

HEALTH OBSERVANCES FEBRUARY 2026

February is primarily recognized for [American Heart Month](#), a critical time to focus on cardiovascular health, blood pressure, and preventing heart disease.

PRIMARY 2026 THEMES:

- **American Heart Association (AHA):** The central message for 2026 is "**Be the help until help arrives**". This theme emphasizes the "Nation of Lifesavers" initiative, urging individuals to learn Hands-Only CPR and how to use an AED to intervene during cardiac emergencies.
- **Sudden Cardiac Arrest Foundation (SCAF):** Their 2026 campaign theme is "**Empowering Hearts to Save Lives: From Awareness to Action**".
- **National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI):** Continues the "**#OurHearts**" movement, which focuses on the idea that "our hearts are healthier together" and encourages social support for heart-healthy habits.

KEY EVENTS & INITIATIVES

Our Hearts Weekly Focuses: The NHLBI structures the month with themed weeks:

- **Week 1:** Physical Activity.
- **Week 2:** Healthy Eating.
- **Week 3:** Tracking Heart Stats (blood pressure, cholesterol).
- **Week 4:** Stress Management, Sleep, and Smoking Cessation.
- **Congenital Heart Disease Awareness Week:** Recognized from **February 7–14, 2026**.
- **Heart Valve Disease Awareness Day:** Observed on **February 22, 2026**, to highlight early detection of valve issues.
- **These are additional health awareness topics to focus on. Choose areas that are pertinent to your congregation. The Commission of Preventative Care will focus on heart health, knowing your body and self-advocacy. They provide a strong focus on preventative health, particularly for cardiovascular and, in some contexts, cancer-related screenings.**
- **American Heart Month:** Focuses on heart-healthy lifestyles, including nutrition and physical activity to prevent heart disease.
- **National Cancer Prevention Month:** Dedicated to reducing cancer risks through lifestyle changes and screenings.
- **Age-Related Macular Degeneration (AMD)/Low Vision Awareness Month:** Raises awareness of the leading cause of vision loss in adults 65+.
- **National Children's Dental Health Month:** Emphasizes the importance of oral health for children.
- **National Self-Check Month:** Encourages individuals to perform personal health screenings and check-ups.

SIGNIFICANT DAYS AND WEEKS

Feb 4: World Cancer Day

Feb 6: National Wear Red Day (for women's heart health, leading health threat to women)

Feb 7-14: Congenital Heart Defect Awareness Week

Feb 8-14: Heart Failure Awareness Week

Feb 28: Rare Disease Day

Why do we observe American Heart Month every February?

Every year more than 650,000 Americans die from heart disease. The number one cause of deaths for most groups, heart disease affects all ages, genders, and ethnicities. Risk factors include high cholesterol, high blood pressure, smoking, diabetes, and excessive alcohol use.

The human heart is responsible for pumping blood throughout our body, supplying oxygen and nutrients and removing toxins and waste. Weighing between 8 and 12 ounces, the heart is a mighty organ divided into four chambers that work together to pump blood in and out. The heart gets oxygenated blood from the lungs and pumps it throughout the rest of the body. It does this by contracting at a rhythmic pace, about 60-80 times per minute, by electrical cells called "pacemakers." When the heart no longer performs its regular function, a medical device also called a pacemaker can be implanted to assist the heart.

Heart disease occurs when the arteries leading to the heart become clogged. Although heart disease has been around for thousands of years. Many aspects of modern life increase the risk factors and make people more prone to heart disease and heart failure. Today, one in four deaths in the U.S. is caused by heart disease. Heart disease can affect everyone, but managing your prior health risks, activities and diet can help you reduce your risk.

American Heart Month is observed to raise awareness on the importance of a healthy heart and to encourage healthy habits that help reduce the risk of heart disease.

1. IT REMINDS US TO TAKE CARE OF OUR HEART

American Heart Month motivates us to examine our own health habits and risks and take steps to improve our heart health. Staying active, eating healthy, and watching our weight are all important parts of maintaining a healthy cardiovascular system. Pick a new heart-healthy habit like jogging or substituting sodas with water and try to stick to it for a whole month and cook healthy meals with your family.

2. IT PROMOTES EDUCATION ABOUT HEART HEALTH

Learn about the risk factors for heart disease, the ways you can prevent them, and the lifestyle choices that can help you stay healthy. Ask your doctor to perform a simple cholesterol test to let you know if you're at risk and should make adjustments to your diet. Knowing the risk factors for heart disease and how to reduce them can help you lead healthier lives and diminish your risk for heart attacks or other cardiovascular diseases. As the number one killer of Americans, heart disease is a slow-moving epidemic that affects almost everyone. The warning signs for heart disease have been known to appear when people are as young as 18. Red flags such as high blood pressure should be taken seriously and healthy habits should be adopted.

5 INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT HEART HEALTH

1. Heart Attacks Can Be Silent

One in five heart attacks occurs without the person even knowing they had one. Heart disease is a slow-moving epidemic that affects almost everyone.

2. Heart Attacks Affect Women Differently

Women may experience different symptoms than men. These include pain in the back, arm, neck, or shoulder; nausea; fatigue; shortness of breath; and vomiting.

3. Young Women Are At Higher Risk Than Men

Women under the age of 50 are twice as likely to die of a heart attack as men in the same age group. Pregnant women and those recently experienced child birth are at risk for heart disease.

4. Another Reason To Hate Mondays

Heart attacks are more likely to occur on Monday mornings than other days of the week. Scientists attribute this to the disruption in our circadian rhythm over the weekend which leads to increased blood pressure and other changes to the nervous system.

5. Diet Soda Raises Heart Attack Risk

If you drink one or more diet sodas a day, your chances of having a heart attack are 43% higher than those who drink regular soda or none at all.

The American Heart Association and other organizations reinforce the importance of protecting heart health. Here are just a few examples.

- ⊕ Doing at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity a week (or, just getting started and working your way there!)
- ⊕ Eating healthy (the AHA's [Heart-Check](#) mark can guide you in the grocery store)
- ⊕ Not smoking or vaping. Avoid unhealthy use of alcohol and other substances
- ⊕ Maintaining a healthy weight
- ⊕ Controlling blood sugar, cholesterol and blood pressure. Know your numbers
- ⊕ Getting regular checkups, asking questions when in doubt, seeking second opinions
- ⊕ Learning [Hands-Only CPR](#) – double or triple survival rate after cardiac arrest
- ⊕ Take care of mental health, connect with others
- ⊕ Finding ways to relax and ease your mind, such as meditation

Please concentrate on knowing your body. Catalog symptoms like pain intensity, location, time of occurrences, method of relief, and reaction to interventions. Your body is unique to you alone. Women has always been ignored concerning symptoms. Do not allow anyone to pass you over and ignore your complaints. Seek further help. **Do not give in to what you know is not true. Your life depends on you advocating for yourself or others in your care!**

A young professional African American female died on January 5, 2026 because she was not taken serious concerning her pain and body changes. It took four years for her to be diagnosed with Ovarian cancer, after having an MRI that showed a "little something". Let's wait and see. By the time she changed doctor and had another MRI, she was at stage four. That is years of suffering without competent help. In case you are wondering, her first doctor was an African American female. It does not matter. You are the most important piece in this puzzle.

Inquisitive minds need to know. Stay healthy. I am passionate about advocacy. I have been deferred many times. Don't let it happen to you – female or male.

Sister Alicia B. Commodore, RNMSN
*7th Episcopal Health Committee
Commissioner of Preventative Care*