Mended Hearts® of Atlanta

The Aorta Reporter



November

NEWSLETTER

To find a good plan, compare the total



The cheapest Medicare plan on paper is often not the cheapest plan to live with. The premium is one number among several.

Three checks matter. You can do them yourself, or ask your agent or a free state Medicare counselor for help.

Start with the drug list. Every Medicare Advantage and Part D plan publishes a formulary, and it can change every January. A medication covered this year may be dropped, moved to a costlier tier, or made subject to prior authorization. The Plan Finder at medicare.gov accepts a list of prescriptions and returns each plan's projected cost for the year, which is the number worth comparing.

Next, the pharmacy. Plans sort pharmacies into preferred and standard networks, and the same prescription can cost noticeably more at a standard pharmacy. A plan that looks cheap can turn expensive at the drugstore across the street.

Then the doctors. Medicare Advantage plans work through networks, and networks are rebuilt every year. A physician in the plan this year may be out of it in January, and confirming that means calling the plan or the office rather than trusting a printed directory.

Every state runs a free counseling service, the State Health Insurance Assistance Program, whose counselors work on no commission and sell nothing.

The plan must receive an enrollment request by December 7. That's a hard deadline.



Route 66 established 1926

Route 66 became iconic for moving hundreds of thousands of people west, especially those seeking opportunity during the Depression and the Dust Bowl. The route ran across the country from Chicago to Santa Monica, California, and was one of the first fully paved cross-country roads.

By the 1950s, a network of small towns, diners, roadside attractions, and motels had grown up along its 2,400 miles. Author John Steinbeck called it "The Mother Road" in his 1939 novel The Grapes of Wrath.



Last year's flu missed a new strain; this year we're ready

Last season's flu shot was made too early. Every winter, experts pick the strains for shots that will not go into anyone's arm until fall. For last season, the U.S. picks were made in March 2025. The H3N2 virus that drove the 2025-26 season, a variant called subclade K, was not identified until June, months after the decision had been locked.

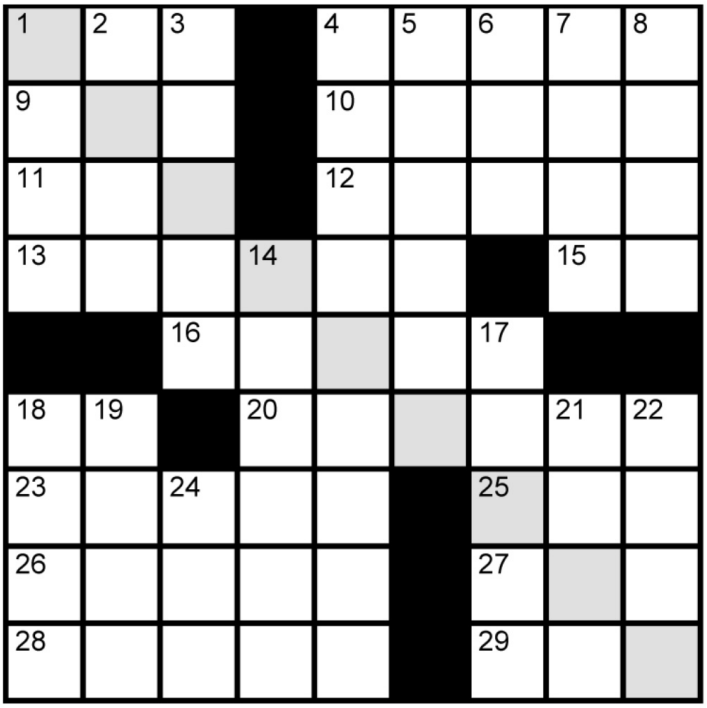
It spread fast. About 93 percent of the H3N2 samples analyzed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention last season turned out to be subclade K, and flu hospitalizations reached the third-highest rate since the 2010-11 season. For children under 18, it was the second-highest.

That is what makes this year different. According to CDC, all three components of the 2026-27 vaccin were updated, including a change to protect against subclade K. Last year, only the H3N2 component changed.

CDC recommends getting the shot in September or October and advises most adults against July or August, because protection fades over the course of a long season. If you have not gone yet, you are not late. Flu activity usually peaks between December and February.

