

**This year, Heart Failure Awareness Week will be February 11–17, 2024.** Visit [hfsa.org](https://hfsa.org) and search for “Events” for information on this year’s happenings.

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# Care Connections<sup>SM</sup>

Sharing the  
knowledge for  
better health

JANUARY 2024

## Your 2024 Action Plan

Start the new year with new goals. If you are living with a chronic disease or health condition, creating an action plan can help you on your journey towards better health.



### What is an action plan?

An action plan is a tool that outlines how to manage your health condition. You and your doctor can create the plan together. Take more control of your health by knowing what to do and when to do it. Here are some reasons why an action plan is important:

### Why are action plans important?

1. Clarity. Action plans give clear instructions about how to manage your condition. They also make it easier for you to understand your treatment plan. You can use them to discuss your treatment goals, expectations, and any concerns with your healthcare team.
2. Control. Having an action plan gets you involved in your health. Become a partner in your treatment by working with your health care provider.
3. Readiness. During a health crisis or when you have sudden symptoms, an action plan can be a lifesaver. It can help you to know what to do and when to seek medical help.
4. Tracking. Action plans allow you to track your progress and discuss any changes with your health care team. This can help your treatment to work better over time.

Talk to your Program Nurse to learn more about how to create an action plan. Start your journey today towards better health.

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## Your 2024 well-visit checklist

Do you have a plan for your well visits? Routine check-ups can catch issues before they have a chance to get worse.

First, talk to your doctor about the checklist below. The well visits you need will depend on your age, sex, and other factors. You may also need regular tests or screenings based on your long-term illness. Together, you and your doctor can decide what is best for your care.

Important: ask your doctor which vaccines are right for you, including COVID-19. For some conditions, live virus vaccines may not be recommended.

What I need:	My planned visits:	Notes from my visit:
<b>Dental Exam</b> (once per 6 months)	Date of visit: ___/___/___	
<b>Eye Exam</b> (once per year, depending on age and health)	Date of visit: ___/___/___	
<b>Flu, Pneumonia, and COVID-19 Shots</b>	Date of visit: ___/___/___	
<b>Physical Exam</b> (once per year: diabetes, blood pressure, cholesterol, osteoporosis, and more)	Date of visit: ___/___/___	
<b>Cancer Screenings</b> (ask your doctor if you are at risk; common screenings include colon, lung, and breast)	Date of visit: ___/___/___	
<b>Other Vaccinations</b> (ask your doctor which vaccines you may need)	Date of visit: ___/___/___	
<b>Hepatitis C</b> (for all those over age 18)	Date of visit: ___/___/___	
<b>Doctor's Orders:</b>	Date of visit: ___/___/___	

## Know your numbers: blood pressure

Your blood pressure (BP) is probably taken each time you go to the doctor. It's a very important number, but many don't know why. BP can have a big impact on your health.

### Blood pressure basics

BP is the force of blood pushing against the walls of the arteries. It is measured with two numbers, a top number (systolic) and a bottom number (diastolic). For most, a goal BP is less than 120/80, or 120 "over" 80. Your numbers may be different. That's okay—the right numbers for you are those you and your doctor set as your target. High BP (hypertension) makes your heart work harder. This can lead to health issues like stroke, heart failure, and kidney damage. High BP cannot be "felt," however. So, you may be at risk without feeling bad or knowing something is wrong.

Is your BP always higher at the doctor's office than at home? This is called "white coat effect." It isn't bad, but it should be tracked. It could mean you are more at risk for high BP. It could also cause your doctor to raise your medicine's dose too high. If you think your numbers are higher during doctor's visits than at home, tell your doctor.

BP can be controlled through medicine, but it is better not to let yourself get to that point. Here's how to get your BP on target and stay on track yourself:

- Eat a well-balanced diet that is low in salt (check food labels for sodium).
- Stay active and at a healthy weight. Ask your doctor about exercise plans.
- Limit how much alcohol you drink.
- Quit smoking (or better yet, don't start at all).
- Ensure you get good sleep.
- Learn to measure your own blood pressure (see below).

### Track your own blood pressure

It's not hard to measure your own BP. Ask your doctor or nurse to teach you at your next visit. Also ask how to get your own cuff-style BP monitor. Then get started! Take your BP each day and write the results down on a chart or in a notebook. The American Heart Association has a helpful printable log you can use. Go to: [www.heart.org](http://www.heart.org).