

EMBRACE

Winter 2025

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EMBRACE

James M. Repp

President

Ana M. Eberhard

Vice President, Member Experience

AvMed, one of Florida's oldest and largest not-for-profit health plans, provides affordable, quality health benefits throughout the state.

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Dear Valued Member:



"**N**ew year, new you." It's a saying we often hear when flipping our calendars to January 1. However, for 2025, I propose a slight revision: "New year, healthier you," and the AvMed team is prepared to help our Members in this pursuit.

If your resolution is to live a WELLfluent™ life, balanced with happiness and wellness for you and your family, this issue of Embrace is for you. You'll read about ways to improve your heart health and sleeping habits; the importance of properly filling and understanding your prescriptions; vital vaccinations for expectant moms; why children's dental health matters; and the value of annual wellness visits and health screenings, among other pieces of advice and information.

Additionally, in the next few weeks, you may receive a survey in the mail from the Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems about AvMed. As you know, we value your opinion and appreciate your feedback as this tool plays an important role in your healthcare and ensures we continue delivering better service, quality, and affordability for our Members.

I hope we inspire you to live a **WELLfluent** life and thank you for the privilege of serving you and your family.

Be well,

James M. Repp

President, AvMed

EMBRACE@AvMed.org

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Essential Tips for a Healthy Heart

Staying active is one of the best ways to keep your heart healthy. And maintaining a healthy heart is a great way to keep your loved ones' hearts happy. Now is the perfect time to show your heart (and theirs) some love.

Why should you care about heart health?

According to the American Heart Association, while heart disease is the No. 1 cause of death in the U.S., it is not a normal part of the aging process. Moreover, even if heart disease runs in your family, that doesn't mean it's inevitable. You can significantly reduce your risk of heart disease by maintaining a healthy weight and keeping your cholesterol and blood pressure at normal levels. The best way to do this is to commit to a healthy lifestyle and keep up with annual wellness visits.

Five things you can do to reduce your risk of heart disease:

1. **Stay active.** Take a fitness class, walk, stretch, do yoga, or ride a bike—as little as 10 minutes a day of physical activity can deliver some maximum health benefits.
2. **Choose healthy foods.** Good nutrition helps keep critical risk factors like cholesterol, blood pressure, diabetes, and weight in check. Plus, you'll feel better. Make sure your diet includes a good balance of proteins, complex carbs, and healthy fats.
3. **Stop smoking.** The toxic chemicals in cigarettes negatively impact the functionality of your heart and blood vessels, which leads to a build-up of plaque in your heart arteries.
4. **Limit alcohol intake.** Having more



than two drinks per day for men, and more than one per day for women, can increase your risk of high blood pressure and obesity – both conditions that raise the risk of heart disease.

5. **Relax.** Managing stress in a healthy way is essential to your mental health and your heart health.

Annual Wellness Visits: Get More Out of Your Appointment

Your annual wellness visit can be more than another item on your to-do list. This regular checkup presents a wonderful opportunity to learn about your risk factors for many chronic diseases and create a personalized prevention plan. And, hopefully, you'll go home with a new appreciation for healthy habits.

Here are eight key questions to ask at your next annual wellness visit:

1. **Is my blood pressure in the healthy range?**

Elevated blood pressure is one of the first signs of cardiovascular disease, stroke, and kidney disease, so it's good to know where your numbers fall on the spectrum. If you're close to the borderline, your Primary Care Provider (PCP) might recommend self-monitoring, lifestyle changes, or even prescription medication(s). Lifestyle changes may include the following:

- Eating a well-balanced, lower-salt diet
- Limiting alcohol
- Not smoking
- Keeping up with any medication(s) you've been prescribed

2. **Am I at a healthy weight for my age?**

Discussing your current weight and body mass index (BMI) gives your healthcare Provider an entry point to talk about the importance of exercising and a healthy diet. BMI numbers aren't 100% accurate for indicating how healthy you are, but knowing your BMI is a useful tool when gauging your overall health.

3. **Is there anything in my family health history that's a concern?**

Several diseases and chronic conditions are passed on via familial genes. With this information, your PCP can talk to you about specific preventive measures and/or tests that can help you avoid the same fate. Be sure to bring up any new illnesses diagnosed in your family since your last visit.

4. **What health problems should be on my radar?**

Ideally, your Primary Care Provider will bring up common health issues for your age as part of the checkup. But if they don't, then you should. This question aims

to open a dialogue about your lifestyle and health habits and to put wellness issues on the radar for you and your PCP.

