



Healthy and Connected Member Newsletter - April 2026

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.

Our Body's Response to Stress



When we feel a headache coming on, get an upset stomach or can't focus, it's easy to think we may be getting sick. But sickness isn't always the cause of these kinds of symptoms. The real cause could also be [stress](#). Feeling stressed can affect our body, thoughts, feelings and behavior. It impacts people differently and

can [affect your body](#) in a variety of ways:

- Pain, tightness or soreness to muscles and joints
- Increased heart rate or worsening of existing conditions like heart disease or high blood pressure
- Worsened pre-existing skin conditions like eczema, rosacea or psoriasis
- Digestive system issues like pain, gas, diarrhea to more complex conditions like irritable bowel syndrome and acid reflux
- Tension in shoulder, head and jaw
- Weakened immune system
- Poor or reduced amount of sleep
- Weight gain due to the natural stress hormone, cortisol, which slows metabolism when too much is released

- Mental health problems like reduced enthusiasm, worry and depression

There are daily stressors many of us experience all the time. Maybe you forgot to pay one of your bills or you have a big event coming up. When we have minor stressful situations, our body goes back to its normal state once it's over. When stress is chronic, that means it's ongoing. This could be daily stressors that continue to be a problem and pile on top of each other over time. It can include things like conflicts with family or financial issues.

April is Stress Awareness Month. It's important to figure out and treat the cause of your stress. Doctors can help with remedies like stress management, counseling or reducing anxiety. If you're still having symptoms while you feel your stress is controlled, talk to your doctor then, too. They may want to check for other causes. If you ever have chest pain, especially with shortness of breath, jaw/back/shoulder pain or dizziness, they could be the signs of a heart attack. If you feel this happening to you, get emergency help right away.

Stroke Awareness: Spotting the Signs

When someone has a [stroke](#), it's a serious medical emergency. It requires immediate attention. It happens when blood flow to the brain is blocked or a blood vessel bursts in or on the brain. There are certain factors that can cause a stroke, but it can happen to anyone. Knowing the signs can help you take quick action if you think you or someone you're with is having a stroke.

[Signs to look out for](#) include sudden:

- Numbness or weakness in the face, arm or leg, especially if on one side of the body;
- Confusion, trouble speaking or difficulty understanding speech;
- Trouble seeing from one or both eyes;
- Problems walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination; and
- Severe headache without knowing the cause.

If you experience symptoms like the above, but they go away after a few minutes, you could have had a transient ischemic attack (TIA). This is also known as a "ministroke." TIAs should not be ignored. Paying attention to a TIA could possibly save your life. They are a sign of a more serious condition that won't go away without medical help.

May is American Stroke Awareness Month. It's a good time to make [lifestyle changes](#) that can help prevent a stroke. These include keeping a healthy weight, getting regular exercise, limiting alcohol and quitting smoking. During your Medicaid-covered well visit, ask your doctor about getting your cholesterol checked. If you have high cholesterol, medicine and healthy changes can also help lower the risk of stroke.

Foster Care in South Carolina

As of April 2026, there are about [3,393 children](#) in South Carolina who are in foster care. Their ages range from newborn to 17 years old. The age cap for some may be extended to 21 by the South Carolina Department of Social Services (DSS). A child enters foster care because they cannot safely remain in their home.



Some are facing social, emotional and behavioral struggles. Some have physical difficulties because of abuse or neglect.

When a child is in the legal custody of DSS, they're placed with a foster home or group care facility. They are placed somewhere that can best meet their needs. During this time, DSS works with the child's parents to resolve their problems. If going back to their biological family isn't possible, adoption is sought.

A child in foster care may receive Healthy Connections Medicaid coverage until age 18 if they stay in foster care. If someone ages out of foster care, they may still be eligible for Medicaid. Former foster care coverage continues until they reach age 26. This is a full-benefit type of Medicaid with no income limit.

May is National Foster Care Month. If you would like to become a foster parent or adopt, read [more here](#). If you are a birth parent with a child currently in foster care, you are not alone. Read [this guide](#) from DSS with helpful info about reuniting with your children.

Mental Health Awareness: Breaking the Stigma

Mental health is just as important as physical health. In the United States, one in five adults experiences a mental health crisis each year. Mental health conditions also affect children. About one in six children aged six to 17 years old are diagnosed with a mental health disorder every year. Half of all mental health conditions begin before age 14. Many children and adults do not get the care they need.

Healthy Connections Medicaid offers support for its members. Adults and children can access behavioral health services. These include counseling, therapy and other treatment options. Early support can help children succeed in school and at home. For adults, treatment can improve overall health, relationships and quality of life.

Be aware of warning signs. These may include:

- Changes in mood or behavior;
- Trouble sleeping;
- Withdrawal from friends or family;
- Declining school/work performance; and
- Frequent complaints of headaches or stomach pain.

Early diagnosis and treatment can reduce problems at home, school, work and later in life.

