



SURVIVING THE STORM: THE DISASTER DEFENSE DIGEST

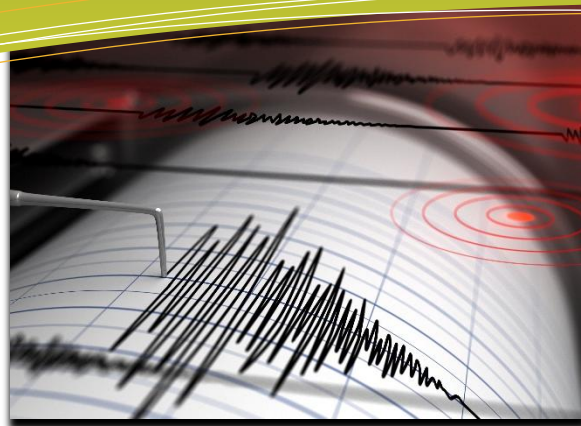
Monthly Safety Message:

Checking In With Ourselves

Our mental health affects how we think, feel, connect with others, and respond to everyday stress. Paying attention to mental health means noticing when something feels off and giving ourselves permission to slow down and ask for support.

Good mental health does not mean feeling happy all the time. It means having the tools to cope with challenges, manage stress, and recover after difficult moments. Simple practices like getting enough sleep, staying connected to others, spending time outdoors, and setting healthy boundaries can make a meaningful difference. So can talking openly with trusted friends, family, or professionals when life feels heavy.

When we talk about mental health openly and with compassion, we create safer spaces for people to seek help without fear or shame. Caring for mental health is an ongoing practice, one rooted in understanding, patience, and the reminder that no one has to navigate life's challenges alone.



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When Stillness Breaks: Understanding and Preparing for Earthquakes

February is Earthquake Awareness Month, which makes it the perfect time to pause, look around your space, and ask a simple question: if the ground started shaking right now, would I know what to do?

Earthquakes are one of those hazards that feel abstract until they are not. Unlike storms or wildfires, there is no warning siren or countdown. In many cases, the first sign is a low rumble or a sudden jolt, and then everything starts moving. In the United States, more than 45,000 earthquakes are recorded each year, and about 75 percent of the population lives in areas with some level of earthquake risk. Most quakes are small, but even moderate shaking can cause injuries if people are unprepared.

One of the most important facts to remember is that most earthquake injuries happen from falling objects, not collapsing buildings. Bookcases tip over. TVs slide off stands. Light fixtures drop. This is why preparedness starts with everyday actions, like securing heavy furniture to walls, moving breakables off high shelves, and knowing which spots in each room are safest. During shaking, the recommended action is still simple and effective: drop, cover, and hold on. Drop

to your hands and knees, cover your head and neck under sturdy furniture if possible, and hold on until the shaking stops.

Another reality people often underestimate is how long earthquakes last. While movies make them feel endless, most strong earthquakes last less than a minute. That minute, however, can feel very long if you are unsure what to do. Practicing your response ahead of time helps turn panic into muscle memory.

Preparedness also means planning for what comes after. Earthquakes can disrupt power, water, and cell service. In past major events, it has taken days or even weeks for full services to return. Having an emergency kit with water, non-perishable food, medications, flashlights, and a battery-powered radio can make a huge difference. A good rule of thumb is to plan for at least three days of self-sufficiency, though longer is even better.

February is a reminder that earthquakes are part of living on a dynamic planet. We cannot stop them, but we can respect them, prepare for them, and reduce the harm they cause. A little awareness now can mean a lot more safety later.

Quick Tip:

Simple Foods That Love Your Heart Back

Heart healthy eating is less about strict rules and more about choosing foods that naturally support your body. It focuses on building meals that feel satisfying, nourishing, and sustainable rather than restrictive or overwhelming. Fruits and vegetables sit at the center of a heart smart plate, providing fiber, vitamins, and antioxidants that help protect blood vessels, reduce inflammation, and support overall circulation. Adding a variety of colors ensures your body receives a wide range of nutrients that work together to support heart function.

Whole grains like oats, brown rice, and whole wheat bread play an important role by supporting healthy cholesterol levels and helping regulate blood sugar throughout the day. Lean proteins such as fish, beans, lentils, and skinless poultry give the heart what it needs to maintain muscle strength without adding excess saturated fat. Healthy fats matter too. Foods like avocados, nuts, seeds, and olive oil support circulation and help lower harmful cholesterol when used in moderation.

Heart healthy foods are not about deprivation. They are about nourishment, balance, and giving your heart steady fuel so it can keep working for you every day with strength and resilience.

