



## Healthy and Connected Member Newsletter - April 24, 2025

Healthy and Connected is the South Carolina Department of Health and Human Services' (SCDHHS) member e-newsletter. Healthy and Connected features tips and tools to help you and your loved ones connect to resources and live healthier lives.

### Making the Change: How to Quit Drinking



It's one thing to have an alcoholic drink every now and then, but it's another when you realize you may be drinking too much or too often. April is Alcohol Awareness Month. Alcohol can affect our sleep, relationships, weight, risk for chronic conditions and more. There may be a point you reach when you decide it's time to stop drinking. If that time comes, consider how much you drink and why.

Understand your relationship with alcohol and self-examine how it plays a role in your life. Then, think about your motivations to quit drinking. Review [these tips](#) to help you quit.

1. **Set a date and stick to it.** Decide when you will quit. Leading up to the date, speak with your family and friends. Tell them your plan and ask them to support you as you make the change.
2. **Be aware of triggers.** Many are used to reaching for a drink when in certain environments. When trying to quit, staying away from certain triggers will help. This could include not hanging out with specific people, not entering bars or attending parties and even removing the wine glasses and flasks from your house.

3. **Find community.** Just because you're blocking triggers doesn't mean you have to stay at home all the time. Try redirecting your time by reconnecting with old friends and doing different things. You could go for a bike ride instead of a happy hour or meet with a friend at a coffee shop instead of a bar.
4. **Talk to a professional.** Substance use disorder treatment services are available for eligible Healthy Connections Medicaid members through the South Carolina [Department of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Services](#). This includes alcohol substance abuse counseling. The member speaks with a professional who helps provide them with skills and support to improve their ability to function in their daily life.
5. **Assess how you feel.** If your body is used to a certain amount of alcohol, you could feel slightly different in some ways when you stop. These could be signs of detox. It depends on how much and how often you drink. You could feel anxiety or sadness about ending a chapter in your life. You may feel unsure or nervous about the future or even irritable. People who have a severe reaction to quitting should seek emergency treatment.

If you are living with [alcohol use disorder](#), quitting on your own could pose health risks. If this could be you, discuss it with your doctor. Treatment for alcohol use disorder can look different for every person. It could involve a brief intervention, counseling, an inpatient stay or something else. Working to stop alcohol use to improve the person's quality of life is the main goal.

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## Women Prioritizing Their Health

Women take on many challenging but rewarding roles. These roles can include mom, spouse and employee. It's natural for women to prioritize other tasks instead of their health.

Women's Health Week is celebrated each May starting on Mother's Day. May 11-17 is a reminder for women to check in on their physical and mental health. There are many issues unique to women that can occur with age or if we forget to put ourselves first.

**Mental health.** Did you know more than one in five American women experienced a mental health condition last year? Things like motherhood, relationships and work can be hard. If you're feeling overwhelmed, try talking to a friend or professional. When mental health issues are ignored, it can lead to other health problems. Click [here](#) to learn more about balancing life's challenges to keep your mental well-being.

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**Maternal health.** Maternal health refers to pregnancy, childbirth and the time after childbirth. Issues like [weight gain and diabetes](#) can affect pregnant women. It's important to work with a provider to plan for childbirth and postpartum healing. Healthy Connections Medicaid members who are women are covered for 12 months after giving birth. In January, the South Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (SCDHHS) received a grant that will fund the [Transforming Maternal Health](#) Model. This enhanced care model is focused on improving maternal health care for members.

**Menopause.** [Menopause](#) marks the end of menstruation for women. It usually takes place between ages 45 and 58. Symptoms include hot flashes, mood changes and insomnia. It's important to learn how menopause might affect you. Feeling ready for this change can help you take control of your health.

**Female cancers.** Breast and cervical cancer are types that affect women. The best way to protect yourself is by getting screened often. Healthy Connections Medicaid covers breast and cervical cancer screenings for women ages 40-74, or as recommended by a provider. Women should be screened for cancer at least once every two years. Read more about the Healthy Connections Medicaid Breast and Cervical Cancer program [here](#).

This Women's Health Week, check in with yourself or the women in your life. Keep a healthy lifestyle. Eat a balanced diet, exercise and practice good mental health habits.

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## Keeping an Eye Out for Spots

Do you and your family have plans to spend time outside this spring and summer? Don't forget to keep your skin protected while being in the sun. Skin cancer is the most common type of cancer in the nation. There are different types, but the most aggressive is called melanoma. It is a more dangerous type that can spread to other parts of the body if it isn't found early. May is [Melanoma and Skin Cancer Awareness Month](#).



