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NEWSLETTER OF THE
CITY OF TACOMA

HealthVine

2024 Wellness Incentive Period

This wellness incentive period runs from Oct. 1, 2022 through Sept. 30, 2023.

Your goal is to earn **25,000 points** during the 12-month period. Participation in our voluntary program could save you hundreds of dollars on an annual basis.

As a reminder, there are [many activities](#) available for you to [earn points](#) and we have added a **Voucher** option for the 2024 incentive period. Here is how the voucher option works:

- Earn voucher points for participating in a community physical activity-related event during the program year (Oct. 1, 2022 and Sept. 30, 2023).
- You can receive up to six vouchers throughout the program year for participating in a 5k—9.99k and/or 10k+ event for 200 and 400 points each, respectively.
- Reach out to Wellness at wellness@cityoftacoma.org to share proof of participation in a community physical activity-related event and then you will be emailed a unique voucher code that you will redeem on [Virgin Pulse](#) under 'Rewards'.
- Don't forget that you can also earn points for the physical activity exerted during these events!

Haven't registered? Go to join.virginpulse.org/cityoftacoma to create an account. Do NOT include any leading zeros before your employee ID number.



Understanding High Blood Pressure

Nearly half of the adult population has high blood pressure. Uncontrolled high blood pressure raises this risk for heart disease and stroke, which are leading cause of death in the United States.

Here are five facts that you may not know about high blood pressure:

1. **Women and African Americans face unique risks when it comes to high blood pressure.** Women with high blood pressure who become pregnant are more likely to have [complications during pregnancy](#) than those with normal blood pressure. Some types of [birth control](#) can also [raise a woman's risk](#) for high blood pressure.
African American men and women have [higher rates of high blood pressure](#) than any other racial or ethnic group.
2. **High blood pressure usually doesn't have any symptoms.** High blood pressure is often called the "silent killer." Most people with high blood pressure don't have any symptoms. Even if you feel normal, it is a good idea to check your blood pressure regularly. This is especially true if you may be at an [increased risk](#).
3. **High blood pressure may be linked to dementia.** Recent studies show that high blood pressure is linked to a [higher risk for dementia](#), a loss of cognitive function. Timing seems to matter. Evidence suggests that having uncontrolled high blood pressure during [midlife \(ages 44 to 66\)](#) creates a higher risk for dementia later in life.
4. **Many people who have high blood pressure don't know it.** About [one in three](#) adults with high blood pressure are not being treated for it. So, ask your health care team what your blood pressure numbers mean and if they are too high.
5. **Young people can have high blood pressure, too.** Nearly [one in four](#) adults aged 20 to 44 have high blood pressure, which is the leading cause of stroke. Not surprisingly, stroke is on the rise among this age group and [experts suggest](#) that their increased risk for stroke is a direct result of the rising rates of obesity, high blood pressure, and type 2 diabetes—conditions that are preventable and treatable.

Source: [Center for Disease Control and Prevention](#)



Three Simple Hacks for Building Heart Healthy Habits

What's the takeaway from the previous article? It's never too early to start thinking about your blood pressure and taking steps to [manage your high blood pressure](#).

Healthy living is the best way to delay or avoid many heart and brain diseases. This means being active and fit, eating healthy, avoiding tobacco, taking care of your mental wellbeing and managing conditions that can put you at greater risk. But, making lifestyle changes can be difficult.

"Habits develop from what you do, rather than from your decisions, or what you think," explained Professor Wendy Wood, author of *Good Habits, Bad Habits*. "They're the way your mind naturally works to code your behavior. Wendy's research has identified three simple hacks for creating healthy habits.

Shape your context. Context refers to everything in the world surrounding you, except yourself. It includes the location you are in, the people you are with, the time of day, and even the actions you perform. So, just as professional chefs set up their kitchens before they start cooking by gathering implements and prepping food to make it easier to cook a meal, you can organize your context to make it easy to want and repeatedly do the same thing. For example, if you want to create a habit of having a healthy lunch break away from your desk each day, ask a buddy to share your lunch hour and prompt you to leave your desk, or go and eat at a place that offers healthy food. We often don't realize how much our actions are driven by our surroundings and the pressures on us — but our habits do.

Invest in repetition. Repeating an action increases its accessibility and salience, so that if you're in the same context again, that action quickly comes to mind. So, a habit will only build if you're consistent. It's not enough to do it a few times. In fact, studies suggest that it may take six to nine months to build a habit. This can mean that over time, there's a risk you may find the habit experience less rewarding. So keep habits for the things you really want to structure into your life, and for the things you want to experience and to appreciate each time.

Rev-up rewards. Context will smooth the way, and repetition will jump start the engine, but if you aren't getting even a minor reward for your efforts along the way, you won't get a habit to start operating on its own. To have a role in habit formation, rewards have to be bigger and better than what you would normally experience. Why? In the brain,



unexpected rewards spur the release of dopamine, stamping the details of the rewarding experience into memory, and making it more likely that you'll repeat the behavior. This creates a habit that energizes and invigorates you to pursue actions that have positive consequences, and meet your goals. So if you want to exercise more, and you hate going to the gym, you're not going to become a gym rat, unless you add something such as watching TV shows, or videos, or listening to podcasts while you're working out. If it's fun, then it's more likely to become a habit for you. And if you find your healthy habits still aren't going entirely to plan, Wendy suggests also experimenting with the following:

- **Stacking your habits:** Try introducing a habit by taking advantage of an existing habit to cue the new behavior. For example, if you have medication to take, you might put it next to your toothbrush, or next to your coffee maker so that you get the automatic cue each morning, "I brush my teeth, I take my meds," or "I make my coffee, I take my meds." This can be more successful than relying on recall, memory, and willpower.
- **Swapping your habits:** Take a habit that you already have, and replace it with something similar but more aligned with your goals. For example, if you want to avoid sugary sodas, try buying bottled water instead. The packaging is the same, it's purchased from the same place, and you carry and use it the same way. Because you already have a habit, it can be easy to swap one product for another and improve your health.

Source: [First Choice Health EAP](#)



Heart Healthy Journey Recommendation

You can earn 30 points per step and 150 points for finishing the Journey. You can complete up to 12 Journeys per program year.

Live Healthy: Blood Pressure

This Journey takes 17 days to complete. Let's take the mystery out of blood pressure. If you have high blood pressure (also called hypertension) or are at a risk, this is the place for you. There's a lot you can do to improve. All it takes is finding the healthy eating, activity and stress-less strategies that work best for you.