

# Women's Health Guide



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## How to Use this eGuide

This eGuide was designed to be read with Adobe Reader, which is a free program for all Mac and Windows computer users. You can download the latest version of Adobe Reader at <http://get.adobe.com/reader>. Guide functionality may vary depending on your reading device.

In addition to reading about your health, you can use this eGuide to:

- **Skip to specific topics.** Click on any section heading to skip to that topic.
- **Search for a specific topic.** On the menu, go to Edit>Find. Type in your search word, followed by the Return key. Search results will be highlighted. Continue to hit Return key to skip to the next result.
- **Look up unfamiliar words.** Use the cursor to highlight a word (for example, “diabetes”). On the menu, go to Edit>Look Up “diabetes.” Your internet browser will open to provide more information about this word.
- **Track your health information.** Places to enter your information appear in blue. Click on any blue field and begin typing. Use the Tab key to skip to the next field or the Return key if you are done. Don't forget to save your changes before you close the document.

Concerned about keeping your information private? Edit your security settings: On the menu, go to Edit>Protection>Security Settings.

- **Make note** of health questions or concerns about what you are reading. On the menu, go to View>Comment>Annotations. Choose Sticky Note. Click where you would like to insert a note and begin typing.
- **Learn more from internet resources.** Click on any web address to open that web page in your internet browser.
- **Hear the guide read aloud to you.** First, activate this feature. On the menu, go to View>Read Out Loud>Activate Read Out Loud. Then, go back to the same place in the menu to begin, pause, or end reading aloud.

# Women's Health Across the Lifespan



100th birthdays are no longer rare. On average, women now live to be 80 years old. We are learning how to take better care of ourselves. We try to prevent problems whenever we can.

Use the Women's Health Guide to help you learn about basic health topics. The "**Take Charge**" sections in the colored boxes can help you take an informed and active role in your health.

- Eat Right, Move More
- Resist Health Risks
- Be Emotionally Healthy
- Get Checkups and Keep Records
- Control Chronic Conditions
- Be Involved in Your Health Care
- Maintain Sexual Health
- Stay Informed

When it comes to living healthy, it really comes down to how you treat yourself. Create a healthy habit, one change at a time. Your efforts will be rewarded as you feel better, look better, and live better!

# Eat Right, Move More

## NUTRITION BASICS

The food choices we make each day affect us today and for years to come. A young girl who drinks colas instead of milk may later develop weak bones. A poor diet during pregnancy may result in a baby with a low birth weight. What a woman eats during all stages of her life can affect how long and how well she lives.

Nutrition is how our body uses food. There are six kinds of nutrients in food. We need all of these nutrients, some more than others.

- Proteins
- Carbohydrates
- Fats
- Vitamins
- Minerals
- Water

Eat healthy by including a variety of complex carbohydrates and fiber in your daily diet. Whole grains, fruits, vegetables, nuts, dry beans and peas are all good sources of nutrition.



Nutrient	Function	Sources of nutrient	% of your total calories
Carbohydrates Sugars Starches Fiber	Quick and long lasting energy  Source of vitamins and minerals	Whole grain foods  Vegetables  Fruits	50%
Proteins	Build, repair, replace body cells  Form antibodies that fight disease and infection	Meat, poultry, fish  Milk, cheese, eggs  Beans, soybeans, lentils, nuts, seeds	15%-30%
Fats  Saturated        Unsaturated	Give energy  Store vitamins  Form hormones	Whole milk, butter, cheese, ice cream      Olive oil, canola oil, margarine	Less than 10% Saturated Fat      Less than 30% Total Fat
Water	Carry nutrients to cells  Remove waste products	Water is the most important nutrient	8-10 glasses each day

## VITAMINS & MINERALS

Healthy food choices provide your best source of vitamins and minerals. Fruits, vegetables, and other plant foods contain many beneficial compounds. Recent studies tell us that supplements have not shown much benefit.<sup>1</sup> In fact, some vitamins can do harm if you take too much. As a rule, do not take more than the recommended daily value (DV).<sup>2</sup>

Our bodies need different nutrients at different times in our lives. **Calcium** is needed to keep bones healthy. If you do not build strong bones during childhood, you have an increased risk for bone breakage later in life. Calcium-rich foods such as low fat milk, yogurt, green leaf vegetables, and cheese will help you get enough calcium every day.

