



Mended Hearts[®]
of Atlanta

The Aorta
Reporter



February is American Heart Month All about AEDs

You've probably seen them mounted on walls in offices, schools, and public buildings, but do you really know what they're for? They're called automated external defibrillators, or AED's, sophisticated medical devices that just about anyone can use to provide lifesaving assistance to people in cardiac arrest.

According to the American Red Cross, sudden cardiac arrest is one of the leading causes of death in the United States, with more than 350,000 cases each year. Defibrillation is the only way to restore regular heart rhythm, and readily accessible AED devices allow laypersons to intervene and buy time until first responders arrive. And during cardiac arrest, that extra time matters -- each minute without defibrillation reduces the odds of survival by about 10 percent.



How AEDs work

According to AED manufacturer Avive, AEDs consist of adhesive electrode pads that read the patient's heart rhythm and deliver controlled electric shocks if necessary, and a processor to analyze heart rhythm data and determine if and when electric shocks are appropriate. There are several FDA-approved models on the market, and all of them provide voice and visual instructions to guide users through the process. While CPR/AED certification can be very helpful and make you feel more confident during an emergency, they are not required to use an AED.

How to get an AED

All fifty states require AEDs in certain public gathering places, though the specific regulations vary by jurisdiction. But even in spaces where AEDs are not required -- which often includes churches, private clubs, businesses, and residential areas -- they can still be installed and used to provide lifesaving assistance.

FDA-approved AEDs can be purchased through a number of manufacturers and organizations, and generally have a base cost between \$1,000 and \$3,000, plus extra for any accessories. Individuals can generally purchase devices with pre-tax HSA dollars, and businesses can write off the cost as a business expense. Individuals, churches, nonprofit organizations and schools may also be able to fully or partially fund the purchase of AEDs with grants through a variety of charitable organizations and government programs.

If you purchase an AED individually or for an organization, make sure to account for maintenance costs. Prices and support can vary by vendor.

Break your phone addiction and improve your life

It's not exactly news that phones are addictive, or that they can distract you from your real-life responsibilities at work and at home.



According to **Becoming Minimalist**, most of us spend more than three hours on our phones each day, and pick up our phones about three minutes after we put them down. But you don't have to spend your life chained to the tiny box of distractions.

Try some of these strategies to reclaim your time, boost your productivity, and remind yourself what the real world has to offer.

* Detox for one day each week. Choose a day (a weekend probably works best), and just put it away. Do it every week, and you'll probably appreciate the day off.

* Track your usage for a month. The raw numbers might be shocking enough to convince you to do something else with your time. For example, does two hours of social media every day really enhance your life?

* Try the right app. It sounds counterintuitive, but there really is an app for this, too. Space, Flipd, Screentime and others can help you set limits and goals, block your access to distracting apps during the workday, and create incentives for you focus on the world around you.

* Put a hair elastic on your phone. It's a low-tech trick that can yield surprising results. A simple hair tie wrapped around your phone allows you to answer calls easily, but makes scrolling physically difficult -- and serves as a reminder not to do it.

Gemstones in February

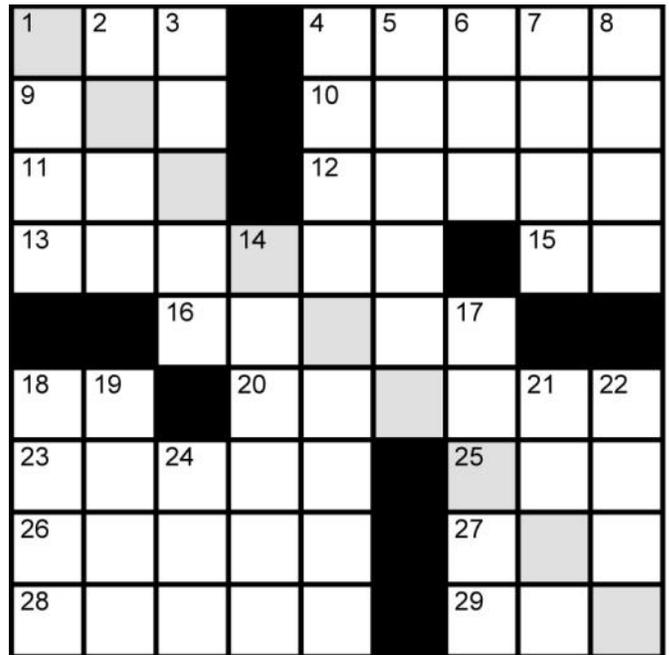
The headline is a clue to the answer in the diagonal.

