



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.

Understanding Colorectal Cancer Risks

Sometimes it's easy to think we're healthy if we feel fine. But there are some diseases that don't show any signs. March is National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month. This type of cancer is in the colon or rectum of the body. It is the third leading cause of death from cancer in the United States. Colorectal cancer and polyps don't always cause symptoms at first. The colon is the first part of the large intestine. It is about five feet long. The rectum makes up the last few inches of the large intestine.

There are some risk factors that can increase the chance of a person getting colorectal cancer.

1. **Age:** The risk goes up after age 50. Most cases are diagnosed after 50 years old.
 2. **Family history:** A person with a parent, brother, sister or child with colorectal cancer doubles their risk.
 3. **Personal history:** Someone who has already had colorectal cancer, colorectal polyps, ovarian cancer or inflammatory bowel disease.
 4. **Alcohol:** Drinking three or more alcoholic drinks a day.
 5. **Cigarette smoking:** Smoking can increase the chance and the likelihood of death from colorectal cancer.
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6. **Race:** African Americans have a higher risk compared to other races.

7. **Obesity:** Having an unhealthy amount of body fat.

Healthy Connections Medicaid members are now covered for Cologuard. This applies to full-benefit Medicaid members and family planning limited-benefit members. It is a preventive colorectal screening test. The test provides a way for you to check your colon health. Learn more about getting a screening from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC).

Fighting Cavities for our Kids



Cavities are the most common chronic disease for children in America. According to the [CDC](#), more than half of children ages six to eight have had a cavity in at least one of their baby teeth. More than half of teens aged 12 to 19 have also had a cavity in at least one of their permanent teeth. The chances for cavities can increase when kids eat lots of sugary foods and

drink a lot of soda, especially between meals.

The good news is cavities are preventable. February is National Children's Dental Health Month. There are a few ways parents can play a part in keeping a healthy smile on their kids' faces:

- When teeth first start coming in, brush them twice a day with a soft, small-bristled toothbrush and water.
 - Visit the dentist by their baby's first birthday.
 - Help their child learn how to brush their teeth until they can do it on their own. Make sure they learn how to spit out the toothpaste. They should not swallow it.
 - Use fluoride toothpaste.
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Kids who are Healthy Connections Medicaid members have many dental services covered. Children can get a dental exam, cleanings and fluoride treatments once every six months. They can also get dental seals for permanent teeth, fillings, root canals and anesthesia. Learn more about what dental services are covered by calling DentaQuest. The number is 1-888-307-6552. They are open Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. You can also go online to [DentaQuest.com](https://www.dentaquest.com).

Eating Disorders Awareness

[Eating disorders](#) are conditions that impact your health. They can affect you physically and mentally. The illness causes problems in the way you think about food, eating, weight and your body shape. There are symptoms people can show with eating disorders. The symptoms can impact the way they act in key areas of their life. Feb. 26-March 1 is National Eating Disorders Awareness Week. The three most common eating disorders are anorexia, bulimia and binge-eating. Take time to learn about some risk factors for people with eating disorders:

- Body dissatisfaction
- Bullying
- Anxiety
- Limited friends
- Trauma
- Knowing someone close with an eating disorder
- Sexual trauma in childhood
- Food insecurity

When eating disorders go untreated, they can cause many health problems. This can include tooth loss, seizures, brain damage, bone loss and more. When caught early, recovery is possible.

[Nutritional counseling](#) is now available for Medicaid members diagnosed with obesity or an eating disorder when nutrition therapy is needed.

Adding Exercise into the New Year

The start of the new year marks a great time to set fitness goals. National Preschool Health and Fitness Day is Jan. 26. This day highlights the importance of healthy eating and exercising becoming a part of someone's life at an early age. It can also be a time for parents and/or guardians of preschoolers to set fitness goals for themselves too.



There are lots of ways to add exercise into your child's life. Planning things for your kids to take part in like dancing, sports or games that involve movement is a great way to start. Learning your child's favorite type of physical activity is the best way to lead them into a healthy, active lifestyle. The more your kids enjoy the activity, the more they will want to keep doing it.

Healthy eating is also key. Encourage your child to try a new fruit of their choice. Or simply pack them a healthy meal for lunch. Building a healthy diet for your child at an early age is good encouragement for them to continue healthy ways throughout life.