- under age 50: 1,000 mg calcium and 400-800 IU of vitamin D
- over age 50: 1,000 mg calcium and 800-1000 IU vitamin D<sup>3</sup>

Your body needs **Vitamin D** to use calcium. It may also play a part in preventing some diseases. Vitamin D comes from fortified foods, supplements, or the sunlight's reaction with the skin. Older women should eat foods fortified with **Vitamin B12** and with added Vitamin D.<sup>4</sup>

You also need **potassium** for healthy bones. You can find it in bananas, spinach, cantaloupe, and other fruits and vegetables.

All women who are or may become pregnant need to get 400 mcg. of **folic acid** every day. It reduces the chance of brain and spinal cord birth defects. If you are pregnant or breast feeding, you need other added nutrients for your growing baby.

### **Take Charge** <sup>4</sup>

- ✓ *Eat a variety of fruits, vegetables, and whole grain foods.*
- ✓ *Limit total fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol.*
- ✓ *Avoid trans fats.*
- ✓ *Eat at least 2 servings of fruit and 3 servings of vegetables each day.*
- ✓ *Choose and prepare foods with less salt. Consume less than 2,300 mg of salt per day.*
- ✓ *Drink alcohol in moderation, if at all.*
- ✓ *Drink 8-10 glasses of water each day.*
- ✓ *Limit soft drinks and sweets.*



## WEIGHT MATTERS

**Body Mass Index (BMI)**<sup>5</sup> is a way to find if you are at a healthy body weight. Find your height in the first column. Scan across to find your weight. The number on top is your BMI.

	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
5'0"	107	112	118	123	128	133	138	143	148	153
5'1"	111	116	122	127	132	137	143	148	153	158
5'2"	115	120	126	131	136	142	147	153	158	164
5'3"	118	124	130	135	141	146	152	158	163	169
5'4"	122	128	134	140	145	151	157	163	169	174
5'5"	126	132	138	144	150	156	162	168	174	180
5'6"	130	136	142	148	155	161	167	173	179	186
5'7"	134	140	146	153	159	166	172	178	185	191
5'8"	138	144	151	158	164	171	177	184	190	197
5'9"	142	149	155	162	169	176	182	189	196	203
5'10"	146	153	160	167	174	181	188	195	202	209
5'11"	150	157	165	172	179	186	193	200	208	215

**Healthy:** 19–24

**Overweight:** 25–29

**Obese:** 30+

## Obesity

Obesity is too much body fat. It is common in women because we eat too much and exercise too little. Medications, genes, health issues and others may also play a role. As our waistlines grow, so do our risks for developing heart disease, stroke, some cancers, and diabetes.

## Take Charge

- ✓ *Avoid fad diets and diet pills. They have side effects and do not work for long-term weight loss.*
- ✓ *Aim to lose 1/2 to 1 pound a week. Losing weight and keeping it off takes a long-term effort.*
- ✓ *Form good basic eating habits and limit portions. Boost your physical activity level to keep the pounds off.*
- ✓ *Note social, emotional, or stressful situations that cause you to overeat. Then find better ways to cope.*
- ✓ *Plan meals and snacks. Snacking on fruits and veggies can satisfy your hunger in a healthy way!*

## Eating Disorders

It is also dangerous to eat or weigh too little. Two serious eating disorders mainly affect teenage girls and young women. **Anorexia** is starving oneself. **Bulimia** is binge eating and then removing the food and fluid through forced vomiting and/or overuse of laxatives and enemas. These are serious problems that can lead to death if left untreated.



## Take Charge

- ✓ *Maintain a healthy weight.*
- ✓ *Seek both medical and psychological help. There is a strong mental/emotional drive linked to eating disorders.*
- ✓ *Call the National Association of Anorexia Nervosa helpline at 630-577-1330 for support groups and referrals.*

## EXERCISE BASICS

Benefits of regular physical activity:

- Helps keep bones strong
- Slows muscle loss as you age
- Reduces back pain and strain
- Improves your mood
- Increases energy
- Helps control stress
- Promotes weight control
- Strengthens muscles to improve balance and prevent falls
- Walking for 1–3 hours each week can reduce your risk of diabetes, thinning bones, hip fracture, and heart disease.<sup>6</sup>



Aerobic exercise is any activity that makes your heart beat faster and your breathing a little harder than when you are sitting still. This can improve your heart health.

