



Hood County News

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**PREVENTIVE HEALTH:** Many Americans may have postponed preventative health screenings. Schedule an appointment soon to get caught up.

# Six steps to get your health back on track

(STATEPOINT)

Since the start of the pandemic, Americans have been postponing routine care. With more Americans vaccinated against COVID-19, medical experts are urging patients to return to routine health care and get caught up on delayed or foregone preventive health screenings.

“While we know that prevention is the best medicine, the pandemic has caused many Americans to delay important routine health services vital to keeping themselves and their families healthy, particularly critical immunizations and preventive cancer screenings. We urge everyone to get up to date on their routine health care needs,” said Gerald E. Harmon, M.D., president of the American Medical Association (AMA).

According to the AMA, you and your family should take these six steps to get your health back on track:

1. **Get screened:** Estimates based on statistical models show that since April 2020, 3.9 million breast cancer, 3.8 million colorectal cancer and 1.6 million prostate cancer diagnoses may have been missed due to pandemic-related care disruptions. Check in with your health care provider. If you're due

for preventive care, tests or screenings, make an appointment. These measures are designed to keep you healthy and help your doctor spot certain conditions before they become more serious.

2. **Don't wait:** An estimated 41% of adults with one or more chronic health conditions reported delaying or forgoing health care since the pandemic started. Additionally, one in three of those adults reported that doing so worsened one or more of their health conditions or limited their abilities to work or perform other daily activities. Whether you have a chronic health condition or not, don't wait until something is wrong before seeing a doctor. If something does feel off, schedule an appointment with your doctor as soon as possible.

3. **Consider telehealth:** If you're uncomfortable or unable to go in person to your physician's practice, check

on telehealth options, which have greatly increased over the past two years.

4. **Visit your pediatrician:** During the pandemic, pediatric immunizations decreased. As public health measures are rolled back, people gather in groups, and traveling resumes, non-COVID-19 infections that decreased during the pandemic are likely to increase again. Well-child visits and recommended vaccinations are essential to helping ensure children stay healthy and protected from serious diseases. If your child is due for a check-up, schedule one immediately.

5. **Get vaccinated:** Adolescents and adult immunizations also sharply declined during the pandemic and an estimated 26 million recommended vaccinations were missed in 2020 as compared to 2019. Get up to date on vaccinations, including the COVID-19 vaccine. Everyone who's eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine, including booster doses, should get vaccinated as soon as possible to protect themselves and their loved ones. If you have questions, speak with your physician and review trusted resources, including [getvaccineanswers.org](http://getvaccineanswers.org).

6. **Don't neglect mental health:** While mental health

screenings via digital health tools are up, routine care for mental health is down. Approximately 52% of adults with mental health conditions delayed or forewent care since the pandemic began. Given the adverse effects the events of the past two years have had on men-

tal health, such as increasing anxiety, depression and loneliness, it's especially important to prioritize this aspect of your health now.

“We encourage everyone to contact their trusted medical professional to schedule their annual physical and other vital care to help pre-

vent serious health repercussions that could potentially last long past the pandemic,” said Dr. Harmon.

For more resources, visit [ama-assn.org](http://ama-assn.org)

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# Mental healthcare and you - finding the right fit

## (STATEPOINT)

Searching for a mental health provider? You likely have questions.

Recent research from virtual care provider MDLIVE suggests that confusion around finding a mental healthcare provider is common. One in five surveyed said they were concerned about finding a provider match and 70% experience confusion and uncertainty about where to begin. The research also revealed that not everyone knows the difference between the various mental health professionals -- psychiatrists, psychologists, counselors, mental health coaches and others.

"Many people are ready to get depression, anxiety and stress under control by working with a mental health professional, but get bogged down right from the start. Confusion about selecting a professional that best suits their needs causes a lot of people to give up. That's something we want to change," said Dr. Shakira Espada-Campos, who brings more than two decades of direct practice experience to her role as behavioral health medical director at MDLIVE.

To help in your search, MDLIVE is answering some frequently asked questions: When is it time to see a

therapist?