Listening to the Beat: Why February Puts Heart Health in Focus

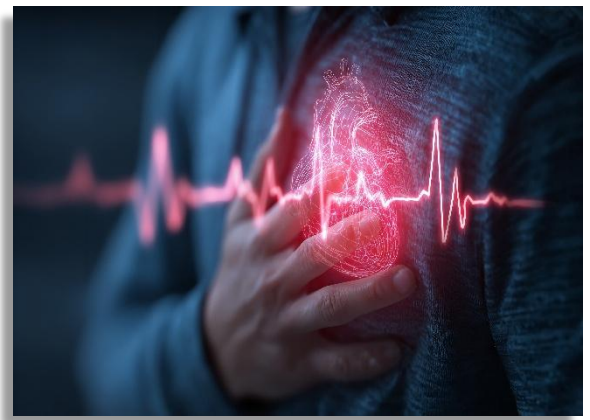
February may be known for colder days and Valentine's cards, but it also carries an important reminder that often gets overlooked. It is Heart Health Awareness Month, a time to pause and pay attention to the organ that quietly works for us every second of every day.

Heart health is not only about avoiding illness later in life. It is about how we feel right now. Energy levels, sleep quality, stress tolerance, and even mood are closely tied to how well our heart and circulatory system are functioning. The good news is that caring for your heart does not require drastic changes. Small, consistent habits make a meaningful difference over time.

One of the most powerful ways to support heart health is through movement. You do not need an intense workout routine to see benefits. Regular walking, stretching, swimming, dancing in your living room, or gardening all help keep blood flowing and strengthen the heart muscle. Even ten to twenty minutes a day can improve circulation and reduce strain on the heart. The key is consistency, not perfection.

What we eat also plays a major role. A heart healthy diet focuses on balance rather than restriction. Fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, and healthy fats like olive oil or nuts give the body what it needs to function efficiently. Reducing highly processed foods, excess salt, and added sugars helps lower blood pressure and cholesterol levels. Staying hydrated matters too, since proper fluid balance supports circulation and overall heart function.

Stress management is another essential but often underestimated part of heart health. Chronic stress can raise blood



pressure and increase inflammation in the body. Finding simple ways to slow down can protect your heart over time. Deep breathing, short breaks during the day, prayer, meditation, journaling, or spending time outdoors can help calm the nervous system. Connection matters as well. Talking with friends, family, or community members reduces isolation and supports emotional well-being, which directly affects heart health.

Sleep is another foundation. Poor or inconsistent sleep places added strain on the heart. Creating a calming bedtime routine, limiting screen time before bed, and aiming for regular sleep hours can improve both rest and cardiovascular health. Even small improvements in sleep quality can have lasting benefits.

Finally, paying attention to your body is an act of heart care. Regular checkups, knowing your blood pressure and cholesterol numbers, and listening when something feels off are all forms of prevention. Early awareness can prevent more serious problems down the road.

February is a reminder that heart health is not just a medical issue. It is a daily practice rooted in movement, nourishment, rest, and connection. When we care for our hearts, we are investing in more energy, more presence, and more time with the people and communities that matter most. Those small, intentional habits create a foundation for resilience, allowing us to show up fully for life, even during its most demanding seasons.

Winter Storm Prep: When the Path Grows Uncertain and Balance Matters

As the winter storms bring hazardous ice conditions to many areas, staying observant and moving with care is critical to reducing the risk of slips, trips, and falls. Winter ice events have a quiet way of changing familiar streets, routines, and expectations. One moment everything feels normal, the next, sidewalks shine like glass and roads become unpredictable. Staying safe during these events is not just about individual preparation, it is about looking out for one another and understanding how quickly conditions can shift.

The first rule of winter ice safety is awareness. Ice often blends into its surroundings, making danger hard to spot until it is already underfoot. Slowing down, watching where you step, and giving yourself extra time to travel can prevent many injuries. The same applies to driving. Reducing speed, increasing following distance, and avoiding sudden movements can make the difference between a close call and a serious incident.

Preparation before a winter ice event matters just as much. To avoid slips, trips, and falls keep walkways clear, apply sand or salt where possible, and check that outdoor lighting works so hazards are visible after dark. Inside the home, having essentials ready, warm clothing, plenty of food, flashlights, and a plan to check on neighbors can ease stress if conditions worsen and you experience a loss of power.

What truly strengthens safety during winter ice events is community awareness. When people communicate, share information, and look out for risky conditions, everyone stays safe. A quick heads up to a neighbor about a slick stairway or a blocked sidewalk can



prevent harm. Checking in on elders, families with children, or those who may feel unsure navigating winter ice conditions builds trust and resilience.

Togetherness also means knowing when to pause and when to use careful footing. During winter ice events, sticking to well-known routes, staying in well-lit areas, and avoiding unnecessary exposure helps reduce risk. Winter ice events remind us that safety is rarely a solo effort. When everyone stays alert, shares knowledge, and acts with care, hidden dangers lose their power.

As a community, staying calm, informed, and united allows everyone to weather ice events more safely. With shared attention and simple acts of care, we can protect one another and ensure that when the storm and ice passes, our community remains standing strong. Beyond physical hazards, winter ice events can also create confusion and fear when information is unclear, or people feel unsure about what is happening around them.

During winter ice events, clear communication passed through neighborhood groups, local alerts, or word of mouth helps calm uncertainty. Knowing where to take refuge if conditions worsen, and when to stay safely inside offers an added layer of winter readiness.

Finally, patience is one of the most important safety tools during a winter ice event. Rushing increases risk, while steady, thoughtful steps and choices protect both individuals and the wider community.

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