

Simple steps can protect your heart

By DAN MCKAY

Ephraim McDowell Health

February is American Heart Month, a time to focus on the health of your heart and raise awareness about the nation's leading cause of death. At Ephraim McDowell Health, we're dedicated to helping our communities understand the importance of heart health and offering guidance on how to reduce risk through prevention and healthy lifestyle choices.

Heart disease remains the **number one cause of death in Kentucky**, accounting for about 20% of all deaths in the state in 2022. That means roughly 1 in every 5 deaths in Kentucky is due to heart disease.

Kentucky also consistently ranks among the states with some of the highest heart disease death rates in the nation.

In recent data, Kentucky was among the top 10 states for heart disease mortality, with more than 200 deaths per 100,000 residents, significantly higher than national averages.

Risk factors are also

disproportionately

common:

• **About 40% of Kentucky adults report having high blood pressure**, a major contributor to heart disease

and stroke.

• Over 37% report high cholesterol, another key risk factor.

• Approximately 20% of adults in Kentucky currently smoke, further increasing cardiovascular risk.

These numbers show just how widespread and serious heart health challenges are in our state — but they also highlight opportunities for prevention and intervention.

KNOW YOUR NUMBERS

One of the most impactful ways to protect your heart is to track and manage your health numbers. Your doctor can help monitor: blood pressure, cholesterol levels, blood sugar and body mass index.

Early detection of high

blood pressure or cholesterol can help you make changes before heart disease develops.

MOVE MORE, SIT LESS

Regular physical activity strengthens the heart, helps control weight, and improves overall well-being. Adults should aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate activity most days of the week. This could be as simple as brisk walking, gardening, or cycling — every bit counts.

EAT HEART-HEALTHY FOODS

Your diet makes a big

difference. Opt for fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins; limit saturated fats, added sugars, and salt; stay hydrated and be mindful of portion sizes. Making gradual, healthier food choices can have a lasting positive impact on your heart.

STRESS LESS AND SLEEP MORE

Stress and poor sleep are linked to heart disease and high blood pressure. Prioritize activities that help you relax, such as gentle stretching, meditation, or spending time outdoors. Aim for 7–9 hours of quality sleep each night to support overall heart health.

AVOID TOBACCO AND LIMIT ALCOHOL

Smoking is one of the most preventable causes of heart disease. If you smoke, quitting significantly reduces your risk — at any age. Limiting alcohol intake can also lower blood pressure and reduce stress on your heart.

START TODAY

Heart health isn't just a February focus — it's a lifelong commitment. By taking small, positive steps now, you can make a big difference for your heart and your overall well-being.

To learn more, visit ephraimcdowell.org.

Ephraim McDowell offers health care scholarships

NEWS RELEASE

Ephraim McDowell Health is accepting applications for a health care scholarships for the Fall 2026-Spring 2027 school year. Scholarships are available to high school seniors or college students from Boyle, Casey, Garrard, Lincoln, Mercer and Washington counties. The application deadline is March 31.

To be eligible, high school students must be in the top 25 percent of their class, have a minimum ACT score of 21 or SAT score of 1000 and have the intent to enter an approved health care career program at a regionally accredited college or university.

College students must have completed undergraduate educational requirements and be accepted into a professional health care program approved by Ephraim McDowell Health.

• **EMH Health Care scholarship** is available to high school seniors and college students.

\$1,000 is paid directly to the college or university for high school recipients, renewable for the second semester if the recipient earns a 2.5 or higher GPA during the initial semester; \$2,000 is paid directly to the college or university for graduate or professional program recipients, renewable for the second

semester if the recipient earns a 3.0 or higher GPA during the initial semester.

Additional scholarships are available through the Ephraim McDowell Regional Medical Center Auxiliary, Fort Logan Hospital Auxiliary, and James B. Haggin Auxiliary.

• **Keith & Vicki A. Darnell Scholarship** — available to a high school senior, with preference given to students pursuing a BSN degree. The award is \$500 for one semester.

• **Anne Byrom Memorial Nursing Scholarship** — available to a high school senior in Boyle County. The award is a minimum of \$500 for one semester. Winners can apply for a second semester if the recipient earns a 2.5 or higher GPA.

• **Sherry Colleen Durbin Memorial Scholarship** — available to a high school senior in Boyle County. The award is a minimum of \$500 for one semester.

• **James B. Haggin Auxiliary Healthcare Scholarship** — available to a high school senior from Mercer County. The award is \$500 for one semester.

To apply, students should print and complete an application available online at emhealth.org/careers/education-assistance-program. Completed applications and other documentation should be forwarded to Ephraim McDowell Health's Volunteer Services at 217 South Third Street, Danville, KY 40422.

For more information, call (859) 239-4785.



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