[How to Get Your Kids Exercising](#)

Birth Defects Prevention

January is National Birth Defects Awareness Month. Birth defects are a leading cause of infant deaths in South Carolina. They are abnormalities present when a baby is born. They can affect almost any part of the body. Symptoms can range from mild to severe. Infants born with a birth defect often face lifelong challenges. Advances in medical care, prevention, treatment and early detection have improved quality and extended the life of many impacted.

Not all birth defects can be prevented. But there are certain actions before and during pregnancy that can reduce the risk. The CDC encourages people to make a PACT to help avoid birth defects:

P – Plan ahead by getting 400 mcg of folic acid every day. See a doctor before you are pregnant.

A – Avoid harmful substances like alcohol and tobacco.

C – Choose a healthy lifestyle. Work with your doctor to manage any chronic conditions.

T – Talk with your healthcare provider.

Women who qualify for Healthy Connections Medicaid because they are pregnant have coverage for themselves and their babies. Coverage for pregnant women now goes through 12 months postpartum.

[Birth Defects Prevention Details](#)

Keeping our Hearts Healthy



Valentine’s Day in February is a time we often show our love for others. But February is also American Heart Month. One of the best ways we can love ourselves is by doing what we can to stay healthy. Heart disease is a leading cause of death in the United States. There is a lot you can do to protect your heart and reduce your chances of getting heart disease. The Mayo Clinic

has a few tips to keep in mind for heart disease prevention.

1. **Don’t smoke or use tobacco.** Chemicals in tobacco can damage the heart and blood vessels. Cigarette smoke lowers the oxygen level in blood which raises blood pressure and heart rate.
2. **Aim for 30-60 minutes of physical activity every day.** Exercising lowers the chance of getting other health conditions that can strain your heart.

3. **Eat a heart-healthy diet.** Eating healthy foods can help improve blood pressure, cholesterol and lower the chance of type 2 diabetes. This includes foods like veggies, fruits, lean meats and fish, avocados and whole grains.
4. **Maintain a healthy weight.** Being overweight raises the risk of heart disease. Having extra weight specifically in the middle of the body contributes to risk factors too.
5. **Get a good amount of sleep.** People who don't sleep enough have a higher risk of obesity, heart attack, high blood pressure, diabetes and depression. Most adults need at least seven hours of sleep per night. Children usually need more.
6. **Manage your stress levels.** The more stress you have for long periods of time, the more it can play a role in higher blood pressure and other risk factors.
7. **Get regular health screening tests.** If you don't get checked for any conditions you may have, like high cholesterol, you could damage your heart and blood vessels. If you don't get checked for them, you probably wouldn't know you have them.
8. **Do what you can to prevent infections.** Certain infections like gum disease can lead to heart problems. Staying up to date on vaccines can also help protect against diseases.

Ask your doctor about heart health at your next check-up.

[More About Heart Disease Prevention](#)

New Benefits Through Medicaid

Healthy Connections Medicaid added new benefits to help improve health outcomes for members. These changes apply to Medicaid members enrolled in a managed care plan. They also affect those who are not in a plan.

For full-benefit and family planning limited-benefit Healthy Connections Medicaid members:

- The Nucleic Acid Amplification Test (NAAT) is now covered. This test can find bacterial vaginosis in one test instead of several.

For full-benefit Healthy Connections Medicaid members:

- Nutritional counseling is covered to treat eating disorders and obesity. Members can even receive this service by telehealth. More hours of this counseling are now covered too.
- The placement, replacement and maintenance of cochlear implants are now covered for members 21 years and older who need them. These services are already covered for full-benefit Healthy Connections Medicaid members under 21 years of age.

Remember to Complete Your Annual Review Form

Annual eligibility reviews are continuing for Healthy Connections Medicaid members. If you have not already, you will get an annual review form or “continuation of benefits” notice in the mail by summer 2024.

Usually, a household gets just one annual review form. But there are some situations in which each member must have their own. If you have received an extra review form for a certain member of your household, please fill it out and return each one. It is very important to do your review. If you don't think you're still eligible, there is a chance your children may still be eligible. Don't risk losing their health coverage.

Visit apply.scdhhs.gov to:

- Update your contact info
- Check your annual eligibility review status
- Submit your review when it's time to renew

If you forgot to complete your review or missed the due date, fill it out and return it anyway. You may still have coverage. Or we may be able to re-open your coverage while we review.

[Learn More About Annual Reviews](#)

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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