Mental healthcare is self-care that most everyone can benefit from. However, if your emotional state is interfering with your daily life, it's definitely time to take action. Beyond the common signs of mental illness, such as sadness, drug and alcohol misuse, trouble sleeping and mood swings, Dr. Espada-Campos notes that there are some often overlooked signals that could indicate it's time to seek treatment. These include withdrawing from loved ones, feeling fatigued, having a lack of motivation and frequently "zoning out." She also notes

that life events such as relationship break-ups, job loss or the loss of a loved one can often trigger the need for professional mental health support.

What's the difference between therapists and psychiatrists?

Psychiatrists and therapists can treat the same things, however, psychiatrists are medical doctors who can diagnose psychiatric conditions and prescribe medication, while therapists are licensed providers who can evaluate and support people with emotional or behavioral health concerns through talk therapy.

What should one look for in a provider?

Mental healthcare is highly personal and it's essential that your provider is someone you can open up to, make progress with and not feel judged by.

A good place to start is by working with a provider who has experience treating patients like you.

Understand that you may not find the right therapist on your first try. Dr. Espada-Campos encourages individuals to both trust their feelings in this regard and to take an active role in their sessions by asking questions

like, "What can I do to help my treatment?" and "How can we work together to achieve my goals?"

Does insurance cover therapy?

In recent years, many health plans and employers have acknowledged the importance of mental healthcare and have expanded the resources available to their members and employees. Check coverage details online or through the plan's call center. Alternatively, you may wish to seek counseling through an Employee Assistance Program. EAP counselors can help with a variety

of mental health concerns, however, members are typically restricted to a set number of sessions. If you're suffering from a recurring mental health issue, check what options are available through your health plan.

Can therapists be seen remotely?

Virtual care, an increasingly popular option, can provide private, convenient, quality care quickly, and is often offered by health plans. For example, MDLIVE's platform makes it easy to search for a provider that meets your needs and to schedule an appointment

with one of their psychiatrists or licensed therapists. MDLIVE is a covered benefit for more than 60 million Americans through health insurers such as Cigna, Aetna, certain Blue Cross Blue Shield plans, and many regional and local plans. To learn more or to register, visit [www.mdlive.com](http://www.mdlive.com).

Finding a mental healthcare provider can feel overwhelming. However, identifying what you want out of care and understanding the different treatments available can help demystify the process.



**TALK THERAPY:** One of the many pathways to receiving mental healthcare is through telehealth with a provider. Both psychiatrists and therapists are now using this means to connect with patients.

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## What is HIPAA and the Privacy Rule?

There is a federal law called the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) that sets rules for health care providers and health plans about who can look at and receive your health information, including those closest to you - your family members and friends. The HIPAA Privacy Rule ensures that you have rights over your health information, including the right to get your information, make sure it's correct, and know who has seen it.

HIPAA requires most doctors, nurses, hospitals, nursing homes and other health care providers to protect the privacy of your health information. However, if you don't object, a health care provider or health plan may share relevant informa-

tion with family members or friends involved in your healthcare or payment for your health care in certain circumstances.

Under HIPAA, your healthcare provider may share your information face-to-face, over the phone or in

writing. A healthcare provider or health plan may share relevant information if:

You give your provider or plan permission to share the information.

You are present and do not object to sharing the information.

You are not present, and the provider determines based on professional judgment that it's in your best interest.

Examples:

An emergency room doctor may discuss your treatment in front of your friend when you ask your friend to come into the treatment room.

Your hospital may discuss your bill with your daughter who is with you and has a question about the charges,

if you do not object.

Your doctor may discuss the drugs you need to take with your health aide who has come with you to your appointment.

Your nurse may not discuss your condition with your brother if you tell her not to.

HIPAA also allows health care providers to give prescription drugs, medical supplies, x-rays and other health care items to a family member, friend, or other person you send to pick them up.

A healthcare provider or health plan may also share relevant information if you are not around or cannot give permission when a

healthcare provider or plan representative believes, based on professional judgment, that sharing the information is in your best interest.

Examples:

You had emergency surgery and are still unconscious. Your surgeon may tell your spouse about your condition, either in person or by phone, while you are unconscious.

Your doctor may discuss your drugs with your caregiver who calls your doctor with a question about the

right dosage.