5. **Am I due for any health screenings or medical tests?**

An annual wellness visit is a perfect opportunity to find out whether you should schedule any of the following tests:

- Bone mineral density (osteoporosis)
- Colonoscopy
- Diabetes screening
- Kidney screening
- Liver screening
- Mammogram

Don't leave your appointment without asking about these tests and ask your Primary Care Provider if there are others you should schedule.

6. **Do I need to modify any of my daily habits?**

If your PCP hasn't asked about how often you drink alcohol or what kind of daily stress you're under, take a deep breath and bring up these sensitive issues yourself. Excessive alcohol consumption is linked with chronic diseases and health issues, including:

- Cancer
- Depression
- Heart disease
- High blood pressure
- Liver disease

Regarding stress management, your healthcare Provider can share healthy ways to manage life's challenges.

7. **Are my prescription medications still necessary?**

Remind your Primary Care Provider about all your prescriptions, their dosages, and any supplements or over-the-counter medications you take regularly. Health conditions can improve, and bodies can change, which may mean it's time to take a second look at your medications.

8. **Is this normal?**

The human body can sometimes seem mysterious, and just about everyone has some embarrassing body issue they're curious or concerned about. Ask your healthcare Provider about those issues you may find difficult discussing so they can provide the answers you're looking for and treatment options you may need.



Heart-health Risk Factors Every Woman Should Know About

Heart disease has a reputation as a “man’s disease,” but it’s just as important for women to stay on top of their heart health. That’s because heart disease is the No. 1 killer of women, according to the American Heart Association, causing more deaths than all cancers combined.

If that surprises you, you’re not alone. According to a survey by the Cleveland Clinic, more than two-thirds of Americans didn’t know that heart disease was the top cause of death for women. Because women can experience heart disease differently than men do, it’s important to understand what increases your risk.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, some of the top factors that

increase a woman’s risk for cardiovascular disease include:

- High blood pressure
- High LDL (“bad”) cholesterol
- Smoking
- Diabetes

Knowing your numbers and treating them as necessary, as well as living a healthy lifestyle, are key to keeping your heart in top form. Make sure to get regular routine lab work, blood pressure checks, and see your Primary Care Provider for an annual wellness visit so that together, you can chart your roadmap to staying healthy.

Thank You For Getting Your Flu Shot!

Getting the flu vaccine is the first and most important thing you can do to protect against the flu. If you’ve already had your flu shot, we applaud you for embracing better health.

If you haven’t, it’s still not too late! The flu shot is the best protection against the flu

for everyone, including pregnant women for whom getting vaccinated while pregnant is the best way to protect themselves and their babies under six months old from the flu.

Ask your Primary Care Provider or visit an AvMed Participating Pharmacy for your flu shot.

Find A Pharmacy Near You!

Did you know that you can access drug prices and pharmacy information 24 hours a day by visiting Find a Pharmacy | AvMed? (www.AvMed.org/prescriptions/find-a-pharmacy/)

- From the drop-down menu select your AvMed plan type

- Then select plan name and press view details
- Then you will have the ability to either:
 - o Price a medication OR
 - o Find a pharmacy

Children's Dental Health – Why it Matters

Tooth decay is a major cause of tooth loss in children. Approximately 25% of our nation's children have multiple cavities. Because dental diseases tend to have a negative effect on quality of life in childhood and as we get older, annual dental visits and oral care are especially important throughout childhood and adolescence (ages 2-20).

Oral health is crucial to overall health, and dental cavities are one of the most common and preventable childhood diseases. Keeping up with your child's oral health can significantly reduce the risks of developing oral disease in the future. According to the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD), tooth decay can be prevented and even reversed. That's why it is important to

- **Establish a “dental home” by your child's first birthday or first tooth.**

According to the AAPD, a dental home is a practice that provides a patient with a consistent, comfortable place to receive oral healthcare. A dental home is built through an ongoing relationship with your child's pediatric dentist. Find your dental home no later than your child's first birthday or when their first tooth appears.

- **2x2 rule + flossing for toddlers.** Brush your child's teeth for **two (2) minutes, two (2) times a day**, and floss as soon as the teeth start touching.
- **Keep an eye on when they start brushing:** Supervise young children as they brush their teeth.

Be sure to keep up with your child's overall health in 2025 – including their oral health.



Why Getting a Good Night's Rest is Good for Your Heart

You can boost your heart health by getting quality sleep. Here's why (and how) to sleep better.

