

Health Matters

FALL 2025

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HIGHMARK  
Because Life.™

Protect your heart from high blood pressure



When temperatures drop, blood pressure can rise. Your medication helps keep you on track.

With colder air and more time indoors, it's essential to prioritize your health. **One simple habit can make a big difference: taking your blood pressure medication as prescribed.** This daily step helps protect your heart, supports healthy breathing, and keeps you feeling your best throughout the winter months.

How cold weather affects the heart

Cold weather can have a significant impact on your heart health. When temperatures begin to fall, blood vessels naturally narrow to preserve heat. This increases the force needed to move blood through the body, which can raise blood pressure. According to the American Heart Association, winter months are linked to an uptick in blood pressure levels.¹

Key facts about blood pressure:

- Blood pressure measures the force of blood pressing against vessel walls.
- High blood pressure, or hypertension, often has no noticeable symptoms.
- Left unmanaged, it can strain the heart and raise the risk of heart attack or stroke.

Taking prescribed blood pressure medications is one of the most effective ways to manage this risk — especially during winter.

Risk factors to keep in mind

Several factors can raise your risk for high blood pressure, including:

- A family history of high blood pressure.
- Being over the age of 50.
- Diabetes or chronic kidney disease.
- Race and gender risk factors.

Lifestyle changes for healthier blood pressure

While blood pressure medications are key, pairing them with positive changes to your daily routine can help you keep your numbers steady, and help you feel more balanced overall.

They include:

- Eating a heart-healthy diet.
- Getting regular physical activity.
- Managing stress.
- Reducing or avoiding alcohol and tobacco.

Why healthy lungs matter for a healthy heart

Maintaining good respiratory health plays an important role in managing blood pressure. Low oxygen levels from poor lung function can strain the heart. Indoors, triggers like dry air and dust may affect breathing, while cold air outside can irritate airways — especially for those with asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

Here's how to stay ahead of it:

- **Take all medications,** including inhalers, as prescribed.
- **Keep indoor air clean** and well ventilated.
- **Layer up outdoors** to help warm the air before it hits your lungs.
- **Check in with your care team** if your symptoms change.

Keep moving to support your heart and lungs

Movement is one of the best ways to lift your mood, support your heart, and strengthen your respiratory muscles during the colder months. Even when it's chilly outside, there are plenty of enjoyable ways to stay active indoors, including:

- Walking at malls, recreation centers, or around your home.
- Trying an online workout, gentle yoga, or a dance session.
- Enjoying light stretching, resistance bands, or bodyweight exercises at your own pace.

Remember, winter wellness begins with your medication routine

By taking your medications as prescribed, including blood pressure medications, you're supporting your heart, protecting your respiratory health, and giving your body the care it needs to thrive all season long.

¹ Sourced from www.heart.org



Simple steps for safer living¹

A fall risk checklist for older adults and caregivers

Your independence matters. When you protect yourself from falls, you can stay active and keep doing the things you love, confidently, and on your own terms. The good news is, many falls can be prevented.

A quick conversation can help you feel more in control

Talking with your doctor, or a loved one's doctor, is one of the most important steps you can take to understand fall risk. Whether you're caring for yourself or a loved one, this conversation can help uncover potential concerns and identify practical solutions.

Here's a checklist of questions to ask your doctor at your next appointment:

Ask the doctor:

- ☐ **Do any medications cause dizziness or drowsiness?** Some medications can increase your risk of falling, so it's important to review them with your doctor.
- ☐ **How often should eye exams be scheduled?** Changes in vision can affect depth perception, balance, and your ability to safely navigate your surroundings.
- ☐ **Are there medical conditions that raise fall risk?** Certain medical conditions, like low blood pressure or arthritis, can affect your balance or movement.
- ☐ **What exercises or physical therapy programs can improve balance?** Building strength, balance, and flexibility can help reduce your chances of falling.
- ☐ **What equipment would help prevent a fall?** Supportive equipment may make daily activities safer and reduce your fall risk.

- ☐ **Is there a test that can evaluate fall risk?** Your doctor can perform simple tests to assess how likely you are to fall.

Caregivers can also bring this checklist when accompanying a loved one to a visit. It's a great way to advocate for their safety and support.



Check the home for hazards

Many fall risks are right at home – but thankfully, so are many of the solutions.

Keep an eye out for these common hazards:

- Loose rugs or mats that can slip
- Cords or clutter in walkways
- Dim lighting, especially near stairs
- Lack of handrails or grab bars
- Unstable furniture or uneven steps

Doing a home safety walk-through is a great way to prevent future falls and start an open conversation about safety.