Across

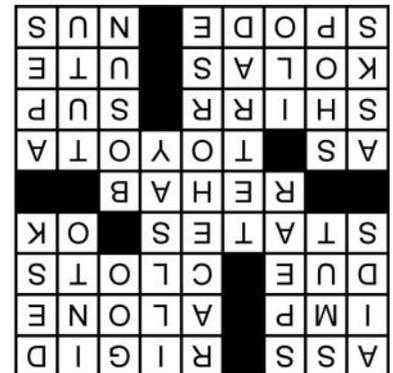
1. Biblical beast
4. Inflexible
9. Babysitter's handful
10. "Home ____"
11. Rightful
12. Artery problems
13. Expresses
15. Sooner St.
16. Get fit after injury
18. "Stubborn ____ a mule"
20. Corolla and Prius maker
23. Bake, as eggs
25. Dine
26. They're nuts
27. Colorado Indian
28. Some porcelain
29. Fraternity letters

Down

1. Boosts
2. Censor's target
3. Asparagus unit
4. Thoroughbred
5. "You got that right!"
6. Moo ____ gai pan
7. "What's gotten ____ you?"
8. Escritoire
14. Foursome
17. Petty-Officer on



- merchant ship
 18. Questions
 19. Boutique
 21. 1984 Nobelist
 22. "Planet of the ____"
 24. 1969 Peace Prize
 grp.



Your spouse might help heal your heart

One of your best assets in the fight against heart disease is the strength of a patient's marriage.

That's the conclusion of a recent Canadian Journal of Cardiology review of 12 trial programs. The review found that strong marriages and partnerships can improve heart health for those with heart disease. In fact, the study suggests, partners should be included in cardiac rehabilitation programs.

Writing in a press release for EurekaAlert, Heather E. Tullock said that 77 percent of the trials reviewed showed improvements in health behavior. Spouses were seen as keys to recovery since they tended to encourage heart healthy meals, regular physical activity, and proper use of medications.

The trial programs reviewed in the study were couples-based programs that involved both patient and spouse in recovery and lifestyle changes.



Early Top Safety Picks for 2026 Cars

The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) awards Top Safety Pick (TSP) and the higher Top Safety Pick+ (TSP+) designations to vehicles that excel in crashworthiness, crash avoidance, and other tests.

These awards apply to the 2025 criteria but include some 2026 model year vehicles tested early.

As of December 2025, the following 2026 models have qualified. Testing is ongoing, and more may be added. Some awards apply only to vehicles built after specific dates due to mid-year updates:

Top Safety Pick+ (highest award)

Audi A5 (all-new sedan)

Audi Q6 Sportback e-tron (electric SUV)

BMW X3 (midsize SUV; built after April 2025)

Ford Explorer (midsize SUV; 2025-2026 models)

Hyundai Ioniq 9 (large electric SUV)

Kia Sportage (small SUV; built after May 2025)

Top Safety Pick (strong performers, one tier below +)

Hyundai Palisade (large SUV)

Hyundai Santa Cruz (small pickup)

Nissan Rogue (small SUV)

Toyota Corolla Cross (small SUV)

For the latest full list and details (including build-date caveats), check the official IIHS site at [iihs.org](https://www.iihs.org)

No Tax on Social Security: How it will affect you

If you're like millions of retirees relying on Social Security, you've probably worried about taxes eating into your monthly check, especially if you are working part time to supplement your income.

But in 2026, President Trump's "One Big Beautiful Bill Act" delivers major relief through the No Tax on Social Security initiative.

Before this change, if your income from pensions, investments, or part-time work was above certain limits (around \$25,000 single or \$32,000 married), up to 85 percent of your benefits could be taxed. Many seniors paid hundreds or thousands extra each year, according to [kiplinger.com](https://www.kiplinger.com)

Now, a new \$6,000 extra tax deduction for those 65 and older (on top of the standard deduction) wipes out taxes on benefits for most folks. It's not a complete end to the old rules, but it works like "no tax" for everyday retirees.

How many does this help? Official estimates show about 88–90 percent of Social Security recipients—over 51 million seniors—will pay zero federal taxes on their benefits.