You probably know that eating nutritious foods and getting regular exercise is good for a healthy heart. According to the American Heart Association, here's another equally critical heart-healthy habit you should add to your routine: get a solid 7 to 9 hours of sleep every night.

When you don't snooze well at night, your heart health can suffer. That doesn't mean that if you stay up watching TV tonight, you'll have a heart attack tomorrow. But over time, lack of sleep takes a toll on your heart and poor sleep can put you at higher risk for many conditions linked to heart disease.

Here's what poor sleep can lead to:

- **Weight gain.** When we don't sleep, we tend to make poor food choices. In one study, women who were sleep-deprived ate significantly more calories per day than those who had plenty of sleep. Those extra calories can lead to weight gain, and obesity is a well-known risk factor for cardiovascular disease.
- **High blood pressure.** Your blood pressure naturally dips and remains lower all night when you sleep. But if you stay awake longer, your body spends less time in this mode of lower blood pressure. Plus, lack of sleep increases stress hormones such as cortisol, which can raise your blood pressure.
- **Less physical activity.** It's easy to see why: without sleep, you'll be too tired to exercise. And the result of inactivity? You guessed it — a higher risk for heart disease.
- **Depression.** According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), mental health disorders are linked with risk factors for heart disease. A 2021 study found that people who didn't get enough sleep had nearly three times the risk of mental

distress (such as anxiety and depression). That's a concern, because depression is hard on your heart.

Now that you know what poor sleep can lead to, here is some advice for catching some quality ZZZZs.

Tips for being a "super sleeper":

- Practice good sleep habits. Go to bed and get up at the same time every day, even on weekends. Having a bedtime routine can be helpful, too. Perhaps read a book, have a warm cup of tea, or take a shower before you turn in for the night. A steady routine can trigger your body to know that it's time to go to sleep.
- Say "NO" to screens. Using your phone or tablet in bed is a no-no. Blue light from most screens disrupts melatonin production, and that disrupts your sleep.
- Keep it cool and dark. The ideal temperature for sleeping is between 60°F and 67°F degrees. So, turn down the thermostat as you prepare to go to bed. If possible, open your bedroom window — that extra burst of oxygen can help you fall asleep faster. Block out light from outside with heavy curtains or a sleep mask.
- Listen to sleep sounds. A white noise machine or phone app (but keep that phone screen OFF, or turned face-down), can help drown out background noises, which can help you drift off faster. You can tune in to pattering rain, a babbling brook, or whatever helps you feel relaxed and sleepy.
- Try meditation. Start out with a simple breathing technique: sit quietly and relax for a few minutes. Pay attention to your breath as you slowly inhale and exhale. If your mind wanders, gently bring it back to the sound of your breathing. A meditation app can help, too.

Important Vaccine Information for Expecting Moms



Getting recommended vaccines before or while you are pregnant helps protect both you and your baby from potentially serious diseases that can make you both very sick. If you have any questions about getting these, or any other vaccines while pregnant, make a point of talking to your Primary Care Provider (PCP).

Whooping Cough

Whooping cough, also known as pertussis, can be serious for anyone; but for a newborn, it can be life-threatening. About 7 in 10 deaths from whooping cough are among babies younger than 2 months old, who are too young to receive a whooping cough vaccine. The younger the baby is when they get whooping cough, the more likely they will need to be treated in a hospital.

When a woman gets a whooping cough vaccine during pregnancy, her body will create protective antibodies and pass some of them to the baby before birth. These antibodies will provide the baby with some early, short-term protection against whooping cough. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends expectant mothers get a whooping cough vaccine during the 27th through 36th week of each pregnancy, preferably during the earlier part of this time period.

Flu

Pregnant women are more likely to have severe illness from flu, possibly due to changes in immune, heart, and lung functions during pregnancy. No matter what stage of pregnancy, and despite timing fluctuations in flu seasons from year to year, the CDC recommends expectant mothers get a flu vaccine by the end of October, which is typically when flu season starts. This timing helps optimize protecting a pregnant woman before flu activity begins to increase. And for those who become pregnant after October, getting the vaccine can still be beneficial if you get it later in the flu season.

RSV

There are two ways to protect your baby from getting very sick with RSV. (1) You can choose to get the RSV vaccine during weeks 32 through 36 of your pregnancy during September to January; or (2) if your baby is age 8 months or younger, they can be immunized for RSV during their first RSV season.

