

# In Sound Health

## Sound Choices for Lifelong Hearing Health

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# Sound Choices for Lifelong Hearing Health

Getting older doesn't have to mean losing your hearing. While age-related hearing changes are common, significant hearing loss isn't a normal part of aging, and it can impact your safety, social life, and cognitive health. The good news? Most noise-related hearing loss can be prevented.

**Age-related hearing loss (presbycusis)** happens gradually for many people as they grow older and typically affects both ears equally, making it harder to hear higher-pitched sounds or follow conversations in noisy settings.

**Noise-induced hearing loss (NIHL)** is caused by loud sounds damaging the delicate structures of the inner ear. It can happen after a one-time exposure to an extremely loud noise, like an explosion, or gradually after years of listening to loud noises.

## Who's at Risk?

Noise-induced hearing loss can affect anyone, but you may be at higher risk if you:



Work in loud environments, like construction sites or factories



Regularly attend concerts or listen to music at high volumes



Use power tools or loud equipment at home



Participate in loud activities, like hunting or snowmobiling

## How to Protect Your Hearing

Noise-induced hearing loss is the only type of hearing loss that's completely preventable. Here's how to keep your ears safe:

- **Turn it down:** Keep personal audio devices at 60% volume or lower.
- **Use protection:** Wear earplugs or earmuffs during loud activities like concerts or yard work.
- **Create distance:** Step away from loud sound sources whenever possible.
- **Protect young ears:** Help children avoid loud environments and model good listening habits.

Protecting your hearing means protecting your quality of life. Taking precautions today can help you preserve cognitive function, reduce social isolation and improve your mental health.

## Signs of Hearing Loss

Early signs of hearing loss can be easy to miss. Pay attention if:

- Speech and other sounds seem muffled
- You have trouble hearing in noisy settings or over the phone
- You often ask others to repeat themselves
- You hear ringing or buzzing in your ears
- You need to turn up the TV or radio

If any of these sound familiar, schedule a hearing test. If you experience a sudden loss of hearing, especially in one ear, seek medical care right away.

Sources: [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov), [my.clevelandclinic.org](https://my.clevelandclinic.org), [nidcd.nih.gov](https://nidcd.nih.gov)

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## Winter Wellness Starts Here

As the days get shorter and the weather gets colder, winter can be a challenging time to stay focused on your well-being, both inside and out.

In this issue of *In Sound Health*, we're helping you stay on track through the winter with information on how to protect your hearing from noise-induced damage, boost your brain health with fun and challenging mental exercises, and find ways to stay active all winter long. Warm up your kitchen with a healthy Tuna Pasta Bake recipe, and get up to speed on important HRA updates and upcoming LiveWell Fit events.

No matter the weather, Sound Support programs are here to help you stay healthy, motivated, and connected all season long.

# Important Information About Your Medical Plan Preferred Provider Network

## What is Changing

The preferred provider network that you use for your plan is changing. This is the only change to your plan. Effective with any medical care services you receive starting on January 1, 2026, your preferred provider network will change from the current network, Aetna Choice POS II, to Premera's BlueCard PPO network. All services you receive January 1, 2026 and after will need to be provided by a Premera contracted provider, so you will want to verify that your provider is part of the Premera BlueCard PPO network in order for you to receive in-network benefits.

## How Will You Know if Your Provider is in the Premera Network?

You can contact your provider and ask them if they are in the Premera BlueCard PPO network or call the Trust Office claims customer service representatives at (800) 225-7620, option 2 then option 2. You can also visit [www.premera.com/shared-admin](http://www.premera.com/shared-admin) and click on "Find a Doctor". The network is preselected to BlueCard PPO.

Watch for additional information from the Trust and new Trust plan identification cards in December. If you have any questions, please call the Trust office at (800) 225-7620, option 2 then option 2.



## For PPO Participants

The preferred provider network for your plan is changing as of January 1, 2026 from Aetna Choice POS II to Premera's BlueCard PPO network.