Antibodies take about two weeks to build. A shot by mid-November is working by Thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving Guest

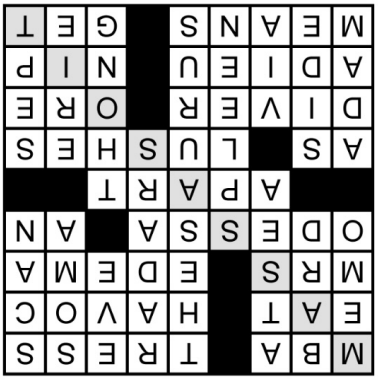


Across

1. Wharton grad
4. Long lock
9. "Dig in!"
10. Devastation
11. "___ Doubtfire"
12. Swelling
13. Texas oil city
15. Indefinite article
16. Not together
18. "___ You Like It"
20. Boozers
23. Type of scallop
25. Neighbor of Wash.
26. "Farewell, mon ami"
27. Chill
28. Stands for
29. Acquire

Down

1. Exec's note
2. Poet
3. Bewildered
4. Synonym finder
5. Navigation aid
6. "The Three Faces of ___"
7. Body
8. Diagnostic test
14. Ire
17. Flip-flop
18. Sandler of "Big Daddy"
19. Pro or con
21. Cleveland's lake
22. Aug. follower
24. By way of



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



"Pay attention as the menu has changed..."

A new reason to take the phone on the dog walk

The flamboyant cardinal is a loudmouth and the tiny Carolina wren is a boisterous chatterbox.

You'll start to recognize all the resident birds -- and occasionally a stranger on the wing -- in your neighborhood with the magical Merlin Bird ID, a free app from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.



Merlin is a breakthrough for both serious bird watchers and for people just strolling through a park. It includes a feature called Sound ID that listens through the phone's microphone and names the birds singing around you as they sing. Even when there is a chaos of birds in the park, the app can often identify separate songs. You don't even need a cell signal to discover the birds around you.

Sound ID covers 2,066 species. That number goes up twice a year, on recordings made by people holding up their phones on their own walks.

Here's what causes stiff muscles

Sit in your favorite chair for two hours, and standing feels like you are pulling up an anchor.

Blame sugar molecules in the bloodstream. They latch onto collagen and form glycation byproducts, according to the Journal of Applied Physiology. These byproducts act like tiny welds, cross-linking the collagen fibers that wrap every muscle. Welded collagen does not glide. It resists, so you feel stiff. The effect builds over decades, and it runs faster when blood sugar stays high for years, as in poorly controlled diabetes. A dessert here and there isn't the problem.

Stiffness in the hands, shoulders and legs isn't always the same problem as arthritis. The joints may be fine. It is the muscle and the connective tissue around it that have lost their give.

Sitting makes it worse fast. Sitting holds the hip and leg muscles in a shortened position, slows circulation and lets tissue settle.

Movement usually does loosen things -- but not always. Stiffness that does not ease, or morning stiffness in the shoulders and hips that drags on past 45 minutes, can point to polymyalgia rheumatica, an underactive thyroid or a reaction to statin drugs, according to the Cleveland Clinic.

This year's Medicare handbook comes without the prices



The Medicare & You handbook for 2027 is arriving in mailboxes now, and the numbers most people turn to first are not in it. According to the handbook itself, the 2027 premiums, drug costs and income limits were not available when it went to print. The figures inside are for 2026.

Some of what changes on January 1 is already known. The deductible for drug coverage can be as high as $700 in 2027, up from $615, according to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. The yearly cap on out-of-pocket spending for covered drugs rises to $2,400, from $2,100.

Premiums for stand-alone drug plans may climb faster than usual. For two years, a temporary federal program paid those plans extra to hold premiums down. CMS ended it after 2026 to return the program to what it calls traditional market conditions.

Some prices fall. Medicare negotiated lower prices on 15 drugs, effective January 1, among them Ozempic, Wegovy, Trelegy Ellipta, Breo Ellipta, Janumet and Linzess. What Medicare pays for a month of Ozempic drops from a list price of $959 to $274. What a patient pays still depends on the plan, but CMS estimates the new prices will save people on Medicare $685 million out of pocket in 2027.

The handbook does carry news of its own. Telehealth visits stay covered through December 31, 2027, and the Diabetes Prevention Program now offers online and self-paced versions.

Medicare is also using artificial intelligence to catch improper payments early, and it still asks for help from the people it covers. Every Medicare Summary Notice lists each service billed in the patient's name. A charge for a visit that never happened is the first thing to look for.

Health advice that sold America on red wine has been withdrawn



On a Sunday night in November 1991, the CBS program 60 Minutes told a national audience that the French ate rich food, smoked more and exercised less than Americans, and still had less heart disease. It pointed to red wine as the reason. Red wine sales in the United States jumped nearly 40 percent the following year, according to Wine Spectator. Thirty-five years later, 6 percent of Americans say moderate drinking is good for your health.

The figure is from Gallup's Consumption Habits survey, taken July 1-19. When Gallup first asked the question in 2001, 22 percent called a drink or two a day good for you and 27 percent called it bad. Today it is 6 percent good and 51 percent bad, only the second year a majority has taken that view.