Any physical activity is better than none!

### Take Charge

- ✓ *If you're just starting to exercise, begin slowly and check with your health care provider.*
- ✓ *Choose an activity you can do for 5–10 minutes without getting tired. Gradually increase the length of time.*
- ✓ *Aim for 30–60 minutes on most days of the week.*
- ✓ *Vary your activity. Include aerobic, stretching, strength training, and balance exercises.*
- ✓ *Choose activities that are easy and fun to do. They might include brisk walking, swimming, biking, or dancing.*
- ✓ *Ask a friend to join you to help you stick with your plan.*

# Resist Health Risks

## TOBACCO

Smoking is the single greatest cause of disease and death. Quitting will reduce your risks of developing many serious diseases including lung cancer, heart disease, stroke, and long-term breathing problems. Women who smoke are two to six times as likely to suffer a heart attack as non-smokers.

It doesn't matter how old you are or how long you have smoked. Quitting can improve the health of your lungs. Tobacco causes most cancers of the mouth, throat and esophagus. Tobacco users have a higher risk of cancers of the breast, cervix, urinary tract, kidney, and pancreas.

Women who smoke put their babies at serious risk of:

- Early birth
- Low birth weight
- Infant death

Parents who smoke also put their children's health in danger. Sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), ear infections, and asthma are more common in children in households where people smoke. Most teen smokers are from families with smokers.

### **Take Charge**

- ✓ *Join an organized program. Also talk to your health care provider about medicines that can help you quit.*
- ✓ *Avoid secondhand smoke.*
- ✓ *Contact the Smoking Quitline 1-800-QuitNow (784-8669).*
- ✓ *Stop smoking!*

## ALCOHOL

Alcohol presents a health challenge for women. One alcoholic drink per day (and no more) may lower your risk of heart disease. However, even one drink per day can raise the risk of breast cancer in some women. Drinking too much alcohol increases the risk of liver damage, heart-related problems, some forms of cancer, weak bones, high blood pressure, and stroke.

Pregnant women should not drink at all. Women who drink while pregnant put their babies at risk of fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS)—growth, mental, and physical birth defects.

### *Take Charge*

- ✓ *If you drink, do so in moderation.*
- ✓ *Women 65 and over should limit themselves to one drink per day—or less.*
- ✓ *Know how much alcohol is in one drink.*

## SEAT BELTS

Always use your seat belt to prevent death and disability. **Be a good example for your children.** The leading cause of fetal death is injury when a mother does not wear a seat belt.



## **PRESCRIPTION DRUGS AND OVER-THE-COUNTER (OTC) PRODUCTS**

Overuse of some prescription pain relievers can be very dangerous. Death and abuse problems can result from taking these drugs incorrectly. Discuss the use of these medicines and their risks with your health care provider.

OTC drugs, supplements, and herbs can have risky side effects and may not be safe to take with other drugs.

### **Take Charge**

- ✓ *Discuss all OTC medicines, prescription drugs, herbs, supplements, and healing remedies you are taking with your health care provider and/or pharmacist.*
- ✓ *Carefully read labels and package inserts.*

## **SUBSTANCE ABUSE**

If you abuse alcohol or drugs, you are at higher risk for HIV/AIDS, mouth and throat cancer, injury, and sexually transmitted diseases.

Substance abuse during pregnancy can cause your baby to be born early and be addicted to drugs. Babies whose mothers use drugs during pregnancy have increased risk of being born with brain damage or slow development.

### **Take Charge**

- ✓ *Ask your health care provider to help you find local help.*

# Be Emotionally Healthy

## STRESS

What woman doesn't understand the meaning of stress? Large and small changes and demands in life can make it hard to enjoy a bit of peace and quiet.



