

WELLNESS

## In the News

Catch up on the latest **wellness-related developments** from the past month.

### American Heart Association Outlines New Steps to Support Heart Health

The American Heart Association (AHA) [released updated dietary guidance](#) outlining nine practical steps that can significantly improve heart health and overall well-being when followed consistently over time. Rather than promoting fad diets or strict rules, the new recommendations focus on sustainable eating patterns that fit real life.

Cardiovascular disease remains a leading cause of illness in the United States, and experts estimate that up to 80% of heart disease and stroke may be preventable through healthy lifestyle choices, including diet. Yet more than half of adults and children still follow unhealthy eating patterns, increasing risks for conditions like high blood pressure, obesity, diabetes and high cholesterol. The AHA's updated guidance aims to make heart-healthy eating more achievable for everyone.

The AHA recommends focusing on overall eating habits, not individual nutrients, using these nine evidence-based steps:

1. Balance calories with physical activity to maintain a healthy weight.
2. Eat a wide variety of fruits and vegetables.
3. Choose whole grains instead of refined grains.
4. Prioritize healthy protein sources, especially plant-based options like beans, lentils, nuts and seeds.
5. Replace saturated fats with unsaturated fats, such as those found in olive oil, avocados and nuts.
6. Limit ultra-processed foods, including packaged snacks and ready-made meals.
7. Reduce added sugars, particularly sugary drinks.
8. Lower sodium intake by watching for hidden salt in packaged foods.
9. Avoid starting alcohol or limit intake if you drink.

Nutrition experts emphasize that heart health is built through small, consistent changes, not perfection. Simple swaps can add up to meaningful health improvements over time. For personalized guidance, employees are encouraged to discuss nutrition recommendations with their healthcare provider that align with their individual health needs and goals.

## Medical Marijuana Reclassified as Less Dangerous

In partnership with the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the [U.S. Department of Justice reclassified licensed medical marijuana](#) as a less dangerous drug under federal law, marking one of the most significant federal cannabis policy changes in decades. The move shifts qualifying medical marijuana from Schedule I, a category reserved for drugs with no accepted medical use and high abuse potential, to Schedule III, which includes medications considered to have legitimate medical value and lower risk of dependence.

Importantly, this change does not legalize marijuana at the federal level for either medical or recreational use. State laws still determine whether marijuana is legal, and the federal government continues to prohibit cannabis that falls outside approved medical programs.

The reclassification primarily applies to marijuana products sold through state regulated medical marijuana programs. With this shift:

- Medical marijuana businesses may now deduct standard business expenses on federal taxes, a benefit previously unavailable.
- Medical researchers will face fewer federal barriers, making it easier to study cannabis and its potential medical uses.
- State medical marijuana programs in roughly 40 states gain greater federal recognition and regulatory clarity.

While the rescheduling represents a meaningful regulatory shift, it does not decriminalize marijuana, change most federal criminal penalties, automatically release people incarcerated for marijuana related offenses, or override state by state laws governing possession, use or sale. This change also does not affect employer drug free workplace policies, which remain in place and subject to company rules and applicable laws.

The agency will have a hearing, beginning June 29, 2026, intended to provide a timely and legally compliant pathway to evaluate broader changes to marijuana's status under federal law.

## Suicide Rates Have Declined Since the Launch of 988

According to a [new study](#) published in the Journal of the American Medical Association, suicide rates among teens and young adults declined in the two years following the launch of the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline in July 2022.

Researchers examined suicide deaths among people ages 15 to 34 from mid-2022 through the end of 2024. They found suicide deaths were about 11% lower than expected based on trends from prior years, equivalent to more than 4,300 fewer deaths nationwide during that period. While the study does not prove that 988 alone caused the decline, the data shows a strong connection between increased use of the crisis line and reduced suicide rates.

The study also found that states with the largest increases in calls, texts and chats to 988 saw even greater declines in suicide deaths. In those states, suicide rates among young people dropped by about 18%, compared with an 11% reduction in states where use of the hotline increased less. This pattern suggests that awareness and accessibility may play an important role in helping people get support when they need it most.

Experts say the impact of 988 goes beyond the hotline itself. Its launch was paired with significant federal investment, more than \$1.5 billion, to strengthen crisis response systems nationwide. That funding helped expand staffing, reduce wait times, and improve connections to local mental health services such as mobile crisis teams and walk in centers. Together, these changes may make it easier for individuals in distress to access timely help.

Mental health advocates describe the findings as a hopeful sign, especially after years of rising suicide rates among young people. They also emphasize that broader awareness of 988 remains essential, as

many people are still unaware that the service exists or that it is available 24/7 by phone, text or chat.

If you or someone you know is struggling, the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline offers free, confidential support at any time by calling or texting 988 or by chatting online at [988lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org).

Stay tuned for more wellness-related news and developments.