# New HRA Changes Coming in 2026

The Sound Health & Wellness Trust has made changes to how you can earn funding for your Health Reimbursement Arrangement in 2026.

**!** In order to receive **any** HRA funding in 2027, you (and your eligible spouse) must complete your annual health assessment. That means, starting in 2026, the health related actions you take throughout the year will only count toward funding your HRA if you complete your health assessment by December 31, 2026. The good news – you can take your health assessment anytime throughout the year!

## Plus, there will be new ways to build your balance!

**Take care of your teeth:** Earn \$100-300 when you complete two dental preventive exams in 15 months (newly eligible participants will only have to get one visit to receive funding).

**Register for an account:** Earn \$100 when you register for Doctor On Demand for the first-time.

In total, the health related actions you take in 2026 can allow you to earn up to \$500 for employee-only coverage or \$1,000\* for family coverage, so start planning your HRA funding today.

*\*Final earned amount depends on the other Health Related Actions you perform in 2026. Must be HRA eligible on January 1, 2027.*



# Mind Matters: Strengthening Your Brain Health

Cognitive health — your ability to think, learn, and remember — is essential for living a full, independent life. Adopting healthy habits can keep your brain sharp and may reduce your risk of Alzheimer’s disease and related dementias.

Just like physical fitness, brain health depends on regular care and attention. Eating a balanced diet, exercising, getting quality sleep, and staying socially connected all support a strong mind. On top of these essentials, challenging your brain with new activities and experiences helps strengthen cognitive function and build long-term resilience.

## Exercise Your Brain

Your brain thrives on mental stimulation. Research shows that “brainy” activities may help strengthen connections between nerve cells and even encourage new cell growth — building neuroplasticity, your brain’s ability to adapt and stay resilient over time.

## Do the Right Activity

To get the most from brain training, follow these three simple guidelines:



**CHALLENGE:** Push your brain by trying something new or raising the bar on a familiar hobby. Even improving skills in an existing activity — like improving your score on Wordle or a video game — counts.



**COMPLEXITY:** Choose activities that engage multiple thought processes, like strategy games, crafts, or learning choreography.



**PRACTICE:** Regular practice strengthens memory, focus, and overall brain function. The more you engage, the more your brain benefits.

By staying curious, learning new things, and keeping your body and mind active, you can strengthen your brain’s resilience and protect your cognitive health for years to come. It’s never too late, or too early, to start giving your brain the workout it deserves.