### Take Charge

- ✓ *Do what is most important to you and to those who must rely on you first.*
- ✓ *Learn to say no. Some things just have to wait.*
- ✓ *Help family members learn to share the workload at home.*
- ✓ *Consider your needs and how to meet them. Set aside some time each day for yourself.*
- ✓ *Seek balance. Each area of your life needs attention: physical, spiritual, social, work, mental, and emotional.*
- ✓ *Exercise helps relieve stress.*
- ✓ *Friends can help in times of distress.*
- ✓ *Get help if your situation is more than you can handle. A counselor, health care provider, family member, friend, or support group may be a good resource.*

## DEPRESSION

Life is full of emotional ups and downs. Everyone feels "the blues" from time to time. Heavy workloads or financial problems can make us grumpy, gloomy, and uninterested in regular activities. However, these feelings could also be signs of depression, a serious illness that needs medical care.

Have you had five or more of these symptoms for more than two weeks? Do they make it difficult to carry on normal work or family life? If so, you need a complete medical checkup.

### **Symptoms of Depression:**

- An ongoing sad, anxious, or "empty" mood
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities, including sex
- Feeling hopeless and gloomy
- Feeling guilty, worthless, or helpless
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Waking early in the morning
- Loss of appetite and weight, or overeating and weight gain
- Lack of energy, feeling tired or sluggish
- Thoughts of death or suicide; attempted suicide
- Feeling restless, annoyed
- Trouble paying attention, remembering, or making decisions
- Physical symptoms that do not get better, such as headaches, digestive illness, or chronic pain



Depression does not just change mood; it changes your entire life. Symptoms vary and can last for a short or long time. People age 25 to 44 are the most common sufferers. One in every four women can expect to have clinical depression at some time. Depression is especially dangerous for teens with substance abuse problems, increasing the risk for suicide.

Depression is not a sign of weakness. You cannot simply pull yourself together. **It is an illness that will likely get worse without proper treatment.**



### **Take Charge**

- ✓ *Help a depressed person get treatment. It's the most important thing anyone can do.*
- ✓ *Tell your doctor about any symptoms you have.*
- ✓ *Ask about depression care.*
- ✓ *Get emergency help if you think about suicide. Call 1-800-SUICIDE (784-2433).*
- ✓ *Call the National Mental Health Association at 1-800-969-6642 for help and information.*

## FAMILY VIOLENCE

One in four women will be a victim of family violence in her lifetime.<sup>7</sup> Battering, murder, rape, sexual abuse, abuse of money, and emotional abuse (threats, blame, isolation) are all forms of family violence. **The victim is never the cause of abuse.**

Abusers can be your spouse or former spouse, boyfriend, adult child, relative, or in-home caregiver. Twenty-five percent of all murdered women were killed by their current or former partner. Seventy-five percent of rapes or sexual assaults were by men the victim knew.

Violence often changes the way a child develops and behaves. Children may see it as a normal way adults treat each other and even become offenders or victims.

### **Take Charge**

- ✓ *Victims and their children, as well as offenders, need help.*
- ✓ *If you are being harmed in any way, help is at hand. Call 1-800-799-7233 for the hotline of the domestic violence program near you. Shelters offer protection and advice.*

# Get Checkups and Keep Records

A healthy lifestyle is one part of protecting yourself from disease. You should also get checked regularly to maintain your health and find any new problems. Take this booklet with you when you see your health care provider and discuss how to prevent future health problems.

Another great tool for better health is the question! When you talk to your doctor you take on an important role. Be involved. Ask questions and be prepared. You and your health care provider can become partners for better care and better health.

## 1. What is my main problem?

- Repeat back what you heard to be sure it is correct.
- Have him/her explain new terms.

## 2. What do I need to do?

- What are the treatment options? What are the risks and benefits with each?
- Do I need to see another health specialist?
- Do I need a follow-up visit?
- Take notes and ask for written instructions. Find out about any medicines you will take. (See page 28.)

## 3. Why is it important for me to do this?

## HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS AND ADVISORS

**Name**

**Phone**

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

## HEALTH HISTORY

Use these charts to jot down medical procedures, tests, surgeries, and hospital stays.

