



Healthy and Connected Member Newsletter - Jan. 27, 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.

Choosing Your Health This Year



Happy New Year, Healthy Connections Medicaid members! While this is a time many people choose to adopt New Year's resolutions, there are many ways to prioritize your health this year other than the usual "diet and exercise." These are great resolutions to have. But, making small decisions that don't seem so overwhelming might be easier to keep through the year than the idea of losing

a certain amount of weight or exercising a set length of time daily. Maybe it's your year to try some of [these resolutions](#) that might improve your health physically and mentally.

1. **Rethink dieting.** People who lose weight doing restrictive diets are more likely to regain between one-third to two-thirds of the weight back within a year after. Try an easier way of changing eating habits like cooking at home and eating healthier foods.
2. **Get better sleep.** Not getting enough sleep is hard on our bodies. It can lead to problems like mood changes, forgetfulness, weight gain and a weaker immune system. [Adults](#) need seven or more hours of sleep a night.

3. **Visit your doctor.** Getting regular checkups from your doctor is a great way to keep your health on track. Having regular screenings and blood work can help them spot problems before they become more serious. Healthy Connections Medicaid adult members are covered for a physical once every two years.
 4. **Cut back on alcohol.** Drinking alcohol too often can hurt your health. Try setting a goal like limiting drinking to the weekends or only a certain number of drinks per night.
 5. **Find a physical activity you enjoy.** Whether it may be taking a walk or riding a bike, choose an activity that best-fits your schedule. You could even do it with your whole family. Jan. 31 is National Preschool Health and Fitness Day. It could be the perfect time to have your kids join you. It also sets an example for them that exercising can be fun!
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The Warning Signs of Heart Attack

Our hearts have a big job to do. As the main organ that helps pump blood throughout our bodies, it's easy not to think about it when we don't feel like there's anything wrong. February is American Heart Month. Are you prioritizing your heart health? Sometimes, when the flow of blood to the heart is severely reduced or blocked, it could cause a heart attack.

Heart attacks can feel sudden and intense, or they may come on more slowly with mild pain or discomfort. Some of the most common warning signs include chest pain, feeling lightheaded, neck or back pain, arm or shoulder pain and shortness of breath. Anyone who experiences these warning signs should call 911 right away.

Other times, it's possible to have a heart attack without even knowing it. A [silent heart attack](#) has few symptoms, if any. Or, it could have symptoms not recognized as being from a heart attack. Those who experience a silent heart attack might think they have heartburn, the flu or a strained chest muscle. If you think you may have had a silent heart attack, talk to your doctor. A review of your symptoms and health history can help them decide if you need more tests.

The risk factors for a heart attack of any kind include:

- Age
- Being diabetic
- Having excess weight
- Having a family history of heart disease
- High blood pressure
- Lack of exercise

- Prior heart attack
- Tobacco use

It's important to discuss your heart health with your doctor during your Medicaid-covered well visits. You can also ask your child's pediatrician about a cardiac risk screening.

[More About Warning Signs](#)

Vision Health: More than What Meets the Eye

When you look at your eyes in a mirror, they may look healthy and normal. But there are important ways to keep up your eye health that you cannot see on your own.

January is [Glaucoma Awareness Month](#).



Glaucoma is an eye condition that damages the optic nerve. The optic nerve is what sends visual info from your eye to your brain. It is vital for having good vision. Glaucoma is one of the leading causes of vision loss and blindness in the nation.

Many people do not know they have [glaucoma](#). This is because there are usually no warning signs or early symptoms. It is often a gradual change that isn't noticed until the condition is in its later stages. Although it can happen to anyone, it is more frequent for people over 60 years old.

The best way to find out if you may have glaucoma is to visit your eye doctor for a dilated eye exam. This is one of the easiest ways you can protect your vision. There is no cure for glaucoma, but it can be monitored. If it's found early, vision loss can be slowed or prevented from getting worse.

If you or your child may have something wrong with your vision, it's best to address it quickly. Do not ignore it. Healthy Connections Medicaid members younger than 21 are covered for one eye exam and one pair of glasses each year, if medically

necessary. Members 21 years old and above are covered for an eye exam when medically necessary.

National Kidney Month

Your kidneys may be small, but they play a big role. March is National Kidney Month. It's a time to learn more about what our kidneys do and how we can keep them healthy. The kidneys help balance fluids in your body and remove waste. They also make hormones that control our blood pressure, make red blood cells and keep our bones strong and healthy. When your kidneys aren't working right, it leads to a serious condition called chronic kidney disease (CKD). CKD develops slowly and can be hard to spot until it reaches more advanced stages. Getting tested regularly could help you spot the disease earlier.

