

FEBRUARY 2026

# Through the WIRE

LOCAL 26 IBEW-NECA JOINT TRUST FUNDS

## YOUR HEALTH CARE PLAN

*protecting your family*

When most people think of February, they think of Valentine's Day. But February, which is American Heart Month, is also a reminder to take care of your "literal" heart through good health care, exercise and a healthy diet. Love yourself enough to care for your heart and then share that love with others!

## Matters of the Heart

The heart is the workhorse of the human body. It's in constant motion, even when the rest of your body isn't, making it critical that you take good care of this precious muscle. Unlike other muscles in your body, there is simply no time-out, rest period or downtime for the human heart.

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States and around the world, accounting for one in every five deaths in the U.S. or about 695,000 deaths per year according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). These numbers equate to someone dying from heart disease every 34 seconds! Heart disease is quite literally a broken heart.

The term heart disease refers to many conditions that affect the heart including:

- ♥ **Coronary artery disease:** the most common form of heart disease and is when plaque builds up in the coronary arteries reducing blood flow to the heart. Coronary artery disease can lead to chest pain and heart attack.
- ♥ **Heart attack:** when blood flow to the part of the heart muscle is blocked, usually by a blood clot. It can cause damage and even death and is a medical emergency.

- ♥ **Heart failure:** when the heart cannot pump blood effectively enough to meet the body's needs. Heart failure can cause shortness of breath, fatigue, and swelling in the legs and feet.
- ♥ **Arrhythmias:** Problems with the heart's rhythm causing it to beat too fast, too slow or irregularly. Some arrhythmias are harmless and some can be life-threatening.
- ♥ **Heart valve disease:** when one or more of the heart's valves do not open properly affecting blood flow through the heart.
- ♥ **Cardiomyopathy:** a disease of the heart muscle that makes it harder for the heart to pump blood. It can be caused by genetics, infections, alcohol use or other medical conditions.
- ♥ **Peripheral artery disease:** when arteries supplying blood to the arms or legs narrow due to plaque buildup. It's related to coronary artery disease and increases the risk of heart attack and stroke.

While, yes, the heart's primary function is to circulate blood through the body, its role goes far beyond that including controlling blood pressure and helping the body react to



different situations such as exercise, stress and rest. The heart also supports the body's immune and hormonal systems by circulating white blood cells to fight infections and transporting hormones that regulate body functions such as growth, metabolism, and stress responses.

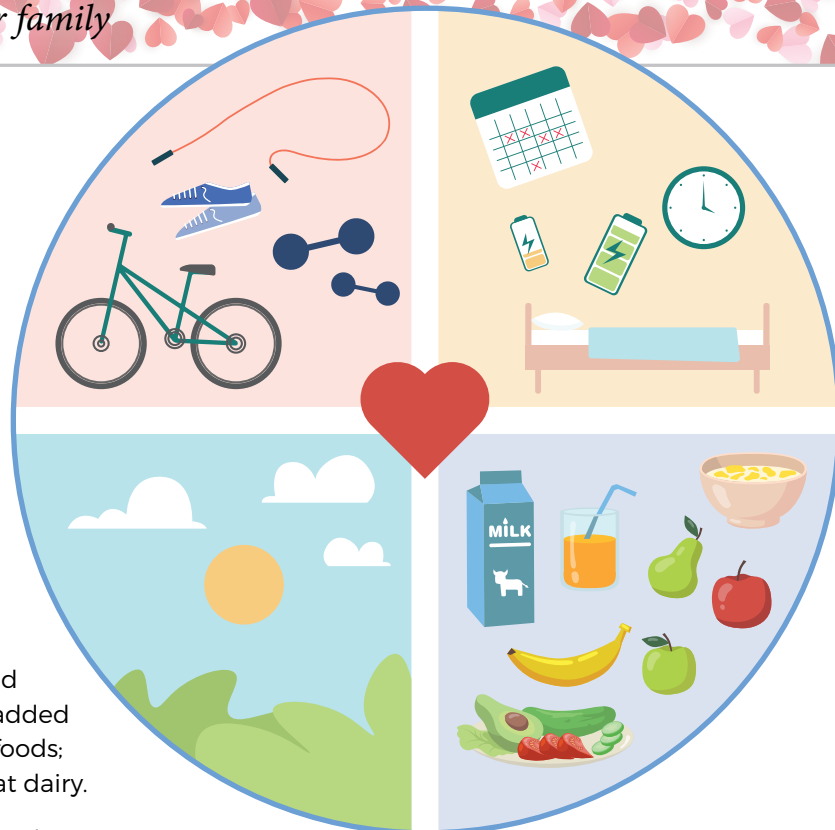
While a small percentage of heart disease is genetic, many risk factors associated with heart disease are preventable with proper diet and exercise and healthy lifestyle choices. Risk factors include high cholesterol, high blood pressure, obesity and diabetes, all of which can be controlled by diet and exercise, and quitting smoking.

American Heart Month is a great reminder to be kind to your heart. Never assume that your heart can take a licking and keep on ticking. Treat your heart with the care it deserves for the life-sustaining work that it does.

# Make It a Habit to Be Good to Your Heart

Being kind to your heart isn't a one-and-done effort. A heart healthy way of living means building lifelong habits to protect, strengthen and repair your heart, and it's never too late to start those habits.

- Eat a heart-healthy diet that relies heavily on fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins and healthy fats. Limit saturated and trans fats and added sugars and sodium; reduce processed and fast foods; and choose fish, nuts, beans, olive oil, and low-fat dairy.
- Be physically active for at least 150 minutes of moderate physical activity per week to strengthen the heart, lower blood pressure, improve cholesterol levels and help maintain a healthy weight. Consider walking, cycling or swimming.
- Maintain a healthy weight to reduce strain on the heart and lower the risk of high blood pressure, diabetes, and high cholesterol.
- Don't smoke or use tobacco. Smoking and tobacco use damages blood vessels that circulate blood through the body, raises blood pressure, and increases the risk of heart disease and stroke.
- Manage stress, which can have a negative impact on the heart whether it's from an increased heart rate or a



rise in blood pressure or from making unhealthy lifestyle and diet choices as coping behaviors.