<b>Procedures/Surgeries</b>	<b>Year</b>

## 8 IMMUNIZATIONS

Vaccine	Date	Health Professional & Location (Health professional to complete)			
HPV					
Measles Mumps Rubella					
Varicella					
Meningococcal <i>Per risk</i>					
Tetanus Diphtheria Pertussis <i>Every 10 years</i>					
Influenza (Flu Shot)					
Pneumococcal <i>Age 65 &amp; older or per risk</i>					
Zoster <i>Age 60+</i>					
Hepatitis A <i>Per risk</i>					
Hepatitis B <i>Per risk</i>					

## 9 HEALTH EXAMS & SCREENINGS

Date/  
Results

<b>WEIGHT</b> BMI waist measurement		
<b>BLOOD PRESSURE</b>	Age 18 every 1–2 years*	
<b>BREAST EXAM</b> by a doctor or nurse	Age 20+ every 1–3 years*	
<b>PELVIC EXAM / PAP TEST</b>	Age 21–70 every 1–3 years*	
<b>SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES (STDs)</b> Chlamydia test HIV test	Per risk*	
<b>SKIN EXAM</b>	Self check—monthly Age 20—every 3 years* Age 40—every year*	
<b>DENTAL</b>	1–2 times every year*	
<b>EYE EXAM</b>	Age 20–40—initial exam* Age 40—every 2–4 years* Age 65—every 1–2 years*	

\*Check with your health care provider for recommendations based on your age, health,

Write down the date and results when you have these exams.

Date/  
Results

Date/  
Results

Date/  
Results

Date/  
Results


and medical history.



## HEALTH EXAMS & SCREENINGS

Date/  
Results

<b>DEPRESSION</b>	Periodically*	
<b>HEARING</b>	Age 18 every 10 years* Age 50+ periodically*	
<b>CHOLESTEROL</b> LDL HDL	Age 45+ every 5 years*	
<b>MAMMOGRAM</b>	Age 40 to 74 every 1–2 years*	
<b>FRACTURE RISK</b>	Age 40 per risk* Age 65 test*	
<b>DIABETES</b>	Age 45 every 3 years*	
<b>COLORECTAL EXAMS</b>	Age 50 to 75 every 5–10 years*	

\*Check with your health care provider for recommendations based on your age, health,

Write down the date and results when you have these exams.

Date/  
Results

Date/  
Results

Date/  
Results

Date/  
Results


and medical history.

## MEDICATIONS AND DRUG ALLERGIES

<b>Pharmacy</b>		<b>Phone #</b>
<hr/>		
<b>Drug Allergies</b>		
<b>Drug</b>		<b>Reaction</b>
<p>List medications, herbal and dietary supplements, and vitamins you are taking. Place a line through those you no longer take and note the date when stopped.</p>		
<b><u>Medication</u></b> <b>Dose</b>	<b>How</b> <b>Often</b>	<b><u>Purpose</u></b> <b>Prescribed by:</b>
<hr/>		<hr/>
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**Medication**  
**Dose**

**How**  
**Often**

**Purpose**  
**Prescribed by:**

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# Control Chronic Conditions

Chronic (long-term) conditions can be prevented or slowed by making healthy lifestyle choices.

## HEART DISEASE

Diseases of the heart and blood vessels cause more deaths than all other diseases combined. A **heart attack** occurs when the blood vessels of the heart become blocked. A **stroke** occurs when blood flow to the brain is blocked.

Warning signs of heart attack include:

- Pressure, fullness, squeezing, or pain in the center of the chest that lasts more than a few minutes or goes away and comes back
- Pain in one or both arms, neck, the back, jaw, or stomach.
- Breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea, or lightheadedness

Women may have less common warning signs of heart attack:

- Shortness of breath, with or without chest discomfort
- Back or jaw pain
- Nausea, vomiting, dizziness
- Pain or pressure in the lower chest
- Extreme fatigue

Warning signs of stroke include a *sudden* change in:

- Weakness or numbness of the face, arm, or leg
- Trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Confusion, trouble talking, or understanding
- Severe headache with no known cause
- Trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance

If you have signs of heart attack or stroke, don't wait! Call 911 right away!

## Take Charge

- ✓ *Manage these major risk factors as early as you can.*
  - *do not smoke*
  - *control weight, diabetes and stress*
  - *get physical activity every day*
- ✓ *Regular walking can greatly reduce heart attack risk.*
- ✓ *Keep blood pressure less than 120/80.*
- ✓ *Keep total cholesterol less than 200, LDL less than 100, and HDL 50 or more.*
- ✓ *Triglycerides should be 150 or less.*
- ✓ *Ask your doctor about taking low dose aspirin.*

## CANCER

Cancer is the second leading cause of death in women. Among all cancers, lung cancer is the number one cause of death for women.

