

American Heart Month is observed to raise awareness on the importance of a healthy heart and to encourage healthy habits that help reduce the risk of heart disease.

The warning signs for heart disease have been known to appear when people are as young as 18. Red flags such as high blood pressure should be taken seriously and healthy habits should be adopted.

FIVE INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT HEART HEALTH

Heart attacks can be silent

One in five heart attacks occurs without the person even knowing they had one.

Heart attacks affect women differently

Women may experience different symptoms than men. These include pain in the back, arm, neck, or shoulder; nausea; fatigue; shortness of breath; and vomiting.

Young women are at higher risk than men

Women under the age of 50 are twice as likely to die of a heart attack as men in the same age group.

Another reason to hate Mondays

Heart attacks are more likely to occur on Monday mornings than other days of the week. Scientists attribute this to the disruption in our circadian rhythm over the weekend which leads to increased blood pressure and other changes to the nervous system.

Diet soda raises heart attack risk

If you drink one or more diet sodas a day, your chances of having a heart attack are 43% higher than those who drink regular soda or none at all.



HOW TO OBSERVE AMERICAN HEART MONTH

Take up a heart-healthy habit

Staying active, eating healthy, and watching our weight are all important parts of maintaining a healthy cardiovascular system. Pick a new heart-healthy habit like jogging or substituting sodas with water and try to stick to it for a whole month.

Educate yourself

Learn about the risk factors for heart disease, the ways you can prevent them, and the lifestyle choices that can help you stay healthy.

Get your cholesterol tested

If you're worried you might be at risk for heart disease, ask your doctor to perform a simple cholesterol test to let you know if you're at risk and should make adjustments to your diet.

Heart disease occurs when the arteries leading to the heart become clogged. Although heart disease has been around for thousands of years, we do know that many aspects of modern life exacerbate risk factors and make people more prone to heart disease and heart failure. Today, one in four deaths in the U.S. is attributable to heart disease. Heart disease can affect everyone, but taking stock of your prior health risks, activities and diet can help you reduce your risk.

Although we've learned a lot about how the heart works, there are still many unanswered questions about heart health and the cardiovascular system. As far as we know, the best way to protect your heart is to stay active, eat a healthy and balanced diet, and reduce your daily stress. To celebrate American Heart Month, take some time to learn about heart health risks, find your favorite heart-healthy activities, and cook some healthy meals with your family.

<https://nationaltoday.com/american-heart-month/>

In this issue:

- Heart Month
- National Wear Red Day
- Macular Degeneration
- February Happenings
- Super Foods for Heart Health
- Know Your Benefits—BLU365
- February Webinars
- Keeping a Healthy Heart

National Wear Red Day and More Heart Health Resources!

The **first Friday in February** is National Wear Red Day! Please send a **photo of your school or parish staff wearing their red** for Heart Health Awareness!! **Pick any day in February that works for you** and send it to cwaring@diocesepb.org for inclusion in the next Step Into Wellness Newsletter!

Studies show that regularly sleeping too little ups the risk of high blood pressure. Following a bedtime routine that allows for 7 to 9 hours of sleep is important for heart health.

Show your heart some love by preparing tasty, nutritious, DASH-friendly meals. The Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension is a flexible and balanced eating plan that helps you eat heart-healthy for life. Find healthy recipes you'll enjoy at this link <https://healthyeating.nhlbi.nih.gov/>

February is Age Related Macular Degeneration Month

Age-related Macular Degeneration is the leading cause of vision loss in Americans aged 50 and over. The macula is located at the back of the retina and controls our central and color vision. Vision impairment from AMD occurs in one of two ways. In dry AMD, protein called Drusin gather under the macula and begin to deteriorate the retinal support system.

Once the structural support system of the retina has been broken down, it moves into wet AMD. The breaking down of that support allows abnormal blood vessels to grow and potentially leak into the retina, causing a loss of central vision.