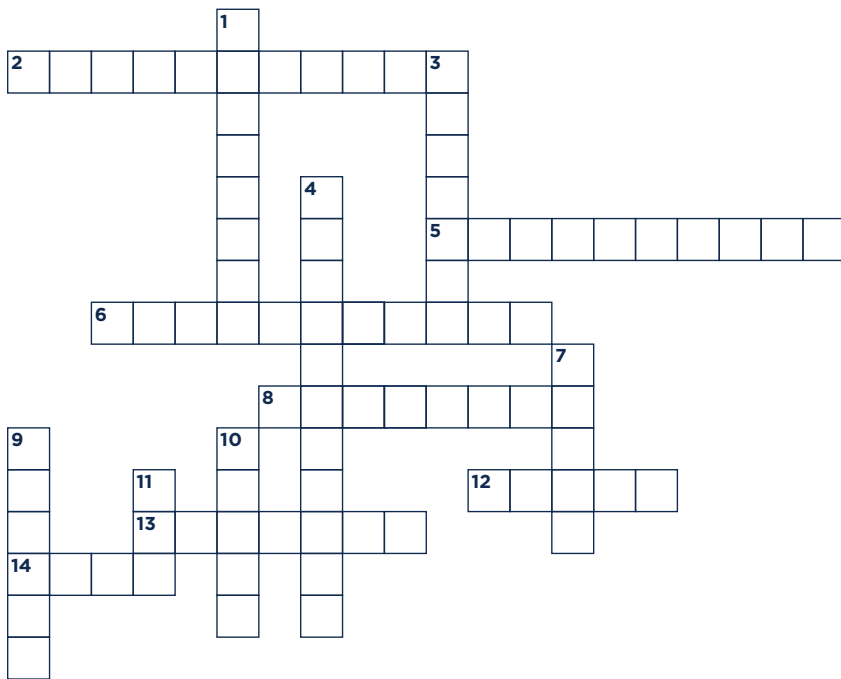
## Try These Brain-Boosting Habits

- **Challenge yourself:** Try crossword puzzles, word games, sudoku, jigsaw puzzles, or strategy games like chess or checkers.
- **Learn something new:** Take a class, learn a new language, or practice a musical instrument to activate new parts of your brain.
- **Get creative:** Engage in hands-on hobbies like painting, woodworking, drawing, knitting, photography, or dancing. Activities that combine physical and mental coordination can be especially beneficial.
- **Listen and visualize:** Music can boost mood and cognition, while visualization — forming detailed mental images — can help with organization, memory, and decision-making.
- **Play mind-training games:** Certain apps and games designed for memory and focus can help keep your thinking sharp.

Source: [health.harvard.edu](https://www.health.harvard.edu)

# Train Your Brain

Try these simple brain exercises to boost memory, focus, and creativity!



## Across

- 2. Active events reimbursed by the Trust
- 5. Common brain injury
- 6. Can be avoided through ear protection
- 8. Risk of this is reduced by training your brain
- 12. Something that damages hearing
- 13. LiveWell Fit event activity
- 14. Key ingredient in this edition's recipe

## Down

- 1. Holiday month
- 3. A Trust program can help you quit this
- 4. An antioxidant-packed holiday treat
- 7. Optional garnish for this edition's recipe
- 9. New way to fund your HRA in 2026
- 10. Weight loss program offered by the Trust
- 11. Reduce your deductible with this

# Sound Support Word Scramble

Unscramble these jumbled-up Trust programs!

EEVILLWL IFT    □□□○□□□□    □○□

WNROD    □□○□□

UAAGNDI SRSNEU    ○□□□□○□□    ○□□□□□

RCOODT ON MANDED    □□○□□□    □□    ○□□□□○□

UQTI OCBTOAC    ○○□□    □○□□○□□

○○○○    ○○○○○○○○○



## Healthy Tuna Pasta Bake

This healthy tuna noodle casserole is packed with protein and vegetables for a quick, nutritious dinner. **Serves: 6**

### INGREDIENTS

- 3 cups small whole wheat pasta shape, dry
- 2 tbsp olive oil (divided)
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- Optional: 1 small onion, diced
- 1 large bell pepper, cored and chopped
- 1 cup carrots, chopped (approx. 2-4 carrots)
- 8 large green olives, chopped (approx. 1/2 cup)
- 2 cups baby spinach
- 4 cans tuna, packed in water, drained
- 2 cups tomato sauce
- 1 cup light cheddar cheese, shredded

### PREPARATION

1. Preheat oven to 400F.
2. Boil a pot of water, cook pasta according to package instructions, and drain.
3. Heat 1 tbsp olive oil in large pan over medium heat. Sauté garlic (and onion if using) for 2 minutes, until fragrant and lightly browned.
4. Add bell peppers, carrots, and olives. Cook for 5-7 minutes, stirring frequently.
5. Stir in spinach until wilted, about 2 minutes. Then, stir in canned tuna and tomato sauce. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Remove from heat.
6. Transfer cooked vegetable and tuna mixture to a large baking dish. Add pasta and remaining 1 tbsp of olive oil, and stir until well-combined.
7. Spread pasta mixture in an even layer in the baking dish. Sprinkle cheddar cheese over top of everything in an even layer.
8. Transfer baking dish to the oven. Bake for 15 minutes, until cheese is melted and slightly browned.
9. Remove from oven and serve hot!