Breast cancer is the most common type of cancer affecting mostly women. Finding breast cancer early provides the best chance to beat it. **Mammograms** are the most effective way to find breast cancer early. This exam can find a lump up to two years before you can feel it. Talk to your doctor about other tests and counseling if you have a family history of breast cancer. Be aware of what your breasts normally feel and look like. Contact your health care provider right away if you notice changes.

A **pelvic exam** and **Pap test** can find cervical cancer and reproductive problems. Finding problems early can save your life and your ability to have children.

10 Cancer Type	Symptoms	Tests	✓ Take Charge
<b>Lung</b> #1 cause of cancer death	None until advanced stages	X-rays	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>Don't smoke.</i></li> <li>✓ <i>Avoid secondhand smoke.</i></li> </ul>
<b>Breast</b> #2 cause of cancer death	Changes in the skin or nipple Lump or thickened area	Doctor/Nurse exam Mammogram	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>Get mammograms.</i></li> <li>✓ <i>Get clinical breast exams.</i></li> </ul>
<b>Colorectal</b>	Rectal bleeding Long-term change in bowel movements	Digital rectal exam Sigmoidoscopy Colonoscopy Test for hidden blood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>Get screening tests.</i></li> <li>✓ <i>Exercise.</i></li> <li>✓ <i>Maintain a healthy weight.</i></li> </ul>
<b>Uterine</b>	Abnormal vaginal bleeding Pink or watery discharge Pelvic area pain	Testing uterine tissue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>Risk factors:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>obesity</i></li> <li>• <i>long-term estrogen use</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Ovarian</b>	Persistent abdominal pressure, fullness. Pelvic pain. Urinary frequency or urgency.	Pelvic exams Imaging studies Blood tests	
<b>Cervical</b>	Abnormal vaginal bleeding or discharge	Pap test	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>Risk factors:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>many sexual partners.</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>✓ <i>Get HPV vaccine.</i></li> <li>✓ <i>Don't smoke.</i></li> </ul>
<b>Skin</b> Most common cancer	Fair skin and previously sunburned skin are most at risk	Inspect skin carefully, especially birthmarks and moles.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>Use high-protection sunscreen.</i></li> </ul>

## DIABETES

Diabetes is a condition when sugar in the blood is too high. It occurs when your body produces too little insulin or doesn't use it properly. Type 2 is the most common.

Your risk of developing diabetes increases with your body weight. There is no cure. Left untreated or poorly controlled, diabetes can lead to:

- Blindness
- Heart disease
- Kidney disease
- Problems in pregnancy
- Problems fighting infection
- Nerve and blood vessel damage
- Amputation

### *Take Charge*

- ✓ *Lose extra weight and be more active to help postpone or prevent type 2 diabetes.*
- ✓ *Control your blood sugar. This is the key to living healthy with diabetes.*

## CHRONIC OBSTRUCTIVE PULMONARY DISEASE (COPD)

COPD includes conditions where airflow from the lungs is blocked. This leads to serious disability. COPD is the fourth leading cause of death in women. There is no cure. Smoking is the leading cause. Treatment includes help with breathing and preventing complications.

### *Take Charge*

- ✓ *Prevent COPD—don't smoke.*



## OSTEOPOROSIS

Our bodies constantly break down and rebuild bone. When this cycle is out of balance, the result is osteoporosis (thin bones). During menopause, lower estrogen levels cause women to lose bone faster than it is replaced. In many women, bones in the spine, hip, or wrist become so fragile they break easily.

The key to preventing osteoporosis is to begin with strong bones. Think of bones as a savings account. The more bone mass we deposit in the first 30 years, the more we will have later in life when normal bone loss occurs. Young women can increase their “account” with weight-bearing exercise and healthy eating.

### **Take Charge**

- ✓ *Eat food that includes calcium and vitamin D.*
- ✓ *Do not smoke. It reduces bone mass and lowers estrogen.*
- ✓ *Drink alcohol sparingly (1 drink per day) or not at all.*
- ✓ *Be active every day. Good weight-bearing choices include walking, gardening, dancing, and tennis.*

## ARTHRITIS

The most common form of arthritis occurs when the cushion between bones wears away. This leads to painful and often stiff joints in the hip, knee, ankle, and spine. The pain can be managed with medication.