COVID-19

The CDC recommends COVID-19 vaccination for everyone ages 6 months and older, including pregnant women, since they are more likely to get severely ill with COVID-19 by comparison with other members of the population. If you are pregnant, you should stay up to date on your COVID-19 vaccine. Getting a COVID-19 vaccine during pregnancy can protect you and your baby from severe illness from the virus.

QUIZ: Do You Know The Signs of a Heart Attack?

Fast action saves lives, but you've got to know what you're looking for. We've all seen the movie version of a heart attack — the crushing pain, the splayed hand clutching the chest, the grimace, the collapse. It's very dramatic but often not at all realistic.

If you suspect someone is having a heart attack, call **911 right away, even if you're not sure.**

First responders can get the patient to the hospital faster, begin treatment on the way, and ensure that the person is admitted quickly when they arrive. By calling 911, your loved one can have treatment up to an hour sooner than if you'd jumped in the car. And it could save their life.

Here's a short quiz to test your knowledge of cardiac events. Perhaps you'll learn something new.

Q1: True or false: Most heart attacks involve a sudden onset of intense chest pain.

Q2: What chest-area symptoms are associated with most heart attacks?

- a. Discomfort in the center of the chest or toward the left side
- b. Discomfort that lasts more than a few minutes, or that comes and goes
- c. Feelings of pressure or squeezing
- d. All of the above

Q3: True or false: Nausea, vomiting, pain above the navel, and cold sweats are signs of the stomach flu, not a heart attack.

Q4: Which of these statements is NOT TRUE regarding women's heart attacks?

- a. Women always have the exact same symptoms as men.
- b. Feeling tired for no reason is a symptom more common in women than in men.
- c. Women often mistake heart attack symptoms as signs of stress or exhaustion.
- d. A woman having a heart attack is more likely than a man to have abdominal pain or heartburn.



Answers

A1: False. Though chest pain or discomfort is the most common sign, most heart attacks begin slowly, and symptoms can range from mild to intense. Milder symptoms are more common in women, older adults, and people with diabetes.

A2: D, all of the above. Mild or severe versions of any of these can signal a heart attack.

A3: False. Symptoms of a heart attack aren't always limited to the chest area. Signs can include those listed, as well as pain or discomfort in the jaw, neck, back, shoulder, or one or both arms. Some people experience lightheadedness and shortness of breath, with or without chest pain, when active or at rest.

A4: A is NOT TRUE, but the others are. Women can experience the same symptoms as men, but they may not. Many women don't have chest pain at all. They are also more likely than men to experience dizziness and fainting, shortness of breath, nausea or vomiting, and pain in their back or jaw. Heart disease is the No. 1 killer of women, so it's important for everyone to know the possible signs, regardless of gender.

The Importance of Filling Prescriptions

When patients leave the doctor's office with a prescription in hand, the next step is to visit their local pharmacy to fill and pick up their medication(s). Unfortunately, that doesn't always happen.

For some, prescription drug pricing, confusion about taking the medication(s), or fears about side effects may affect whether they end up filling their prescription(s) in the first place. But if they don't, it puts them at risk of disease progression and complications that could have been avoided with the medication(s) prescribed.

If you have prescription medication concerns, here are some tips:

- **Find out about lower cost alternatives.** If the cost of your prescription medication(s) is high for your budget, talk to your Primary Care Provider (PCP) or pharmacist about other options, like generics. Depending on the prescription drug, the price difference can be significant.
 - *AvMed's Rx Savings Solutions is a prescription cost savings tool that helps you easily find the lowest-price options for your prescription drug(s). This service is linked to your AvMed plan, so everything is personalized according to the medication(s) you and your family are currently taking. Log in to your AvMed*

Member Portal account and select the Rx Savings Solutions link on the left menu.

- **Ask questions.** People are less likely to adhere to their treatment if they are not 100% sure of how to take the medication(s) or if they don't understand what they're taking. Don't be afraid to ask your prescribing PCP questions about your medication(s).
- **Bring up side effects.** If you're particularly concerned about potential side effects, talk to your PCP about ways to minimize them.



Help Us Do Even Better!

It is our top priority to continuously improve your Member experience and benefits to help you stay healthy. In the next few weeks, you may receive an independent survey in the mail from the Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (CAHPS) program.


By filling out this survey, we can learn more about your AvMed experience to improve our services and better meet your needs. This tool plays an important role in your healthcare and ensures we continue delivering quality services and the best healthcare experience possible.

We value your opinion. If you receive a letter or call from CAHPS about a survey, we kindly ask that you take a few minutes to participate.

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