One of the easiest things we can do to keep an eye out for skin cancer is to check our skin regularly for anything unusual. The best time to check is after a bath or shower. There are a few things you will need for an at-home exam:

- A well-lit room
- A full-length mirror
- A hand-held mirror to check harder-to-see areas
- A trusted person like a spouse, parent or family member to help you with areas like your back or scalp

The first time you check your skin at home, spend time looking at all the surfaces. Observe your patterns of moles, freckles and other marks so you'll be able to notice any changes later. Be sure to show your doctor any areas where you may have concern. View [these steps](#) for how to give yourself an exam.

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## Men Prioritizing Their Health

June is Men's Health Month. In June, men are encouraged to take charge of their mental and physical health. They can start by visiting a doctor and scheduling regular screenings. Did you know the average life span for men is about [six years less than women](#)? This is due to many biological, behavioral and social factors. The mission of Men's Health Month is to spread awareness about men's preventable health problems and reduce the life span gap over time.

A major reason for the gap is because men are more likely than women to neglect their health. Specifically, men tend to ignore signs of mental health issues. They may not seek care. Many men believe they must "[suffer in silence](#)" instead of talking with someone. If you are feeling lonely, depressed or anxious, seek help from a medical professional or a friend.

Heart disease is the [leading cause of death](#) for American men. Managing your risk of heart disease is key. Learn if you have a history of heart disease in your family. Exercising regularly, quitting smoking and keeping a healthy weight are things you can do to improve your heart health. Speak with your doctor about it during your Medicaid-covered well visits.

Cancer affects men of all ages and backgrounds, especially prostate, lung and colorectal cancer. Men are more likely to work in places with chemicals that can

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cause cancer. Also, substance use, poor diet and lack of exercise are all factors that increase your risk of cancer. The best way to protect yourself is by getting screened regularly. Set yearly screenings and report any unusual changes in your body to your doctor promptly. Read more [here](#).

Take part in changing the course of men's well-being during Men's Health Month. Participate in Wear Blue Day Friday, June 13 to show your commitment to lowering the life span gap. It's time to focus on our health and teach loved ones how they can do the same. Learn more [here](#).

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## Quality of Life as We Age



There are many things we should do through our lives to stay healthy. But as we grow older, certain actions become even more important. About 19% of South Carolinians are 65 or older. Every May is Older Americans Month. It's a time to honor and acknowledge those older than us and help keep this group active and engaged. If you have older family members or loved ones, there are

ways you can [encourage them](#) to maintain a high quality of life.

**Social connection.** Social isolation and loneliness are associated with higher risk for health problems. This could include depression, heart disease and mental decline. Set daily or weekly phone calls or video chats with your older family member. Encourage them to seek out others with similar interests.

**Physical activity.** Help your loved one aim for different types of physical activities. Options like walking around the neighborhood, gardening, lifting weights or stretching can all be ways to get exercise. See if there are any activities you could do together.

**Healthier eating.** Eating well is not just to maintain a healthy weight. It can also help support muscles and strengthen bones. This leads to better balance and independence. It can be hard to change their mind about some longstanding family recipes. However, introducing healthier eating habits could lead to new favorite

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foods. Try going with your loved one to the grocery store. You can help them pick out some healthy options.

**Visiting the doctor.** Health exams are key for older people. This can help lower risk factors for disease like high blood pressure and cholesterol levels. Some people visit their doctor often. Others tend to avoid appointments. Try to encourage your family member to reach out to their doctor right away if they have any pain or experience something unexpected. If possible, offer to drive them to their appointment or go in with them.

Healthy Connections Medicaid offers an optional service for members 55 and older. It is called the [Program of All-inclusive Care for the Elderly \(PACE\)](#). It helps meet the person's health care needs in their community instead of going to a nursing home. PACE is currently offered in 11 counties.

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## Reducing the Risk of a Stroke

American Stroke Month is recognized each May to increase awareness about stroke causes, warning signs and prevention. A stroke takes place when blood flow to the brain is interrupted. Stroke is the fifth-leading cause of death and [a leading cause of adult disability](#) in the United States. Luckily, there are many steps you can take to reduce your risk of stroke:

**Manage blood pressure and cholesterol levels.** If you have both high blood pressure and cholesterol, you are at a higher risk of stroke. It's important to talk to a doctor to learn about your options for treatment.

**Quit smoking and vaping.** Tobacco and nicotine can increase your blood pressure and heart rate which puts stress on your cardiovascular system. The [South Carolina Tobacco Quitline](#) has free services, support and resources to help you quit. The number to call is 1-800-QUIT-NOW.

**Limit alcohol consumption.** Heavy alcohol use is considered two drinks per day for women and three drinks per day for men. It is important to decrease your alcohol consumption to reduce the chance of high blood pressure and a spike in heart rate.