May is Mental Health Awareness Month. Talking about mental health helps break the stigma. [Mental health issues](#) can affect anyone. They are medical conditions, not failures. Not talking about mental health adds to the stigma. It labels the topic taboo. Making mental health part of a normal discussion can help people feel good to seek the help they need.

If you or someone you know is in crisis, the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline can help. Call or text 988. You can also chat at 988lifeline.org.

Visit [FindTreatment.gov](https://www.findtreatment.gov) or [FindSupport.gov](https://www.findsupport.gov) to access more help for mental health or substance use.

The Importance of Prostate Cancer Screening



About one in eight men will be diagnosed with prostate cancer at some point in their lifetime. It is the [second-leading](#) cause of cancer death in American men. The prostate is a gland just below the bladder in men that is part of their reproductive system. It is about the size of a walnut.

This type of cancer may not cause any symptoms at first. When they do happen, symptoms can include:

- Blood in urine;
- Blood in semen;
- Needing to urinate more often;
- Difficulty starting to urinate; and
- Waking up at night more often to urinate.

Other symptoms can happen if prostate cancer spreads. If it spreads, it's called metastatic prostate cancer. These symptoms can include:

- Accidental leaking of urine;
- Back pain;
- Bone pain;
- Difficulty getting an erection;
- Feeling very tired;
- Losing weight without trying; and
- Weakness of the arms or legs.

[Prostate cancer](#) often grows slowly. This means it's more likely for it to be found early. People diagnosed with early prostate cancer normally have more treatment options to consider. June is Men's Health Month. One of the easiest ways to detect prostate cancer early and prioritize your health is by getting a prostate cancer screening. Healthy Connections Medicaid members ages 55-69 are covered for this screening. Starting June 1, the age will expand, lowering it to 50.

The Range of Services for ASD

[Autism spectrum disorder](#) (ASD) is a condition related to brain development. It affects how a person sees and socializes with others. This can cause problems with how the person speaks and gets along in a social setting. Many people with ASD also have limited and repeated patterns of behavior. The word “spectrum” in ASD relates to the wide range of symptoms. Someone with ASD could have mild to severe symptoms, or anywhere in between. Children often show symptoms of ASD in their first year of life.

Healthy Connections Medicaid members are screened for autism as part of a well-child checkup at 18-24 months. They can also be screened by their doctor at any age if there is a concern for ASD. If the screening reveals a concern, they can be referred to a specialist to assess them for autism.

There are a range of services covered for Medicaid members with ASD. Many providers recommend families of kids with ASD seek applied behavior analysis (ABA) for their child. It’s a type of therapy based on the science of learning and behavior. Its purpose is to improve social interactions, communication and adaptive skills. Although ABA is an option, [it is not the only service](#) offered. It is also not required for every child. There are other intervention types which could help your child. This includes licensed occupational and speech therapists and licensed mental health specialists.

April is Autism Awareness Month. If you think your child needs any type of therapy for ASD, use this time to talk with their doctor for a referral. There is no cure for ASD. But getting a child treatment during their preschool years can make a big difference.

Saving Moms Starts Early: Why Women's Health Can't Wait

Many women face challenges before, during and after pregnancy. In South Carolina, about [90% of pregnancy-related deaths](#) can be prevented.

Health experts say many of these deaths are linked to high blood pressure, heart conditions and lack of timely care.

Healthy Connections Medicaid has a key role in improving the health of moms and their babies. Members can get prenatal visits, postpartum care and preventive services at little to no cost.



These services help doctors find risks early and support healthy pregnancies.

Women should see their primary care doctor as soon as they think they may be pregnant. They should also continue regular visits after delivery. Postpartum care is important. Many health issues can occur weeks after giving birth. This is why Healthy Connections Medicaid provides postpartum coverage for new moms for 12 months after the birth of their child.

If you are pregnant or plan to become pregnant, set up a visit with your doctor as soon as possible. For more details on Medicaid benefits, reach out to your health plan. You can also visit scdhhs.gov.

Fitting Exercise into Our Daily Routine

Adults may often find it harder to fit time into the day for physical activity. Our own health may be put to the side to focus on our job, our children or tasks around the house. But there are many ways to be active you can work into your daily life. May is National Physical Fitness and Sports Month. Try adding some [simple forms of exercise](#) into your routine.

Take advantage of walking. This could include:

- Taking the stairs instead of the elevator;
- Going on a walk as a family after dinner;
- Parking farther from the store; and
- Choosing to walk around the neighborhood instead of watching TV.

Move more while you're at home. Try activities like:

- Gardening outside;
- Making home repairs;
- Doing yard work with your kids;
- Cleaning around your house; and
- Washing the car.

Choosing to make the time for more active living can make a big difference. This could look like joining an exercise group, enrolling your child in a sports team or having a dance party with your family. Ask your kids what types of activities they enjoy. Then, try them out together. Adults should get at least [150 minutes](#) per week of moderate aerobic activity or 75 minutes of vigorous activity. Whether you're able to get the full amount or not, remember, some exercise is still better than none.

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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