



February is Heart Health Month

Not only do we have hearts on our minds in February because of Valentine's Day, but February is also American Heart Month. Heart disease is the leading cause of death for both men and women in the United States. The good news is that although genetics and family history can play a role in developing heart disease, you possess the ability to make heart-healthy lifestyle choices that can reduce your risk.

The Archdiocese of Boston Lay Benefits Department offers tips for a more heart-healthy lifestyle. Although diet and exercise are the most obvious ways to maximize heart health, you can also try to improve your heart health in these non-conventional ways:

1. Laughter – Laughing dilates blood vessels by about 22%, which reduces blood pressure and increases blood flow.
2. Chocolate – Most dark chocolate contains high amounts of flavonoids, which are associated with lower risk of heart disease. One study published in the Journal of the American Heart Association found that the combination of raw almonds, dark chocolate, and cocoa significantly reduced LDL (low-density lipoproteins).
3. Wine – Red wine contains antioxidants. Some studies suggest that resveratrol, an antioxidant found in red wine, can reduce cholesterol and lower blood pressure.
4. Get enough sleep – Not getting enough sleep (under six hours) may increase your risk of heart disease.
5. Coffee – Some research suggests that drinking coffee, a source of antioxidants, in moderation is linked to a lower risk of heart failure, stroke, and coronary heart disease. Thanks to caffeine, drinking coffee also gives you energy and may help you lose weight.

Consider these more conventional tips to maximize your heart health:

1. Check your blood pressure – Because high blood pressure may not display any symptoms, a blood pressure test is the only means to determine whether your blood pressure is high.
2. Check your cholesterol – If you are over age 20 without heart disease, you should check your levels every four to six years. You should check your levels more often if you are at risk of heart disease or are already on medication to treat high cholesterol.
3. Engage in physical activity on a regular basis – If possible, aim for 30 minutes of heart-pumping physical activity at least five days a week.
4. Eat heart healthy foods:
 - Eat more plant-based foods.
 - Eat fish and lean meats.
 - Consume low-fat dairy.

- Incorporate plenty of fiber in your diet. Great sources of fiber include fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and beans. Most adults need 20-30 grams a day.
 - Avoid fried foods.
 - Limit or avoid sugary foods and drinks.
 - Reduce consumption of red meat.
 - Avoid saturated and trans fats. Try to use healthy oils, such as olive or canola.
 - Monitor your sodium intake and aim to limit yourself to 2,300 milligrams or less per day (approximately one teaspoon).
 - Avoid processed and canned foods.
5. Maintain a healthy weight – Your Body Mass Index (BMI), a numerical value of your weight in relation to height, is a good indicator of body fat and whether your weight is healthy or not. To determine BMI, multiply your weight in pounds by 703, divide by your height in inches, and divide again by the same number (height in inches).

BMI Guidelines

Underweight: Less than 18.5

Healthy weight: Less than 25

Overweight: Between 25 and 29.9

Obese: 30 or more

6. Manage stress.
7. Quit smoking.
8. Drink alcohol in moderation.

Spiritual Reflection

February is the month in which we celebrate Valentine's Day, which is a secular celebration of romantic love. Although it might be a special day for couples in happy, healthy relationships, we know that is not always the reality. Some people may be single, either due to a broken relationship, the loss of a loved one, or simply because they haven't found that special someone. A day focused on romantic love can only enhance feelings of loneliness. The best antidote for such feelings is to remember that, no matter what, we are loved by the God who created us. If you are ever feeling alone and isolated, whether on Valentine's Day or some other time, try saying a quick prayer and ask God to make His love known to you. If you do that, those feelings of loneliness might just dissipate a little, and you can find peace from knowing that you are never alone and you are loved.

Wellness Webinars

Employees and spouses enrolled in one of the RCAB Health Plans and registered in the Blue Cross *ahealthyme* portal will earn \$20 into their Health Equity HRA accounts for attending a wellness webinar. Points are awarded for a maximum of five wellness webinars/family activities per Plan Year.

Disease Prevention Webinar- Solutions for Heart Health

Thursday, February 4 at 12:00

[Click Here to Register](#)

Participants learn how to improve heart health through good nutrition. Find out the best oils to use for optimal health, clear up confusion surrounding farmed fish and learn about an array of cholesterol lowering heart-healthy whole foods.

Low Impact Cardio Fitness Class – James Parker-Ashley

Wednesday, February 10 at 4:00

[Click Here to Access Zoom](#)

Email Kayla Fuller at kfuller@rcab.org to report your attendance.

For Heart Health Month, James Parker-Ashley's Virtual Fitness Class will be a slightly faster paced total body workout. The workout will be focused on movement to maintain an elevated heart rate, while still having elements of core and balance.