### *Take Charge*

- ✓ *Control your weight.*
- ✓ *Get low-impact aerobic exercise.*
- ✓ *Get strengthening exercise 2 or more days per week.*



## URINE INCONTINENCE

Incontinence is the uncontrolled leaking of urine. It can happen at any age. Loss of control when coughing or sneezing is the most common type. It is often due to pelvic muscles that are stretched and weakened. Childbirth, surgery, weight gain, or aging are the most common causes. Strengthening exercises, bladder training, medications, and surgery may help to treat it.

### *Take Charge*

- ✓ *Strengthen your pelvic muscles to help regain bladder control. Try Kegel exercises: Tighten your pelvic muscles as if to stop the flow of urine. Hold for a few seconds, then relax. Repeat 10 or 15 times, several times a day.*

# Maintain Sexual Health

The fact that we can give birth shapes our lives and health. But it is not only during our childbearing years that we should pay attention to the health of our reproductive organs. It is important during all stages of life.

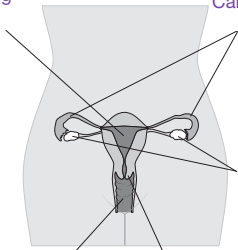
A woman's sex organs have an outside and an inside portion. Outside are the folds of skin, the inner lips, clitoris, the vaginal opening, the urethra where urine exits, and the anus (rectal opening).

## Uterus

Where a fertilized egg grows into a baby.

## Fallopian Tubes

Carry the eggs to the uterus



## Ovaries

Where eggs are stored.

## Vagina

The canal a baby passes through during birth.

## Cervix

End of the uterus.

## Take Charge

- ✓ *Know your body and understand how it works. Then you will be better able to notice changes.*

## SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES (STDs)

STDs are usually passed from person to person through sexual and intimate contact. The most common ones are:

- Chlamydia
- Gonorrhea
- Bacterial vaginosis
- Human papilloma virus (HPV)/Genital warts
- Herpes
- Syphilis
- Trichomoniasis
- AIDS caused by HIV

Girls and young women can now be immunized to prevent the leading cause of cervical cancer, HPV. Chlamydia is also linked to cervical cancer. Chlamydia and gonorrhea may cause pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). PID is very painful and can lead to infertility.

Women may not show symptoms of an STD until much damage has been done. It may take several weeks or months after sexual contact for signs to appear. Sometimes there are no symptoms. Most of the STDs that you can get from intercourse can also be spread orally. The best way to prevent STDs is through avoiding sexual contact or having a relationship with just one uninfected person.

Clinical exams are the only way to find changes in the cervix or uterus. See a health care provider if you have any of these symptoms in the genital area:

- Urine changes
- Sores
- Rashes
- Warts
- Abnormal discharge
- Painful intercourse
- Bleeding
- Pains
- Blisters
- Itching
- Swellings
- Odors

Most STDs can be cured if treated early. Medications are the most common treatments for STDs.



### **Take Charge**

- ✓ *Practice safer sex. Decrease the risk of STDs by using condoms correctly.*
- ✓ *Discuss prior sexual activity, signs of STDs, and how they are passed on with your partner.*
- ✓ *Check your partner's genital area for signs of disease.*
- ✓ *Seek medical help right away if you think you have been exposed to an STD or if you have symptoms.*

## CONTRACEPTION (BIRTH CONTROL)

You may be sexually active but want to prevent pregnancy. Explore birth control methods with your health care provider and partner:

- Natural methods rely on avoiding sex during the time when pregnancy can occur. This is also known as fertility timing.
- Spermicidal products (foams, creams, jellies, suppositories, films) have chemicals that kill sperm.
- Barrier methods (female and male condoms, diaphragms, cervical caps) block the sperm from the egg.
- Hormonal methods (pill, shots, patch, ring) keep the egg from leaving the ovary.
- Intrauterine devices (IUDs) keep sperm and eggs from joining.
- Permanent options prevent sperm or eggs from being released.

Condoms can help protect each partner from STDs if used correctly. If birth control didn't work or was not used, emergency contraception is available. It comes as a pill or IUD.