The opinion followed the research rather than the other way around. The International Agency for Research on Cancer placed alcohol in its Group 1 carcinogen category decades ago, alongside tobacco and asbestos. In January 2023 the World Health Organization published a statement in The Lancet Public Health concluding that no amount of alcohol is safe. Two years later, a U.S. surgeon general's advisory tied alcohol to seven types of cancer and recommended that bottles carry a warning label.

Readers have been paying attention. Gallup found that 86 percent of Americans have heard at least something about recent studies on alcohol's long-term effects, up from 79 percent in 2024. The share of adults who drink at all now stands at 54 percent, the lowest reading since Gallup began asking in 1939 and unchanged from last year.

Beer still holds a narrow lead as the drink Americans reach for most often, at 36 percent, with liquor at 32 percent and wine at 30 percent. Among drinkers 55 and older, wine is still the favorite.

Skillet Ham Hash

Calories
205 Per Serving
Protein
9g Per Serving
Fiber
5g Per Serving



Ingredients

2 teaspoons olive oil
1 large green bell pepper, diced
1 large red bell pepper, diced
1 medium onion, diced
1/2 cup uncured lower-sodium, low-fat, diced ham (about 4 ounces), all visible fat discarded
3 cups frozen fat-free southern-style diced hash brown potatoes, thawed
1/2 teaspoon salt-free Cajun or Creole seasoning blend
2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon pepper

Directions

1.In a large nonstick skillet, heat the oil over medium heat, swirling to coat the bottom. Cook the bell peppers and onion for 4 to 5 minutes, or until the onion is soft and the bell pepper is tender, stirring occasionally. Stir in the ham. Cook for 1 to 2 minutes, or until heated through, stirring occasionally.

2. Stir in the hash browns and seasoning blend. Cook without stirring for 4 minutes, or until the bottom is golden brown. Stir (the golden-brown pieces will be redistributed). Cook without stirring for 4 minutes, or until the bottom is golden brown and the mixture is heated through.

3. Stir in the parsley, salt, and pepper.

Recipe borrowed from https://recipes.heart.org/en/recipes/skillet-ham-hash

Humor the Best Medicine

Mended Hearts® of Atlanta

As I handed my Dad his 50th birthday card, he looked at me with tears in his eyes and said: "Y'know, one would have been enough."

I showed my therapist the notes you sent me. Now she wants to talk to you as well.

I thought getting older would take longer.

Customer: I'd like to buy a bagel with cream cheese.
Me: Sorry, we only take cash
Manager: Can I talk to you?

I told my nephew a watermelon was gonna grow in his stomach because he ate some of the seeds and I kid you not, he looked me straight in the eyes and said "nope because there's no sunlight so you're wrong and college has failed you" He's 7.

"Right now, I'm having amnesia and déjà vu at the same time. I think I've forgotten this before."

I told a joke in a zoom meeting and nobody laughed. I guess I'm not remotely funny.

A man goes to a funeral and asks the widow: Mind if I say a word?" She says: "Please do." The man clears his throat and says: "Bargain."
The widow replies: "Thanks that means a great deal."

What's the difference between a kleptomaniac and a literalist?
The literalist takes things literally.
The kleptomaniac takes things, literally.

November 2026

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10 HF Support group Meeting 5 PM ET	11	12	13	14
15	16	17 Transplant Support Group Meeting 4 PM ET	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					

The Mended Hearts, Inc.

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MEMBERSHIP FORM

DATE_____

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Name (Mr. /Mrs./Ms.) _____ Chapter/Group_____ National Member _____

Address _____ Phone _____

City / ST / Zip _____ I want to be a support volunteer: ☐ Yes ☐ No

Email address _____ I am interested in CHD Parent Matching: ☐ Yes ☐ No

(Please check all that apply) I am a ☐ Heart Patient ☐ Caregiver ☐ CHD Parent ☐ Physician ☐ RN ☐ Healthcare Employee

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_____
Spouse ___ Child ___ Heart Patient ____

_____
Spouse ___ Child ___ Heart Patient ____

_____
Spouse ___ Child ___ Heart Patient ____

_____
Spouse ___ Child ___ Heart Patient ____

ALL Donations are tax deductible

PAYMENT INFORMATION: **ADDITIONAL CHAPTER/GROUP DONATION:** _____

Membership Level_____ $ _____ Chapter/Group Name:_____

Additional tax-deductible Donation to:
☐ Mended Hearts ☐ Mended *Little* Hearts
☐ Young Mended Hearts $_____ Amount: $_____

TOTAL TO NATIONAL **$** _____ **TOTAL TO CHAPTER $** _____

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