A doctor may not tell your friend about a past medical problem that is unrelated to your current condition.

For more information about sharing your health information with family members and friends, or more information about HIPAA, visit [www.hhs.gov/ocr/privacy/hipaa/understanding/index.html](http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/privacy/hipaa/understanding/index.html).

Source: Department of Health and Human Services, [hhs.gov](http://hhs.gov)

## Coping with stress during the pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a major effect on our lives. Many of us are facing challenges that can be stressful and overwhelming. Learning to cope with stress in a healthy way will help you, the people you care about and those around you become more resilient.

Stress can cause the following:

- Feelings of fear, anger, sadness, worry, numbness, or frustration
- Changes in appetite, energy, desires, and interests
- Difficulty concentrating and making decisions
- Nightmares or problems sleeping
- Physical reactions, such as headaches, body pains, stomach problems, or skin rashes
- Worsening of chronic health problems and mental health conditions
- Increased use of alcohol, illegal drugs (like heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine), and misuse of prescription drugs (like opioids)

### HEALTHY WAYS TO COPE

It's natural to feel stress, anxiety, grief and worry during the COVID-19 pandemic. Below are ways that you can help yourself, others and

your community manage stress.

Take breaks from news stories, including those on social media. It's good to be informed, but constant information about the pandemic can be upsetting. Consider limiting news to just a couple times a day and disconnecting from phone, TV, and computer screens for a while.

Take care of your body. Get vaccinated and stay up to date on your COVID-19 vaccines.

Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables, lean protein, whole grains, and fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products. Eating well also means limiting saturated fats, cholesterol, salt, and added sugars.

Going to bed at the same time each night and getting up at the same time each morning, including on the weekends, can help you



**EFFECTIVE COPING:** Finding healthy ways to cope with stress is the best bet for making it through the pandemic.

COURTESY PHOTO

sleep better (seven or more hours per night for adults).

Move more and sit less. Every little bit of physical activity helps. You can start small and build up to 150 minutes a week that can be broken down to smaller amounts such as 20 to 30 minutes a day.

Take deep breaths, stretch, or meditate. Make time to

unwind. Try to do some other activities you enjoy.

Limit alcohol intake. Choose not to drink, or drink in moderation by limiting consumption to one drink a day for women — two for men — on days that alcohol is consumed.

Avoid using prescription drugs in ways other than prescribed, someone else's

prescription, or illegal drugs. Treatment is available and recovery starts with asking for help.

Avoid smoking and the use of other tobacco products. People can and do quit smoking for good.

Continue with regular health appointments, testing and screening.

Connect with others. Talk

with people you trust about your concerns and how you are feeling. Connect with your community or faith-based organizations. If social distancing measures are in place, try connecting online, through social media, or by phone or mail.

Source: [CDC.gov](http://CDC.gov)

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**IF MOMMA AIN'T HAPPY:** A majority of moms feel the burden of managing busy families but few seek support to alleviate the stress.

# Moms' health crisis: what you need to know

## (STATEPOINT)

**A** new survey reveals that the mental health of American moms is going largely unattended, with many living under a near-constant state of stress and few seeking support to ease the burden.

The research, commissioned by MDLIVE, an Evernorth company and leading provider of virtual care services in the United States, finds that 33% of mothers feel stressed or overwhelmed by their responsibilities as a mom at least five days a week. Drivers of their stress and anxiety may include financial concerns, ripple effects of the pandemic, including the mental health crisis among teens, work responsibilities and being a caregiver simultaneously to both children and aging parents.

Yet, for many moms, the prospect of managing their mental health has become a source of stress in and of itself. For 37% of moms, concerns about their own mental health are among their biggest stressors, second only to finances (40%).

Possibly even more concerning is that 70% of moms admit to holding back their feelings and not telling their partner or family when they're stressed, and 61% feel that they have no one to turn to or confide in for help.

"Our research shows that many moms are suffering

in silence and not getting the support they need," says Dr. Shakira Espada-Campos, who brings more than two decades of direct practice experience to her role as behavioral health medical director at MDLIVE. "I cannot stress enough how important it is for them to prioritize their own well-being."