- Get seven to nine hours of sleep to avoid high blood pressure, obesity, and diabetes.
- Limit alcohol intake as excessive drinking raises blood pressure.
- Know your numbers and make necessary changes. Monitor your blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar, and weight to catch problems early.
- Follow medical advice and get regular checkups to manage existing conditions.



(Can you unscramble these Valentine's Day words?)

ENTEAVNIL

USHG

NCYAD

SISKES

EWFOSLR

AHTRE

VEOL

UIPCD

## LOVE IS IN THE AIR

CUPID

LOVE

HEART

FLOWERS

KISSES

CANDY

HUGS

VALENTINE

**Answers:**

# Love Your Heart While Minding Your Budget

Part of taking care of your heart is eating a diet that supports a healthy heart. When it comes to heart health, food can actually be the *enemy* and not the *energy* your body needs. But, have you noticed that healthy food can sometimes be the most expensive food on grocery store shelves?

So what are heart-healthy foods?

- 🍷 Fruits and vegetables
- 🍷 Whole grains
- 🍷 Healthy protein such as legumes and nuts, fish and seafood, low-fat or fat-free dairy, lean and unprocessed meat and poultry
- 🍷 Liquid non-tropical vegetable oils such as canola, corn, soybean, olive and sunflower oils
- 🍷 Minimally processed foods
- 🍷 Foods prepared with little or no added salt
- 🍷 Foods with little or no added sugar

*Despite soaring grocery prices, you can eat healthy on a budget. It may require a little advanced*

planning, flexibility and practice but a heart-healthy diet is possible even on a budget.

- \$ Prepare menus and grocery lists ahead to avoid impulse purchases.
- \$ Use technology like apps to help you plan your menus and grocery purchases.
- \$ Prepare meals in advance and freeze them so you are prepared with a healthy meal on hand even if you are pressed for time.
- \$ Prep snacks by cutting up fruit and vegetables and keeping them in single servings in the

refrigerator. Fruit and vegetables already cut in store are much more expensive.

- \$ Buy fresh produce that is in season.
- \$ Buy local at a farmer's market.
- \$ Buy in bulk and consider buying canned, frozen or dried produce.
- \$ Look for store specials and coupons and stock up.

Once you get all of your healthy eats home, be sure to watch expiration dates and keep an eye out that the fresh produce isn't spoiling. Throwing away heart-healthy food is isn't good for your ticker or your wallet!



SCAN this QR code to access  
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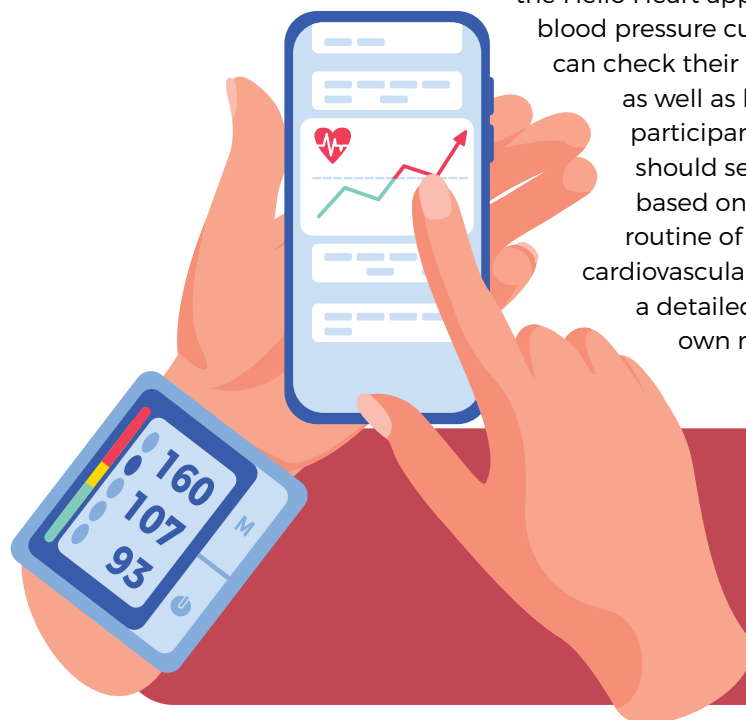
YOUR  
HEALTH CARE PLAN

*protecting your family*

# The EWTF is Looking Out for Your Ticker

**H**ello Heart, an EWTF partner provider, has one focus at the heart of all they do—helping our participants maintain and achieve heart health to live their best lives. Hello Heart is a voluntary program offered at no additional charge to all EWTF participants and dependents age 18 or older to help monitor existing heart conditions and prevent new conditions from taking hold.

**Hello Heart** is a remote heart health monitoring program that can be done in the comfort of your own home, through the Hello Heart app on a smart phone. With a Bluetooth-connected blood pressure cuff and reader provided by Hello Heart, participants can check their blood pressure and log it into the Hello Heart app, as well as log cholesterol levels and medications. The app lets participants know if they are on the path to good heart health or should seek support, and provides tips and recommendations based on blood pressure readings. The goal is to create a routine of monitoring blood pressure in order to achieve peak cardiovascular health. Additionally, the Hello Heart app can generate a detailed report of your heart health for you to share with your own medical team.



Learn more about Hello Heart at  
[https://preferences.helloheart.com/  
EWTF](https://preferences.helloheart.com/EWTF).