Prevent falls, protect your independence

Falls can do more than cause injury – they can take you away from the things you love. Whether it's spending time with family or pursuing your hobbies, taking steps to prevent falls can help you stay active, independent, and in control of your life.

Consider the facts:

- **Stay connected** – 1 in 4 adults aged 65 and older falls each year, but many don't mention it to their doctor.
- **Maintain your strength and balance** – Just one fall doubles the risk of falling again.
- **Avoid a hospital visit** – Every year in the U.S.:
 - **3 million** emergency room visits are related to falls.
 - **1 million** older adults are hospitalized due to falls.
 - **Nearly 319,000** people are hospitalized for hip fractures.
- **Protect your brain** – Falls are the leading cause of traumatic brain injuries (TBIs).

Check out important notices online.

Highmark Wholecare cares about the health and well-being of our members. We have guidelines in place to make sure you receive the quality care and service you deserve.

Go to **HHO.fyl/Newsletters** to view these and other important topics:

- Members' rights and responsibilities
- Medical necessity
- Doctor appointment guidelines
- Second opinions
- Protecting your privacy

You can also ask for a printed copy of the Important Member Notices by calling **1-855-401-8251** (TTY: 711).

Make the most of your benefits this year

Preventive care is covered, and it's an important part of staying healthy

Your Highmark Health Options Duals plan includes a variety of preventive tests and screenings designed to help you catch potential health issues early, often before you notice symptoms. Early detection can lead to more effective treatment and better health outcomes.

Now's the perfect time to schedule your:



Annual Wellness Visit – A chance to talk to your primary care provider (PCP) about your overall health, review your medications, and receive guidance tailored to you.



Breast cancer screening – An important screening for women over 50 or those at higher risk.



Colorectal cancer screening – A key part of staying on top of your health, recommended for adults 45 and older. A colonoscopy is the preferred method, but convenient at-home screening options are also available. Talk to your provider to determine the best choice for you.



Diabetes screening – If you have diabetes, regular monitoring is essential. This includes a diabetic retinal eye exam to check for eye damage, a blood sugar check to manage your glucose levels, and kidney monitoring to detect any potential problems early.

Get to know your benefits

Remember, preventive care isn't just about screenings and checkups. It's about knowing your options, making informed choices, and getting extra support when you need it. That's why understanding your benefits, and how to use them, is so important.

Before you make any decisions about your care or services, it's a good idea to review your Evidence of Coverage (EOC). It gives you a clear picture of which services are included and what they might cost.



Benefit Spotlight: Ivira Care Compass Programs

Sometimes, staying on top of your health takes more than just a doctor's visit. That's where Care Compass from Ivira Health comes in. These programs are designed to fill the gaps, supporting you between appointments and helping you manage your day-to-day health.

You'll get personalized help from caring clinical professionals who can assist with:

- Remote monitoring to check in from afar.
- Medication counseling to help you understand your medications.
- Chronic condition management for ongoing support.
- Healthy eating and fitness advice.
- Pharmacy services.
- Help scheduling doctor appointments.

Programs available through Care Compass

Care Compass offers several different programs to support your individual health needs, including:

- **Medication Management** – Connect with a pharmacist each month to discuss your medication, get help with refills, and talk through any questions or concerns.
- **Asthma Management** – Get a three-month supply of your inhaler delivered directly to your door, at no additional cost. You'll also receive monthly pharmacist check-ins and ongoing guidance from a care team that can help with everything from scheduling appointments to managing your lifestyle.
- **Cholesterol Support and Statin Adherence** – You'll have monthly pharmacist consultations plus access to a health coach and dietitian for expert advice on how to stay on track with your medications and heart health.
- **Post-Hospital Recovery Support** – If you've recently stayed in the hospital or a behavioral health facility, Care Compass offers dedicated follow-up support to make the transition home easier. The team will help with provider communication, patient education, and managing your condition so you feel supported at every step.

If you're interested in enrolling in Care Compass, you can call Ivira directly at **302-660-8847** or **302-274-0020**. You can also ask your Care Coordinator or Case Manager for a referral.

Say yes to more support

Some benefits — like transportation to appointments, **Healthy Rewards**, or wellness programs — may require you to opt in. These optional services are designed to add even more value to your plan. If you want to opt in or learn more, just give our Member Services team a call. We want to help you make the most of everything your plan has to offer.

Prefer not to participate? That's OK, too.