Intermittent Fasting – Health and Harmony

Thursday, February 18th at 3:30

[Click Here to Register](#)

Fasting is one of the most ancient healing traditions in human history. It has been practiced to varying degrees in virtually every culture and religion. Intermittent fasting is an eating style that involves eating within a specific time period and fasting the rest of the time. It can be an effective way to manage your weight. Research shows many benefits, such as increased energy, brain power, cellular protection, and controlled blood sugar levels. You will learn tips on how to make intermittent fasting easy for you!

Nutrition Education Webinar- Build a Heart Smart Pantry and Cook for Wellness

Tuesday, February 23 at 12:30

[Click Here to Register](#)

The program includes information on how to build a heart smart pantry to prepare quick, healthful meals in minutes. Recipes and meal planning information are included.

Previously Recorded January Webinars

You can still view the recorded webinars listed below. After viewing these webinars, please self-report your viewing to Kayla Fuller, Benefits Assistant, at kfuller@rcab.org and you will earn 20 HRA

points if you are registered in *ahealthyme* and have not yet exceeded the maximum number of wellness webinars/family activities for the current Plan Year (max of 5).

Strategies for Healthy Living

[Click Here to Access Webinar](#)

Immunity Boosters: Beat Colds and the Flu with Superfoods

[Click Here to Access Webinar](#)

Biohacking Your Health

[Click Here to Access Webinar](#)

Live Core Strength and Stability Class

[Click Here to Access Zoom Recording](#)

Have You Signed Up For Health Coaching?

A great way to work on heart-healthy goals is to enlist the help of a health coach. Think of health coaching as a Valentine's Day gift from you to you and your loved ones, except this gift is free of charge! If you are enrolled in one of the RCAB Health Plans and haven't signed up for health coaching yet, now is the time. As a reminder, if you are registered in *ahealthyme* and successfully meet your wellness goal with your coach, you will earn \$500 HRA into your Health Equity HRA account. Sign up is easy. Call 1-800-392-0098 and select option 1, Monday through Friday, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. A case manager will ask you about your goal, if you have identified one, and place you with a wellness coach according to your needs.

European Expedition Steps Challenge

Hopefully many of you are enjoying your trek across Europe as you participate in the European Expedition Steps Challenge. Remember that brisk walking is one way you can add cardio to your day, which is crucial to maintaining heart health. The Challenge continues until February 21. As a reminder, you need to log steps **every week** in order to successfully complete the Challenge criteria and earn \$100 into your HRA and the chance to win other incentives. Please contact Virgin Pulse with any questions about the Challenge website.

Program support

Email: healthytogether@virginpulse.com

Phone: 833-226-5914

Wellness Rewards

Have you purchased a fitness tracking device? Did you add fitness equipment to your home gym? Did you purchase a membership to a weight management class, group fitness class, or other wellness class? Have you stocked up on any COVID-19-related PPE/hand sanitizer? If you and/or your spouse are registered in *ahealthyme*, you can receive a Wellness Reward of up to \$150 each Plan Year in HRA dollars for wellness-related expenses. To qualify, you or your spouse must be covered under the RCAB Health Plan at the time the expense was incurred. You may submit multiple requests (minimum \$25) or one request if your expense is \$150 or more for expenses incurred during the Plan Year.

Don't miss out on this opportunity to earn HRA dollars to deposit into a Health Reimbursement Arrangement account (HRA). HRA dollars are loaded onto a Health Equity debit card and can be used to pay for out of pocket medical expenses such as deductibles, co-pays, and coinsurance, as well as for qualified dental, vision, and other over-the-counter purchases. Click [HERE](#) to access the form, which you should submit to Kayla Fuller, Benefits Assistant, at kfuller@rcab.org upon completion.

Exercise of the Month – Heart Healthy Cardio

Even if the lockdown or cold weather limits your cardio options, you can still give your heart a good workout by doing a circuit-style exercise. Pair together three cardio exercises, like jumping jacks, jogging in place, and burpees, with short breaks in between:

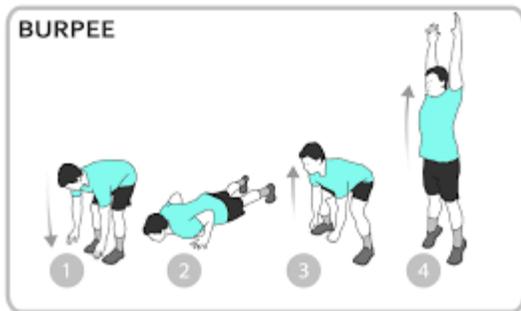
1. Do jumping jacks for 30-60 seconds



2. Take a 10 second break
3. Jog in place for 30-60 seconds



4. Take a 10 second break
5. Do burpees for 30-60 seconds



6. Take a 60 second break

Repeat these steps three times for a quick cardio circuit!

In good health,

Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston Benefits Department