### NUTRITIONAL INFORMATION

Serving size: 3/4 cup

**Calories: 407**

**Fiber: 5.5 g**

**Protein: 39 g**

**Fat: 12.3 g**

**Carbs: 35.5 g**

Source: modified from [walderwellness.com](http://walderwellness.com)



# Staying Active in the Winter Months

When winter's chill sets in, it's easy to trade workouts for warm blankets, but keeping your body moving is one of the best ways to beat the winter blues. Staying active helps improve mood, boost immunity, and combat seasonal fatigue. Here are some practical ways to stay active and motivated this winter:



## Set realistic goals

Instead of aiming for long workouts, focus on short, consistent bursts of movement. Even 20–30 minutes of daily activity such as stretching, walking, or a quick home workout can help keep your energy up and maintain momentum.



## Get outside whenever possible

Sunlight exposure helps regulate your mood and sleep cycle. If weather permits, bundle up for a brisk walk. Fresh air and daylight can make a big difference for your mental health as well.



## Create a motivating space

Keep your workout gear visible and ready to use. Whether it's a yoga mat in the living room or gym shoes in your car, small visual cues can serve as daily reminders to stay active.



## Find what feels good

Winter is a great time to explore new types of movement. Try an indoor yoga class, follow an online fitness video, or sign up for a local recreation program. When you enjoy what you're doing, you're more likely to stick with it.



## Stay connected

Joining a group class, participating in a fitness challenge, or checking in with a friend can keep you accountable. Sharing your goals and celebrating small wins with others can make exercise more enjoyable and help you stay on track. LiveWell Fit events are a great way to be active with friends while earning HRA funding.




## Listen to your body


On some days, you may need rest. Balance your physical activity with recovery, hydration, and proper nutrition to maintain overall health and avoid burnout.


Staying active during winter doesn't have to mean sticking to a rigid routine. By setting small goals, finding movement you enjoy, and embracing the season, you can support your well-being and emerge from winter feeling stronger, energized, and ready for the months ahead.


# Festive Treats with a Healthy Twist

Sweet treats are a vital part of the holiday season, but you can enjoy them in healthier ways. Here are some nutrient-rich options that still feel festive:

 Roasted sweet potatoes are naturally sweet and high in fiber.

 Cranberry sauce is packed with antioxidants and is extra healthy when made with less sugar.

 Dark chocolate has antioxidants and is a good source of fiber and minerals.

 Nuts and seeds provide protein and healthy fats.



## CROSSWORD ANSWERS

### Across

2. LIVEWELLFIT
5. CONCUSSION
6. HEARINGLOSS
8. DEMENTIA
12. NOISE
13. RUNNING
14. TUNA

### Down

1. DECEMBER
3. TOBACCO
4. CRANBERRIES
7. BASIL
9. DENTAL
10. WONDR
11. HRA

## WORD SCRAMBLE ANSWERS

- LIVEWELL FIT  
 WONDR  
 GUARDIAN NURSES  
 DOCTOR ON DEMAND  
 QUIT TOBACCO

# Important Numbers to Know

## PPO Plan Participants

Trust Office—Benefits, Eligibility, HRA	(206) 282-4500 or (800) 225-7620
Delta Dental PPO & Schedule Plan	(800) 554-1907
DeltaCare	(800) 650-1583
VSP (Vision Service Plan)	(800) 877-7195
WellDyneRx—for Prescription Coverage	(888) 479-2000
MCC Nurses—for Hospitalization/Health Conditions	(877) 362-9969 Option 2
MCC Nurses—for Behavioral Health	(206) 308-5632
Nurse Line	(877) 362-9969 Option 1
Health Coaching	(877) 362-9969 Option 3
Quit Tobacco Coaching	(877) 362-9969 Option 4
LiveWell Fit	(800) 225-7620 Option 2, then 5