Your health care should always be your choice. If there's a service or program you don't need or wish not to use, you have the option to opt out. Call us at **1-844-325-6251** or **1-855-401-8251** to update your preferences or stop receiving certain communications.

Why the flu shot is a smart health move

Discover the proven benefits of this yearly vaccine



There's a lot of helpful information about the flu shot, and understanding it can empower you to make the best choice for your health. Getting a flu shot is a simple way to stay well and keep enjoying the people and activities you love. Let's look at a few facts that can help you move forward with confidence.

The truth about flu shots

Understanding the flu shot starts with the facts. Here are a few to keep in mind.

- **Myth:** You can get the flu from the flu shot.
Fact: The flu shot won't make you sick. The injectable vaccine uses an inactivated (dead) version of the virus, which means it can't cause the flu — but it can help your body build strong protection against it.
- **Myth:** If I'm healthy, I don't need it.
Fact: As we age, our immune systems naturally weaken. This makes us more susceptible to the flu and its complications, even if we feel healthy. Vaccination helps boost your immune response and plays a key role in keeping you protected.

- **Myth:** The flu is just a bad cold.
Fact: The flu tends to be far more intense than a cold and can lead to serious illnesses requiring hospitalization, such as pneumonia, sepsis (a life-threatening response to infection), and worsening of chronic conditions like asthma and heart failure.
- **Myth:** It's too late to get the flu shot once flu season starts.
Fact: The flu can circulate well into spring. Even if you get the flu later in the season, it can still cause serious complications. Vaccination can help you avoid getting sick or reduce the severity of your symptoms.

Protect your health, enjoy what you love

Whether it's family dinner, community events, or catching up with friends, staying well helps you keep those meaningful moments on your calendar. A flu shot offers added protection to help you stay well all season long, especially if you're 65 or older.

Why it matters:

- The flu can lead to complications that impact your day-to-day life.
- Recovery can take weeks, and often means missing out on special events.
- Prevention helps you stay social, independent, and feeling your best.

Remember, flu shots are covered under Highmark Health Options Duals plans. Schedule yours with your doctor or stop by a local retail pharmacy. It's a smart step toward staying healthy.

All information in this article is sourced from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Seasonal Flu Vaccine Basics.

cdc.gov/flu/vaccines

Brain Game — Heart Smarts

Take a quick break with this heart health word scramble. Each word ties into our feature article, [Protect your heart from high blood pressure](#).

RHEAT _____

OLBOD RSPSEURE _____

CMEADITONS _____

MVEMETON _____

DOOLB SSEVLES _____



Mark your calendar

November

COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease) Awareness Month Talk to your doctor about your inhalers, vaccines, and ways to manage symptoms. A few simple check-ins can help you breathe easier.

World Diabetes Day (November 14) Make sure to complete your A1C test, retinal eye exam, and kidney screening. It's also a good idea to talk with your doctor about your medications.

December

Crohn's and Colitis Awareness Week (December 1 – 7) Check in with your doctor about symptoms like fatigue, cramping, or changes in digestion to stay ahead of flares — and feel better day to day.



And don't forget, the deadline to enroll in and complete all rewardable activities from your **Personalized Wellness Plan** is **December 31, 2025**. Once you do, you'll earn a Healthy Reward.

Answer Key 1. Heart 2. Blood pressure 3. Medications 4. Movement 5. Blood vessels

Manage diabetes during the holidays

Tips to navigate the season with confidence

The holidays are a time for joy, connection, and delicious food. If you're managing diabetes, you might be wondering how to navigate the festivities while staying healthy. With a little planning, it's possible to enjoy every moment — festivities, food, and all — while keeping your blood sugar in check.

How to handle holiday stress

The holidays can be joyful — and a little hectic. Managing stress helps you feel your best and keeps your blood sugar steady. Here are a few tips to keep in mind:

- **Take short breaks** – Even a 5-minute walk or a few deep breaths can help reset your mood.
- **Stick to a routine when you can** – Regular meals, sleep, and activity go a long way in keeping stress (and blood sugar) in check.
- **Make time for things you enjoy** – Whether it's listening to music or calling a friend, make some time for you.
- **Say no when you need to** – It's OK to set boundaries to protect your energy and health.

Holiday nutrition tips

It's possible to enjoy your favorite holiday foods with just a few mindful swaps and choices:

- **Plan ahead** – Have a light, healthy snack — like a handful of nuts or some fresh berries — before a big gathering to avoid sudden drops in blood sugar or overeating.
- **Watch your portions** – Use smaller plates and limit desserts.
- **Fill up on fiber** – Make vegetables the star of your plate, especially low-carb options like leafy greens, broccoli, or roasted Brussels sprouts.
- **Take a dish** – If asked to bring something, bring a low-carbohydrate dish that supports healthy eating.
- **Avoid sugary drinks** – Water, sparkling water, or unsweetened beverages are great alternatives to soda, juice, and holiday cocktails.