To help moms manage their mental health, MDLIVE offers the following tips:

### PRIORITIZE SELF-CARE

Recognize that practicing self-care is not selfish. In addition to things like eating well, exercising, practicing good hygiene, getting enough sleep, and seeing a health care professional routinely for preventive screenings and other care, self-care also means taking time to pursue hobbies or personal interests that bring

you pleasure or fulfillment or offer you a way to relax and unwind – activities you may have abandoned after having kids because it would mean time away from family responsibilities.

Practicing self-care puts one in a better position to help care for others because your own well-being is in check.

### MAKE TIME TO CULTIVATE RELATIONSHIPS

Connecting with people who are important to you is essential to mental health. Make it a priority to spend time with partners, family, friends, colleagues, or anyone else who may be important to you, away from the house and kids, even if it's just for a short period of time.

### MANAGE STRESS AND ANXIETY

Seek help when struggling to manage stress and anxiety: If your emotional state is interfering with your daily life – if you're having difficulty controlling your mood, withdrawing from loved ones, feeling fatigued, having trouble sleeping, lacking motivation, or frequently "zoning out" – it's definitely time to seek professional help.

Acknowledging the importance of mental healthcare, many health plans and employers have expanded the resources available to their members and employers in recent years. New options include digital tools that can help with tracking mood, support meditation, help build life skills, and provide self-care advice.

Additionally, telehealth

visits with behavioral health professionals offer private, convenient, quality care quickly. For example, MDLIVE's platform makes it easy to search for providers and schedule appointments with one of their psychiatrists or licensed therapists. MDLIVE is a covered benefit for more than 60 million Americans through health insurers such as Cigna, Aetna, certain Blue Cross Blue Shield plans, and many regional and local plans.

"Although it's natural to feel like you need to be a superhero, it takes a toll. You should never feel like you're alone in your mental health journey or that you need to suffer in silence," said Dr. Espada-Campos.

To learn more or to register, visit [www.mdlive.com](http://www.mdlive.com)

## Urinary incontinence can happen to women at any age

BY DONALD HOWSER, MD, OB/GYN, AND MICHELLE STEGENGA, DO, OB/GYN

**I**ncontinence may be an embarrassing topic for many women, but with an estimated 78 million impacted by this condition, it should be a topic of discussion with your healthcare provider.

It is thought that pregnancy, childbirth and menopause are life events that impact urinary incontinence, yet it is not considered a normal part of aging and can be treated.

Pressure caused by laughing, sneezing and exercising can cause urine leakage. Nerve issues in the bladder and urethra can also play a role in incontinence.

The two most common types of urinary incontinence in women include:

**Stress incontinence** – this can happen when weak pelvic floor muscles put pressure on the bladder and urethra by making them work harder.

**Urge incontinence** – often called "overactive bladder," this can happen when urine leakage occurs after a strong, sudden urge to urinate and before you can get to a bathroom.

There are many different treatment options for urinary incontinence, including exercises, medicines, devices and surgery.

For more information or to schedule an appointment with Dr. Howser or Dr. Stegenga, call 817-279-1776 in Granbury or 254-968-1500 in Stephenville.

Online scheduling is also available at [bit.ly/YourOB-GYN](http://bit.ly/YourOB-GYN)

## Straight talk about 'organic' foods

**O**rganic is a labeling term that indicates that the food or other agricultural product has been produced through approved methods. These methods integrate cultural, biological, and mechanical practices that foster cycling of resources, promote ecological balance, and conserve biodiversity. Synthetic fertilizers, sewage sludge, irradiation, and genetic engineering may not be used.

### HOW ARE ORGANIC PRODUCTS OVERSEEN?

The National Organic Program regulates all organic crops, livestock, and agricultural products certified to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) organic standards. USDA also conducts oversight of organic certification, compliance and enforcement activities, and product labeling. In order to sell, label, or represent their products as organic, operations must follow all of the specifications set out by the USDA organic regulations.

### HOW DO I KNOW IF MY FOOD IS ORGANIC?

Look at the label. If you

see the USDA organic seal ( ), the product is certified organic and has 95 percent or more organic content. For multi-ingredient products such as bread or soup, if the label claims that it is made with specified organic ingredients, you can be confident that those specific ingredients have been certified organic.