Higher-income seniors (about 12 percent) may still owe some, but for average retirees, it's real relief. This started with 2025 taxes—check with the IRS or your tax preparer to see your savings.

Groundhog Day: Check Phil's Weather Prediction!

On February 2, Punxsutawney Phil, Pennsylvania's groundhog extraordinaire, will again stick his head out of his den. The nation awaits his verdict.

Groundhog Day is said to have its origins in ancient weather lore where the prognosticator was often a badger or a sacred bear. In the United States, its origin is said to come from a Pennsylvania German custom.

If Phil, peeking from his burrow, fails to see his shadow, winter will soon be over. If the sun happens to be shining and Phil sees his shadow, winter will continue for six more weeks.

The first trek to meet with Phil began in 1887. He has been emerging from his burrow in Pennsylvania ever since, always eager to greet his public.

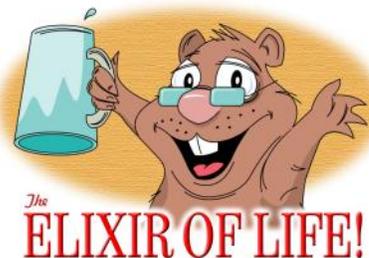
Phil is private in many ways, but a few rumors have circulated about him.

*He gets his longevity from drinking the "elixir of life" of which he takes one sip every summer during the Groundhog Picnic. This gives him seven more years of life.

* It is said he is named after King Philip, a famous Native American leader. In his more plebeian days, he was called Br'er Groundhog.

* He speaks only in Groundhogese, which luckily is a language understood by the President of the Inner Circle. The Inner Circle provides for Phil during the year, rather like a court provides for its king.

The city of Punxsutawney offers several days of celebration for those who gather from around the world to hear Phil's proclamation. The city offers food, music, carriage rides, magicians, crafts and games.



Health in the News

Merck updates cancer drug

The versatile cancer drug Keytruda is now available as an injectable formula, thanks in part to research conducted aboard the International Space Station. According to NASA, Merck Research Labs has flown crystal growth experiments to the space station for over a decade to support its efforts to develop drug formulations that dissolve in liquid. The new injection takes about one minute every three weeks to administer. Intravenous Keytruda required at least 30 minutes every three weeks.

Gum disease linked to arterial buildup

The American Heart Association (AHA) released a new scientific statement highlighting the potential link between oral health and cardiovascular outcomes. According to the AHA journal *Circulation*, new data suggests that periodontal disease may contribute to atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease. More than 40 percent of U.S. adults over age 30 have periodontal disease.

Medication may control hypertension

An experimental oral medication for hard-to-treat hypertension is one step closer to approval. Drugmaker AstraZeneca released new data from clinical trials that showed significant reductions in average nighttime blood pressure readings among trial participants. High night blood pressure is linked with increased risk of heart attack and stroke.

Black Beans and Rice

Calories

363 Per Serving

Protein

10g Per Serving

Fiber

7g Per Serving



Ingredients

2 cups uncooked instant brown rice
 ¼ cup fresh lime juice (about 2 medium limes)
 2 teaspoons olive oil (extra-virgin preferred) and 2 tablespoons olive oil (extra-virgin preferred), divided use
 1/2 teaspoon salt
 1 medium onion, finely chopped
 2 medium garlic cloves, minced OR
 1 teaspoon jarred minced garlic
 2 teaspoons ground cumin
 1 teaspoon chili powder
 1 15-ounce can no-salt-added black beans, rinsed and drained
 2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh cilantro (optional)
 2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh oregano (optional)

Recipe borrowed from <https://recipes.heart.org/recipes/black-beans-and-rice>

Directions

Prepare the rice using the package directions, omitting the salt and margarine. Meanwhile, in a small bowl, whisk together the lime juice, 2 teaspoons oil and salt. Set aside. Heat the remaining 2 tablespoons oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat, swirling to coat the bottom. Cook the onion for 3 minutes, or until soft, stirring frequently. Stir in the garlic. Cook for 1 minute, stirring frequently. Stir in the cumin and chili powder. Cook for 1 minute, stirring frequently. Stir in the beans. Cook until warmed through. Remove from the heat. Transfer to a large serving bowl. Stir in the cooked rice, lime juice mixture, cilantro and oregano.