Your health is the best gift

You don't have to choose between enjoying the season and taking care of your health. You can do both, with a little mindfulness. Talk to your doctor, or see if nutritional support may be right for you.

How to use antibiotics effectively



Highmark Health Options Duals is committed to providing the highest quality of care and experience for our members. Here are some facts about antibiotic overuse to help you talk with your doctor to make the best decisions for you and your family.

When antibiotics are not needed

- Antibiotics do not work against viruses (such as COVID-19, the flu, or the common cold).
- Antibiotics are not needed for many sinus and ear infections, which often get better on their own.
- Unnecessary antibiotic use can lead to antibiotic resistance, making it difficult to treat infection and causing more side effects.

Common side effects of antibiotic use

- Rash
- Dizziness
- Nausea and abdominal pain
- Diarrhea
- Yeast infection

Serious side effects

- *Clostridioides difficile* (C. diff), which causes severe diarrhea that can lead to organ damage and even death.
- Severe and life-threatening allergic reactions, such as wheezing, hives, shortness of breath, and anaphylaxis (which also includes feeling like your throat is closing or choking, or your voice is changing).

What can you do to feel better?

- Do **NOT** call and ask your provider for an antibiotic prescription. If you are sick, your doctor will examine you and determine if you have an infection that should be treated with antibiotics.
- **DO** call and ask your provider about ways to relieve symptoms caused by a virus.
- **If your doctor prescribes antibiotics**, take them exactly as prescribed.
- **Talk with a health care professional** immediately if you develop any side effects.

Do your best to stay healthy and keep others healthy

- Wash hands with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer that is at least 60% alcohol.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough and sneeze.
- Stay home when sick.
- Be fully vaccinated, including against flu and COVID-19.



Important phone numbers

Member Services

1-855-401-8251 (TTY: 711)

Seven days a week,
Oct. 1 – March 31, 8 a.m. – 8 p.m.,
Monday – Friday
April 1 – Sept. 30, 8 a.m. – 8 p.m.

24-Hour Nurse Line

1-855-805-9420 (TTY: 711)

24 hours a day, 365 days a year

Care Coordination

1-844-325-6251 (TTY: 711)

Monday – Friday, 8 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Fraud, Waste, and Abuse Hotline

1-844-325-6256 (TTY: 711)

Healthy Rewards

1-866-469-7973 (TTY: 711)

Monday – Friday, 8 a.m. – 8 p.m.

My Healthy Flex Benefits

1-833-623-2619 (TTY: 711)

Monday – Friday, 8 a.m. – 8 p.m.

Fitness Benefit

888-423-4632 (TTY: 711)

Monday – Friday, 8 a.m. – 8 p.m.

Transportation Benefit

1-855-401-8251 (TTY: 711)

and select prompt #5

Monday – Friday, 8 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Saturday, 9 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Delaware Quitline

Stop smoking, using tobacco,
or vaping

1-866-409-1858 (TTY: 711)

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline

Call or text 988 or
1-800-273-8255 (TTY: 711)

National Helpline

Treatment referral and
information, 24/7
1-800-662-4357 (TTY: 711)

Report Suspected Abuse of an Older Adult

1-888-277-4302
(1-888-APS-4302) (TTY: 711)

Delaware Prescription Assistance Program

1-844-245-9580
Monday – Friday,
8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.



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All references to “Highmark” in this document are references to the Highmark company that is providing the member’s health benefits or health benefit administration and/or to one or more of its affiliated Blue companies.

We have free interpreter services to answer any questions you may have about our health or drug plan. To get an interpreter, just call us at 1-855-401-8251 (TTY: 711). Someone who speaks English can help you.

This is a free service.

Tenemos servicios gratis de interpretación para responder cualquier pregunta que pueda tener sobre nuestro plan médico o de medicamentos. Para obtener un intérprete, simplemente llámenos al número que figura en la parte de atrás de su tarjeta de ID (TTY: 711). Alguien que hable español puede ayudarlo. Este servicio es gratis.

我们免费提供口译服务，为您解答有关我们健康计划或药物计划的任何疑问。如需口译服务，只需拨打您 ID 卡背面的电话号码（TTY: 711）与我们联系即可。说中文的工作人员可为您提供帮助。此项服务免费。