### WHAT ABOUT OTHER LABELS?

Other voluntary labels for livestock products, e.g. meat and eggs, include:

#### Free-range

This label indicates that the flock was provided shelter in a building, room, or area with unlimited ac-

cess to food, fresh water, and continuous access to the outdoors during their production cycle. The outdoor area may or may not be fenced and/or covered with netting-like material. This label is regulated by the USDA.

#### Cage-free

This label indicates that the flock was able to freely roam a building, room, or enclosed area with unlimited access to food and fresh water during their production cycle.

#### Natural

As required by USDA, meat, poultry, and egg products labeled as "natural" must be minimally processed and contain no artificial ingredients. However, the natural label does not include any standards regarding farm practices and only applies to processing of meat and egg products. There are no standards or regulations for the labeling of natural food products if they do not contain meat or eggs.

#### Grass-fed

Grass-fed animals receive

a majority of their nutrients from grass throughout their life, while organic animals' pasture diet may be supplemented with grain. Also USDA regulated, the grass-fed label does not limit the use of antibiotics, hormones, or pesticides. Meat products may be labeled as grass-fed organic.

#### Pasture-raised

Due to the number of variables involved in pasture-raised agricultural systems, the USDA has not developed a labeling policy for pasture-raised products.

#### Humane

Multiple labeling programs make claims that animals were treated humanely during the production cycle, but the verification of these claims varies widely. These labeling programs are not regulated.

Source: [USDA.gov](http://USDA.gov)

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# Four steps to food safety: clean, separate, cook, chill

**F**ollowing four simple steps at home can help protect you and your loved ones from food poisoning.

**CLEAN**  
Wash your hands and surfaces often.

Germes that cause food poisoning can survive in many places and spread around your kitchen.

Wash your hands for 20 seconds with soap and water before, during, and after preparing food and before eating.

Wash your utensils, cutting boards, and countertops with hot, soapy water after preparing each food item.

Rinse fresh fruits and vegetables under running water.

**SEPARATE**  
Don't cross-contaminate. Raw meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs can spread

germs to ready-to-eat foods—unless you keep them separate.

Use separate cutting boards and plates for raw meat, poultry, and seafood.

When grocery shopping, keep raw meat, poultry, seafood, and their juices away from other foods.

Keep raw meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs separate from all other foods in the refrigerator.

**COOK**  
Food is safely cooked when the internal temperature gets high enough to kill germs that can make you sick. The only way to tell if food is safely cooked is to use a food thermometer. You can't tell if food is safely cooked by checking its color and texture (except for seafood).

Use a food thermometer to ensure foods are cooked to a safe internal temperature. Check this chart for a detailed list of temperatures and foods, including shell-



COURTESY PHOTO

**PREVENT FOOD POISONING: Following these simple guidelines from the CDC will protect the family.**

fish and precooked ham. Whole cuts of beef, veal, lamb, and pork, including fresh ham (raw): 145°F (then allow the meat to rest for three minutes before carving or eating); Fish with fins: 145°F or cook until flesh is opaque; Ground meats, such as beef and pork: 160°F; All poultry, including ground chicken and turkey: 165°F; Leftovers and casseroles:

165°F. Microwave food thoroughly. Know your microwave's wattage. Check inside the door, owner's manual, or manufacturer's website. Lower wattage means longer cooking time. Follow recommended cooking and standing times, to allow for additional cooking after microwaving stops. Letting food sit for a few

minutes after microwaving allows cold spots to absorb heat from hotter areas and cook more completely. When reheating, use a food thermometer to make sure that microwaved food reaches 165°F. **CHILL** Refrigerate promptly. Bacteria can multiply rapidly if left at room temperature

or in the "Danger Zone" between 40°F and 140°F. Never leave perishable food out for more than 2 hours (or 1 hour if exposed to temperatures above 90°F).

Keep your refrigerator at 40°F or below, your freezer at 0°F or below, and know when to throw food out.

Divide warm foods into several clean, shallow containers so they will chill faster.