Some health conditions like diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease and a family history of kidney problems can increase your risk of getting CKD. There are ways you can help protect your kidneys and prevent damage:

- Avoid smoking or quit if you already smoke. Need help to quit? Call the SC Tobacco Quitline for free at 1-800-QUIT-NOW. Visit quitnowsc.org for more information.
- Work toward a healthy weight if you're overweight or obese. Talking with a health care provider to create a weight-loss or meal plan may help. Healthy Connections Medicaid members diagnosed with obesity or an eating disorder are covered for nutritional counseling when needed.
- Monitor your blood sugar levels if you have diabetes. Managing your A1C, blood pressure and cholesterol is important. They are known as the [“ABCs of diabetes.”](#)
- Eat a low salt and sugar diet. Try eating fresh whole foods like fruits, vegetables, whole grains and lean meats like fish and chicken. Cooking at home can be fun, more affordable and allows you to control salt and sugar levels.
- Limit alcohol. Too much alcohol can raise your blood pressure and add extra calories, which can lead to gaining weight.

To learn more, visit the [Kidney Disease](#) page on NIH.gov.

Making Dental Health Fun for Kids



Teaching our kids how to care for their dental health is important to start at an early age. Although cavities are common for children in America, they can be prevented. Brushing and flossing your teeth might not be at the top of your child's list of fun things to do, but there are ways to get creative. This Children's Dental Health Month in February, try using some [fun ways](#) to get your kids in the

habit of brushing their teeth. They should brush them for at least two minutes, twice a day.

1. Brush to the beat. Pick a song they enjoy and ask them to brush to the beat of the music. Almost any upbeat track will work and is more fun than using a timer.
2. Offer an easy reward. Once your child is finished brushing, reward them with something small, like a shiny sticker. You could also give them a hug, high five or verbal encouragement.
3. Tell them a story. Create your own story to tell them while they brush their teeth. It could even be teeth-related where your son or daughter is the superhero who "brushes away" the bad guys who cause cavities.
4. Let them pick their own toothbrush or toothpaste. It can be more fun to brush for a child if they have a toothbrush in their favorite color or toothpaste that's got colored stripes or sparkles. There are many fluoride toothpastes that come in different flavors.
5. Brush together. Try brushing your teeth with your kids to set an example. This is also an easy way to show a healthy dental hygiene routine for your children to follow.

Healthy Connections Medicaid members who are children are eligible for many dental services. These include dental exams, cleanings and fluoride treatments every six months. They can also get x-rays, dental seals for permanent teeth, silver diamine fluoride, fillings, root canals and anesthesia. In addition to their dentist, fluoride varnish can also be applied by the child's doctor. Learn more about what dental

services are covered by calling [DentaQuest](#). The number is (888) 307-6552. They are open Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Caring for Your Colon

March is National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month. The colon and the rectum make up the large intestine, which is part of our digestive system. Cancer in the colon usually starts as small clumps of cells called polyps. Polyps normally aren't cancerous, but sometimes they can turn into cancer over time.

Many people with colon cancer don't have symptoms at first. This means they likely won't know they have cancer. When symptoms do appear, it will usually depend on the cancer's size and its place in the large intestine.

Below are some common [symptoms of colon cancer](#).

- Bowel habits changing.
- Blood in the stool.
- Discomfort in the belly area. This could be gas, cramps or pain.
- Feeling like the bowel doesn't totally empty during a bowel movement.
- Feeling weak or tired.
- Losing weight without trying.

Screening for colorectal cancer could save your life. Healthy Connections Medicaid members ages 45 to 75 can get screening services for colorectal cancer. This includes those in the Family Planning Limited benefit.

Medicaid covers many types of screening tests like Cologuard or colonoscopies. Cologuard is a preventive colorectal screening test. It can be taken at home. It is recommended for people who are at low-to-average risk of colon cancer. [A colonoscopy](#) is the way doctors look inside the colon and rectum. The procedure can find polyps and cancer in the intestine.

The Importance of Donating Blood

January is National Blood Donor Month, a time to highlight the importance of donating. During the winter months, blood donations drop because more people get sick. However, there is still a constant need for blood.



Knowing your blood type is crucial during blood transfusions.

Not all blood types are alike. So, it's important to know yours when receiving or giving blood. Getting the wrong kind of blood is dangerous and can harm your body. If the blood you are given doesn't match the type in your body, your immune system will attack the donated blood.

There are eight blood types: O+, O-, A+, A-, B+, B-, AB+ and AB-. Some types like AB- and B- are rarer. Only a small group of people can donate. People with O- blood are called "universal donors." This means their blood type can be given to anyone. People with universal or rare blood types are urged to donate. They can be vital to saving the patients who are in need. You can find out your blood type by asking your doctor for a test, taking an at-home test or donating blood.

According to the [American Red Cross](#), one donation can help save more than one life. When you decide to donate, that blood can be used later for a blood transfusion. It can help trauma patients, babies, people with sickle cell disease, cancer and other serious injuries.

[Find A Blood Drive Near You](#)

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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