## Kaiser Plan Participants

Trust Office—Eligibility, HRA	(206) 282-4500 or (800) 225-7620
Kaiser Permanente—Benefits, Claims Status	(888) 901-4636
Delta Dental PPO & Schedule Plan	(800) 554-1907
DeltaCare	(800) 650-1583
WellDyneRx—for Prescription Coverage	(800) 373-1568
Consulting Nurse Helpline	(800) 297-6877
Quit for Life® Tobacco Cessation	(800) 462-5327
LiveWell Fit	(800) 225-7620 Option 2, then 5
Chronic Conditions Workshops	(800) 992-2279

## PRIVACY POLICY

Your health information is completely confidential, protected by federal law, and cannot be shared with your union or your employer without your permission.

All Trust programs are provided and managed by independent service providers contracted by the Trust. The information on your health status and conditions, your medical and prescription drug claims, and the information you may provide when participating is only used to offer you programs that could help you meet your health and wellness goals.

***By law, your health information cannot be used to deny healthcare coverage.***



**SOUND HEALTH**  
& WELLNESS TRUST

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# Snow Much Motivation to Get Active

Winter's here — so bundle up, lace up, and make your fitness goals snowball!

Whether you're walking, running, or cycling, LiveWell Fit events are a great way to stay active and earn HRA funding. The Trust reimburses registration fees for up to four approved events per year, and when you bring an eligible Trust participant to their first event, you'll both be entered to win a \$300 VISA gift card.



 Earn funds for your HRA with LiveWell Fit. See the full list for details.

This newsletter provides a general overview of plan benefits. Please refer to your Plan Booklet for specifics about covered expenses as well as exclusions and limitations. The information in this publication is meant to complement the advice of your healthcare providers, not to replace it. Before making any major changes in your medications, diet, or exercise, talk to your doctor.

DATE	EVENT NAME & DESCRIPTION
<b>DECEMBER</b>	
13	Bellingham <b>Jingle Bell Run Bellingham</b> — 3.1 or 1 mile run/walk
13	Tacoma <b>Santa Runs Tacoma</b> — 13.1, 6.2 or 3.1 mile run/walk
13	Orting <b>Ugly Sweater 5k</b> — 3.1 mile run/walk
13	Maple Valley <b>Pigtails Run</b> — 31, 26.2 or 13.1 mile run/walk
13	Kent <b>Christmas Rush Fun Run/Walk</b> — 6.2 or 3.1 mile run/walk
14	Kirkland <b>12ks of Christmas</b> — 7.5 or 3.1 mile run/walk
14	Seattle <b>Jingle Bell Run Seattle</b> — 7.4, 3.1 or 1 mile run/walk and kids run
20	Seattle <b>Sleigh that 5k</b> — 3.1 mile run/walk
20	Everett <b>Holiday 5k, 10k &amp; Half Marathon</b> — 13.1, 6.2 or 3.1 mile run/walk
20	Seattle <b>Holiday Fun Run</b> — 9.3, 6.2 or 3.1 mile run/walk and kids run
20	Seattle <b>Seward Solstice Run</b> — 6.2 or 4.2 mile trail run/walk
27	Spokane <b>Holiday 5k, 10k &amp; Half Marathon</b> — 13.1, 6.2 or 3.1 mile run/walk
<b>JANUARY</b>	
1	Seattle <b>Resolution Run 5k &amp; Polar Bear Dive</b> — 3.1 mile run/walk and kids dash
1	Auburn <b>New Year's Day 5k &amp; 8k</b> — 4.97 or 3.1 mile run/walk
3	Seattle <b>New Year, New Me Run</b> — 13.1, 6.2 or 3.1 mile run/walk
3	Kenmore <b>Absolution Run</b> — 8 or 4 mile trail run/walk
10	Olympia <b>New Year 5k, 10k &amp; Half Marathon at Heritage Park</b> — 13.1, 6.2 or 3.1 mile run/walk
10	Lakewood <b>Ft. Steilacoom Resolution Run 5k &amp; 10k</b> — Ft. Steilacoom Resolution Run 5k & 10k