Refrigerate perishable food within 2 hours. If the food is exposed to temperatures above 90°F (like a hot car or picnic), refrigerate it within 1 hour.

Thaw frozen food safely in the refrigerator, in cold water, or in the microwave. Never thaw foods on the counter because bacteria multiply quickly in the parts of the food that reach room temperature.

Source: CDC.gov

# Make an impact through volunteering and civic engagement

**(STATEPOINT)**  
**I**f you're like many people right now, you're feeling a particular sense of urgency to roll up your sleeves and be a force for good.

"When we face difficult times, as we have during the pandemic and now with the war in Ukraine, we also see the best of humanity and it's natural for people to want to help," says Natalye Paquin, president and CEO of Points of Light, a nonpartisan, global nonprofit organization

that inspires, equips and mobilizes millions of people to take action that changes the world. "During times of uncertainty, one thing we can be certain of is that the most powerful force of change is one person making a positive difference."

That's why Points of Light is leading a joint effort with Phillips 66 and The UPS Foundation to activate individuals, nonprofits and corporate partners to recognize individual action and inspire more people to volunteer in their communities.

"Throughout the pandemic and in recent months, we've seen powerful stories

of everyday citizens rising to the occasion to support their local communities and those abroad," says Paquin.

**GETTING INSPIRED**  
Volunteers can come from all backgrounds, be of all ages and help in countless ways. Let these amazing stories behind Points of Light's Daily Point of Light Award honorees inspire you to action:

■ Seventeen-year-old Henry Morse of New Orleans helps run CultureAid Nola. "We are a no-barrier, no-stigma food distribution center that helps feed over 600 families a week." Morse

arrives at the center every Saturday at 5:30 a.m. and leads volunteers in packing and handing out food to members of his community. "I got involved in March 2020. It grew into something that I am extremely passionate about," says Morse.

■ After a 30-year Navy career, William Hicks now volunteers in the AARP Tax-Aide program. In addition to personally preparing tax returns for senior and low-income individuals pro bono, he serves as training coordinator for the state of Maryland, leading efforts to train and certify tax preparation volunteers.

■ "A small drop in the ocean can make a big difference in the world," says fourth grader Rayansh Boddu, who joined Recycle My Battery as a vice president and recruited more kids to spread the word. He's also actively working on Smart Can, which will use AI technology to sort materials needed for recycling in trash. He's placed over 20 battery bins in different locations and collected more than 25,000 batteries for recycling so far.

**GETTING STARTED**  
Motivation among Americans is high. In a recent Points of Light survey, a



(C) ZORAN ZEREMSKI / ADOBE STOCK

**VOLUNTEERING FOR GOOD: Connecting with people and helping the community is good for the soul as well as the body.**

third of respondents said they plan to volunteer more than they did before the pandemic. But figuring out where and how to make an impact is not always straightforward and online resources can help. Points of Light Engage is the world's largest digital hub for in-person and virtual volunteering and community engagement opportunities.

There are also 177 innovative volunteer-mobilizing organizations in 37 countries that are a part of the Points of Light Global Network. They provide real-time information on pressing community needs. You can find

these by visiting [pointsoflight.org/volunteer](http://pointsoflight.org/volunteer).

The site also offers tips for safely volunteering, along with inspiration for alternative means of getting involved through Points of Light's Civic Circle, such as using your purchasing power, lending your voice to a cause or urging your employer to act.

"We hope you'll take the time to look for volunteer opportunities and to thank a volunteer in your life," says Paquin. "Every action, no matter how small, can have an impact and change a life."

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# Know the basic risks for heart disease

**Y**ou can take steps to lower your risk for heart disease by changing the factors you can control.

Several health conditions, your lifestyle, and your age and family history can increase your risk for heart disease. These are called risk factors. About half of all Americans (47%) have at least one of three key risk factors for heart disease: high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and smoking.

Some risk factors for heart disease cannot be controlled, such as your age or family history. But you can take steps to lower your risk by changing the factors you can control.

## WHAT HEALTH CONDITIONS INCREASE THE RISK?

High blood pressure is a major risk factor for heart disease. It is a medical condition that happens when the pressure of the blood in your arteries and other blood vessels is too high. The high pressure, if not controlled, can affect your heart and other major organs of your body, including your kidneys and brain.