## INFERTILITY

Infertility is not being able to get pregnant. It affects 10–15% of all couples of childbearing age. Both men and women have problems that can cause a couple's infertility. Two common causes of infertility are STDs and a woman's age. Your chances of getting pregnant decrease by age 40. STDs cause 25% of all cases. There are many treatment options.

## PREGNANCY

If you are pregnant or planning to become pregnant, see a health care practitioner. If possible, you should be checked for STDs before you are pregnant. STDs can cause problems during pregnancy and may be passed on to the baby. If they are passed on, the baby may be born sick.

Your baby's health and well-being depend largely on choices you make before and during pregnancy. A healthy diet with folic acid is very important. Do not smoke, drink alcohol, or use illegal drugs. Be sure your doctor knows about any prescriptions, home remedies, herbs, OTC medicines, or vitamins you take. Even small amounts may increase your baby's risk of serious problems.

Family violence often increases during pregnancy. If you are being abused, get help to protect both you and your baby. Abuse of any kind or amount is never okay.



### **Take Charge**

- ✓ *Get care during your pregnancy to keep you and your baby healthy and safe.*
- ✓ *Do not smoke, drink alcohol, or use illegal drugs. If you cannot quit on your own, tell your health care provider right away. Get help.*

## PERIMENOPAUSE/MENOPAUSE

Menopause is when our ovaries run out of eggs. Slowly, they stop making the hormone estrogen. This causes periods to become irregular, or heavier or lighter than usual. In time, they stop. You reach menopause when you have had no periods for a year. That normally happens around age 51.

Signs can start up to 10 years before menopause. Symptoms are not the same for every woman. They range from none at all to severe.

- Hot flashes
- Night sweats
- Thinning and drying of skin, hair, and the walls of the vagina
- Mood swings
- Attention gaps
- Migraine headaches

Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) can help to relieve the symptoms of menopause. However, there are risks and side effects associated with HRT. Discuss HRT with your doctor. We lose estrogen during menopause. Because this is the hormone that keeps calcium in our bones, we are more at risk for osteoporosis. During the first 5 years after menopause, 3-5% of bone mass is lost each year.

### **Take Charge**

- ✓ *Get enough calcium and vitamin D.*
- ✓ *Include weight-bearing and strength building activities in your day.*



# Stay Informed



## GENERAL HEALTH

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

[www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org)

Administration on Aging

202-619-0724, [www.aoa.gov](http://www.aoa.gov)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

800-232-4636, TTY 888-232-6348, [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

Domestic Violence Hotline

800-799-7233, TTY 800-787-3224, [www.thehotline.org](http://www.thehotline.org)

Healthfinder

[www.healthfinder.gov](http://www.healthfinder.gov)

Healthy Eating

[www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov)

National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine

[www.nccam.nih.gov](http://www.nccam.nih.gov)

Planned Parenthood Federation

800-230-7526, [www.plannedparenthood.org](http://www.plannedparenthood.org)

Sexual Health and STDs

[www.ashastd.org](http://www.ashastd.org)

Vaccines & Immunization

[www.cdc.gov/vaccines](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines)

Women's Health Information Center

800-994-9662, TDD 888-220-5446, [www.womenshealth.gov](http://www.womenshealth.gov)

## **MENTAL HEALTH**

Mental Health America  
800-969-6642, [www.nmha.org](http://www.nmha.org)

National Institute of Mental Health  
[www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)

Substance Abuse & Mental Health  
877-726-4727, TTY 800-487-4889, [www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)

## **CONDITIONS**

American Cancer Society  
800-227-2345, [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)

American Heart Association  
800-242-8721, [www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org)

Arthritis Foundation  
800-283-7800, [www.arthritis.org](http://www.arthritis.org)

Healthier Babies  
[www.marchofdimes.com](http://www.marchofdimes.com)

National Cancer Institute  
800-422-6237, [www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov)

National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute  
[www.nhlbi.nih.gov](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov)

National Osteoporosis Foundation  
800-232-4222, [www.nof.org](http://www.nof.org)

National Stroke Association  
800-787-6537, [www.stroke.org](http://www.stroke.org)

## Endnotes:

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*The Women's Health Guide is designed for education only. Do not rely on this information in place of getting personal medical attention. If you feel that you have a medical problem, you should see a health care professional. This information should not be used for diagnosis and treatment purposes. Speak with your health care professional if you have any questions or concerns.*





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