Symptoms and Risk Factors of AMD

There are no real symptoms for age-related macular degeneration or low vision until the condition has progressed. Only an examination by your eye doctor can reveal indications before they become a problem. That is why it is so imperative that you get regular eye exams.

After the age of 60, schedule exams for every year or as recommended by your doctor. Once the problem is identified, there are measures to take to slow or repair the damage to your vision.

Risk factors include but are not limited to:

- Genetics
- History of smoking
- Being female
- UV Light
- Age (50+)
- AMD Treatment Options

The best treatment is always preventative measures. Scheduling regular eye exams will enable your doctor to recognize any issues before they progress. Catching AMD in the early stages leads to treatment by vitamin supplementation. Vitamins C, E, Beta Carotene, Zinc Oxide and Cupric Oxide have been shown to decrease the progression of Macular Degeneration when taken in the early stages.

If you are a smoker and show signs of AMD, the first step is to quit smoking. Then use caution when treating with vitamins since too much beta carotene in smokers has proven to increase the risk for lung cancer.

A healthy diet full of leafy green vegetables is also recommended for treatment.

The treatment for advanced stages of AMD is rapidly developing. There are various treatments that can be recommended by your doctor that focus on slowing the growth of blood vessels. These efforts can put a halt on any additional vision loss.

<https://www.iabhp.com/age-related-macular-degeneration/>

February Happenings Calendar

Feb 1 - 28	American Heart Month 
Feb 1 - 28	Age Related Macular Degeneration Month
Feb 6	National Wear Red Day
Feb 14	Valentine's Day
Feb 16	President's Day 

Super Foods For Heart Health

- 1. Beets** – Have a high does of nitrates, which help keep blood vessels dilated and healthy. Try these other blushing nutrient-rich veggies and fruits: carrots, sweet potatoes, acorn squash, oranges, cantaloupe and papaya.
- 2. Pumpkin seeds and walnuts** - Eating pumpkin seeds may help lower blood pressure. Pumpkin seeds are rich in fiber and a variety of nutrients, particularly heart-healthy magnesium.
- 3. Tofu** - Tofu is a great source of plant protein, so it's a smart substitute for red meat or pork. It also has phytosterols — plant cholesterols that actually improve the cholesterol in our own bodies.
- 4. Olives and olive oils** - It not only boosts good, heart-protective cholesterol but also staves off diabetes and strokes.
- 5. Garbanzo beans** – They're full of fiber, which can help lower your bad LDL. They are also a source of good-quality protein.
- 6. Avocados** - Avocado is rich in fiber, potassium and magnesium, all nutrients associated with heart health. Avocados are sodium-free, a plus for those with high blood pressure, and avocado oil has a high smoke point and a neutral taste, making it good for pan-searing foods
- 7. Oatmeal** - Fiber-rich oatmeal cuts down on cholesterol absorption and contributes to gut health. Also try quinoa, whole-grain rices (brown, black and wild), or whole-grain bread and cereal. Be sure to look at the nutrition label and make sure 'whole-grain' is the first ingredient.
- 8. Salmon** – It is high in omega-3 fatty acids — eat salmon twice a week to help stave off the risk of heart failure, stroke and other coronary disease. Also try lake trout, herring, albacore tuna, sardines and mackerel.
- 9. Blueberries** – These are high in soluble fiber and polyphenols (those antioxidants that absorb free radicals) and vitamin C.
- 10. Broccoli and brussels sprouts** – These and other cruciferous vegetables, including cabbage, are linked to a decline in blood vessel disease. They're high in disease-fighting flavonoids.

<https://www.aarp.org/health/conditions-treatments/info-2021/heart-health-foods.html>

Have an idea, suggestion or comment? Contact your Wellness Coordinator, Carol Waring at cwaring@diocesepb.org or 561-775-9572. Have a benefits question? Contact your Benefits Assistant, Sandy Maulden at smaulden@diocesepb.org or 561-775-9574. Be sure to visit the wellness web page at www.diocesepb.org/wellness for helpful links and information.

Know Your Health and Wellness Benefits! Blue365

As a Florida Blue member, you have access to an exclusive discount program that can help you achieve your health goals without straining your wallet.