High blood pressure is often called a “silent killer” because it usually has no symptoms. The only way to know whether you have high blood pressure is to measure your blood pressure. You can lower your blood pressure with lifestyle changes or with medicine to reduce your risk for heart disease and heart attack.

Unhealthy cholesterol is a waxy, fat-like substance made by the liver or found in certain foods. Your liver makes enough for your body’s needs, but we often get more cholesterol from the foods we eat.

If we take in more chole-

sterol than the body can use, the extra cholesterol can build up in the walls of the arteries, including those of the heart. This leads to narrowing of the arteries and can decrease the blood flow to the heart, brain, kidneys and other parts of the body.

There are two main types of blood cholesterol: LDL (low-density lipoprotein) cholesterol, which is considered to be “bad” cholesterol because it can cause plaque buildup in your arteries, and HDL (high-density lipoprotein) cholesterol, which is considered to be “good” cholesterol because higher levels provide some protection against heart disease.

High blood cholesterol usually has no signs or symptoms. The only way to know whether you have high cholesterol is to get your cholesterol checked. Your health care team can do a simple blood test, called a “lipid profile,” to measure your cholesterol levels.

Diabetes mellitus is another risk factor. Your body needs glucose (sugar) for energy. Insulin is a hormone



COURTESY PHOTO

**TAKE CONTROL, PROTECT YOUR HEART:** Knowing the risk factors for heart disease will help target areas for improvement.

made in the pancreas that helps move glucose from the food you eat to your body’s cells for energy. If you have diabetes, your body doesn’t make enough insulin, can’t use its own insulin as well as it should, or both.

Diabetes causes sugar to build up in the blood. The risk of death from heart disease for adults with diabetes is higher than for adults who do not have diabetes. Talk with your doctor about ways to prevent or manage diabetes and control other risk factors.

Obesity, excess body fat, is a risk factor. Obesity is linked to higher “bad” cholesterol and triglyceride levels and to lower “good” cholesterol levels. Obesity can lead to high blood pressure and diabetes as well as heart disease. Talk with your health care team about a plan to reduce your weight to a healthy level.

## WHAT BEHAVIORS INCREASE THE RISK?

Your lifestyle can increase your risk for heart disease.

Eating a diet high in saturated fats, trans fat, and cholesterol has been linked to heart disease and related conditions, such as atherosclerosis. Also, too much salt (sodium) in the diet can raise blood pressure.

Not getting enough physical activity can lead to heart disease. It can also increase the chances of having other medical conditions that are risk factors, including obesity, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and diabetes. Regular physical activity can lower your risk for heart disease.

Drinking too much alcohol can raise blood pressure levels and the risk for heart disease. It also increases levels of triglycerides, a fatty substance in the blood which can increase the risk for heart disease. Women should have no more than 1 drink a day. Men should have

no more than 2 drinks a day.

Tobacco use increases the risk for heart disease and heart attack. Cigarette smoking can damage the heart and blood vessels, which increases your risk for heart conditions such as atherosclerosis and heart attack. Nicotine raises blood pressure. Carbon monoxide from cigarette smoke reduces the amount of oxygen that your blood can carry.

Exposure to secondhand smoke can also increase the risk for heart disease, even for nonsmokers.

## GENETICS AND FAMILY HISTORY

Genetic factors likely play some role in high blood pressure, heart disease and other related conditions. However, it is also likely that people with a family history of heart disease share common environments and other factors that may increase their risk.

The risk for heart disease can increase even more when heredity combines with

unhealthy lifestyle choices, such as smoking cigarettes and eating an unhealthy diet.

## OTHER RISK FACTORS

Are ethnicity, age or sex risk factors? Heart disease is the number one killer of both men and women. Heart disease can happen at any age, but the risk goes up as you age.

Heart disease and stroke can affect anyone, but some groups are more likely to have conditions that increase their risk for cardiovascular disease.


Heart disease is the leading cause of death for people of most racial and ethnic groups in the United States, including Black people, American Indians and Alaska Natives, and white people. For Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and Hispanics, heart disease is second only to cancer.

Source: CDC.gov

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