**Create healthy habits.** Engaging in regular physical activity, eating a balanced diet and getting enough sleep can significantly reduce the risk of stroke. Try building healthy habits with family or friends to keep each other on track.



Nearly one in four survivors will have another stroke. It's important to work with your doctor to plan for prevention. You can practice these behaviors and others like losing weight and managing glucose levels to lower your risk.

One of the main goals of the month is to increase awareness about the warning signs of stroke. You can use the [F.A.S.T. method](#) to decide if someone is having a stroke.

**F – Face drooping.** Ask the person to smile. Does one side of their face droop making it look uneven?

**A – Arm weakness.** Ask them to raise both arms. Can they do it? Is one arm weak or numb?

**S – Speech difficulty.** Ask them if they can speak. Is their speech slurred or delayed?

**T – Time to call 911.** If the answers to these questions are yes, call 911 at once.

Remember that you can play an important role in spotting a stroke. Start lowering your chance of stroke now and educate your loved ones about how to reduce their risk.

[Read More Facts](#)

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## Supporting Your Child with Autism

About one in 31 children has autism spectrum disorder (ASD). It is a developmental disorder that affects how children communicate. ASD is called a spectrum disorder because there is a range where children may fall on the spectrum. People start to [show symptoms](#) of ASD at an early age. They can include trouble making eye contact, not responding with a smile by six months old and not relating to others.



April is World Autism Month. There are no official rules for how parents should best communicate with their child who has ASD. But there are some [tips that could help](#). These include:

**Being patient.** It can take children with ASD longer to process things. You could try slowing down your speaking speed to match theirs.

**Teaching them how to express their anger.** Kids should know they don't have to hold in their anger inside. They should also learn the way to talk about it without being too aggressive.

**Staying positive.** Children with ASD respond well to positive reinforcement. It is a good practice to reward good behavior.

**Showing them your love.** Although people with ASD may have trouble showing their feelings, they still need to know you love them. Make sure to show them support and interest.

**Believing in them.** A kid with ASD is still a growing person whose possibilities are unknown. Don't define them by their diagnosis. Believe in what they can do!

Healthy Connections Medicaid members are screened for autism as a recommended part of a well-child checkup at 18 and 24 months. They can also be screened by their doctor at any age if there is a concern for autism. If the screening indicates a concern, they can be referred to a specialist for an autism evaluation. Members under three years of age can be referred to BabyNet. This is South Carolina's program for infants and toddlers under three with developmental delays. It provides more developmental screenings to see if they are eligible for early intervention. Families can even self-refer [here](#). Children with ASD who have Healthy Connections Medicaid may also qualify for services such as early intensive behavioral intervention.

[Early intervention](#) is known to have long-term positive effects on your child's development, symptoms and later skills. It is very important not to wait in mentioning any autism concerns with your child's doctor.

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## Mental Illness Awareness

A mental illness is a condition that impacts someone's thinking, feeling, behavior or mood. It is not the result of one single event. There are many causes that can play a factor. These include genetics, environment and lifestyle. Mental health conditions

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can range from mild to severe. They can deeply impact the way a person lives. It also affects their ability to relate to others. [One in five](#) adults in the nation experiences mental illness each year.

There are many types of mental health disorders. Some of the common types are listed below.

- Anxiety disorders
- Depression
- Eating disorders
- Bipolar disorder
- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Psychosis
- Schizophrenia

Someone who has one of these disorders could be considered to have a mental illness. Many times, the word “illness” and “disorder” are both used for each other when it comes to mental health. If you are someone living with a mental illness, it’s important for you to know you are not alone. Having a mental illness does not mean you are broken or that you have done something wrong.

There are several mental health conditions [linked](#) to greater risk of suicide. These include depression, anxiety and hazardous drinking. If you or someone you know may be having thoughts like this, it can be scary. May is Mental Health Awareness Month. But any month is the right one to reach out for help or check in with friends and family. If you are struggling or in a crisis, text or call 988 to reach the [Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#). Learn about the warning signs for suicide [here](#).

SCDHHS is committed to helping mental health support in our state. SCDHHS [awarded grants](#) to 13 South Carolina hospitals in 2023. The facilities are funding emergency department (ED) expansions focused on behavioral health crises. The new units are for those having a mental health and/or substance use emergency. They are separate from the main ED and provide a calming and supportive environment to provide help. Three hospital EDs have opened their units. They are located at AnMed Medical Center in the Upstate, Trident Medical Center in the Lowcountry and Lexington Medical Center in the Midlands.

Thank you for reading Healthy and Connected. Follow SCDHHS on our [Facebook](#) and [X](#) pages for regular updates. You can also [view the Medicaid Member Handbook](#) on

SCDHHS' [website](#) to learn more about what is covered, where to go to ask questions and more.

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