Blue365 Deals is a national discount program that offers special deals and discounts on fitness equipment, gym memberships, nutritious food and many other products that promote healthy living. There are also many travel deals for when you need some well-deserved rest and relaxation. Members can also find savings on their mortgage and even discounts on pet supplies.

Blue365 partners with many well-known national brands such as Fitbit, Nutrisystem, Jenny Craig, Philips Sonicare, Garmin, Reebok and Skechers.

For those who feel more comfortable working out from home, Gympass is a new Blue365 vendor that helps members stay active from anywhere. The platform offers online classes, wellness resources and virtual personal training.

Most Blue365 discounts can be redeemed online or in person, making the program even more convenient and easy to use. Members can also recommend deals they would like to see Blue365 offer.

All you need to do to start taking advantage of these exclusive discounts is register for Blue365 on their website. It's free to join and only takes a few simple steps:

1. Click the join button at the top of the Blue365 website.
2. Enter your member information using the first three characters on your member ID card.
3. Complete your registration by entering your personal information and accepting the terms and conditions.

Check out Blue365 to start saving today. For questions, call 888-242-2060.

NOTE: This program is available to employees covered under Florida Blue through the diocese or other Blue Cross Blue Shield insurance.

***Pastoral Center Employees
Wearing Their Red!***



Take control of your heart health this American Heart Month! Discover the power of food as medicine and learn practical tips for adopting a lifestyle that supports your overall cardiovascular well-being.

February 4th at 1:00pm ET/12:00pm CT: Ask the Dietitian: Food as Medicine

Join us as Lauren discusses how food and nutrition helps individuals with interventions that support health and disease management.

point your smart phone camera to the QR Code below:



February 5th, 12th and 19th at 2:00pm ET/1:00 pm CT: Blood Pressure Control Series

Join a doctor, nurse, and pharmacist to learn about the health risks of high blood pressure and understand the lifestyle choices and medication options to manage it for a healthier life.

point your smart phone camera to the QR Code below:



February 10th at 1:00pm ET/12:00pm CT: DASH to Better Health

Learn how the heart healthy DASH diet can lower high blood pressure and benefit your health.

point your smart phone camera to the QR Code below:



February 18th at 12:00pm ET/11:00am CT: Every Second Counts: Spotting the signs of a heart attack

This webinar teaches you how to recognize symptoms early, what actions to take, and how to reduce your risk of a heart attack through heart-healthy habits.

point your smart phone camera to the QR Code below:



Healthy Food Choices

Lean meats and fish

Low-fat or fat-free dairy foods

Whole grains

Healthy fats, such as olive oil

Two examples of heart-healthy food plans include the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) eating plan and the Mediterranean diet.

Limit intake of the following

Salt

Sugar

Processed carbohydrates

Alcohol

Saturated fat (found in red meat and full-fat dairy products) and trans fat (found in fried fast food, chips, baked goods)

Maintain a healthy weight

Being overweight — especially around the middle of the body — increases the risk of heart disease. Excess weight can lead to conditions that increase the chances of developing heart disease — including high blood pressure, high cholesterol and type 2 diabetes.

The body mass index (BMI) uses height and weight to determine whether a person is overweight or obese. A BMI of 25 or higher is considered overweight and is generally associated with higher cholesterol, higher blood pressure, and an increased risk of heart disease and stroke.

Waist circumference also can be a useful tool to measure how much belly fat you have. The risk of heart disease is higher if the waist measurement is greater than:

40 inches (101.6 centimeters, or cm) for men

35 inches (88.9 cm) for women

Even a small weight loss can be beneficial. Reducing weight by just 3% to 5% can help decrease certain fats in the blood (triglycerides), lower blood sugar (glucose) and reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes. Losing even more helps lower blood pressure and blood cholesterol level.

Get good quality sleep. Most adults need at least seven hours of sleep each night. Make sleep a priority in your life.

Manage stress

Get Regular Health Screenings

