

# A Lifetime of Good Health



YOUR GUIDE TO STAYING HEALTHY



*U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Office on Women's Health*



**womenshealth.gov**

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## YOUR GUIDE TO STAYING HEALTHY

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Visit the National Women's Health Information Center web site: [www.WomensHealth.gov](http://www.WomensHealth.gov)

# About the National Women's Health Information Center

## What is OWH?



The Office on Women's Health (OWH) was established in 1991 within the U.S.

Department of Health and Human Services. OWH coordinates the efforts of all the HHS agencies and offices involved in women's health.

OWH works to improve the health and well-being of women and girls in the United States through its innovative programs, by educating health professionals, and motivating behavior change in consumers through the dissemination of health information.

## What is NWHIC?

We are the most reliable and current information resource on women's health today. We offer FREE women's health information on more than 800 topics through our call center and web site.

By phone (in both English and Spanish) or via our web site you can find:

- original health information on special topics like minority women, pregnancy, women with disabilities, breastfeeding, men's health, and much more
- thousands of health publications
- statistics on women's health
- daily news on women's health

- a calendar of women's health events
- and MORE!

We also offer a **National Breastfeeding Helpline!** Our trained breastfeeding peer counselors can help you with your basic breastfeeding questions and concerns. If you are having a hard time, don't give up! Call us! It's free! Or visit [www.WomensHealth.gov/breastfeeding](http://www.WomensHealth.gov/breastfeeding).

**What's the difference between NWHIC and other women's health information services?**

NWHIC is sponsored by the federal government. It is a service of the Office on Women's Health within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. We don't represent any special commercial interest or try to sell you anything. NWHIC is here simply to help you get the information you can trust on a wide range of women's health issues most important to you.

**What is the prevention guide?**

This guide to staying healthy is brought to you by the National Women's Health Information Center (NWHIC) because we understand women's needs for quick and trustworthy information. This approach to life-long health begins with healthy behaviors to prevent and manage the many health conditions that can affect you. Although there are genetic risks that you cannot control for many diseases, there are risks that you can overcome by following key preventive steps. These steps

are outlined in this booklet and were designed to be easy to follow! Please use them to make healthy choices for yourself and for the people you love.



*National Women's Health Information Center  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office on Women's Health*

## Preventive Screenings

Prevention is key to living long and living well. Getting preventive screenings and immunizations are among the most important things you can do for yourself. Take time to review these guidelines for screening tests and immunizations. Use the charts on the next few pages to remind yourself of when you need to see your health care provider based on your personal health profile. Make an appointment today!

### Recommended Screenings and Immunizations for Women at Average Risk for Most Diseases

Screening Tests	Ages 18-39	Ages 40-49	Ages 50-64	Ages 65 and Older
<b>General Health:</b> Full checkup, including weight and height	Discuss with your doctor or nurse.	Discuss with your doctor or nurse.	Discuss with your doctor or nurse.	Discuss with your doctor or nurse.
Thyroid test (TSH)	Start at age 35, then every 5 years	Every 5 years	Every 5 years	Every 5 years
<b>Heart Health:</b> Blood pressure test	At least every 2 years	At least every 2 years	At least every 2 years	At least every 2 years
Cholesterol test	Start at age 20, discuss with your doctor or nurse.	Discuss with your doctor or nurse.	Discuss with your doctor or nurse.	Discuss with your doctor or nurse.
<b>Bone Health:</b> Bone mineral density test		Discuss with your doctor or nurse.	Discuss with your doctor or nurse.	Get a bone mineral density test at least once. Talk to your doctor or nurse about repeat testing.
<b>Diabetes:</b> Blood sugar test	Discuss with your doctor or nurse.	Start at age 45, then every 3 years	Every 3 years	Every 3 years

## Recommended Screenings and Immunizations for Women at Average Risk for Most Diseases

Screening Tests	Ages 18-39	Ages 40-49	Ages 50-64	Ages 65 and Older
<b>Breast Health:</b> Mammogram (x-ray of breast)		Every 1-2 years. Discuss with your doctor or nurse.	Every 1-2 years. Discuss with your doctor or nurse.	Every 1-2 years. Discuss with your doctor or nurse.
<b>Reproductive Health:</b> Pap test & pelvic exam	Every 1-3 years if you have been sexually active or are older than 21	Every 1-3 years	Every 1-3 years	Discuss with your doctor or nurse.
Chlamydia test	If sexually active, yearly until age 25. Ages 26-39, if you are at high risk for chlamydia or other STDs, you may need this test.	If you are at high risk for chlamydia or other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) you may need this test.	If you are at high risk for chlamydia or other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) you may need this test.	If you are at high risk for chlamydia or other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) you may need this test.
Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) tests	Both partners should get tested for STDs, including HIV, before initiating sexual intercourse.	Both partners should get tested for STDs, including HIV, before initiating sexual intercourse.	Both partners should get tested for STDs, including HIV, before initiating sexual intercourse.	Both partners should get tested for STDs, including HIV, before initiating sexual intercourse.
<b>Colorectal Health:</b> Fecal occult blood test			Yearly	Yearly
Flexible Sigmoidoscopy (with fecal occult blood test is preferred)			Every 5 years (if not having a colonoscopy)	Every 5 years (if not having a colonoscopy)
Double Contrast Barium Enema (DCBE)			Every 5-10 years (if not having a colonoscopy or sigmoidoscopy)	Every 5-10 years (if not having a colonoscopy or sigmoidoscopy)
Colonoscopy			Every 10 years	Every 10 years

PLEASE NOTE: These charts are guidelines only. Your doctor will personalize the timing of each test and immunization to best meet your health care needs.

Visit the National Women's Health Information Center web site: [www.WomensHealth.gov](http://www.WomensHealth.gov)

## Recommended Screenings and Immunizations for Women at Average Risk for Most Diseases

Screening Tests	Ages 18-39	Ages 40-49	Ages 50-64	Ages 65 and Older
<b>Colorectal Health (cont):</b> Rectal exam	Discuss with your doctor or nurse.	Discuss with your doctor or nurse.	Every 5-10 years with each screening (sigmoidoscopy, colonoscopy, or DCBE)	Every 5-10 years with each screening (sigmoidoscopy, colonoscopy, or DCBE)
<b>Eye and Ear Health:</b> Eye exam	Get your eyes checked if you have problems or visual changes.	Every 2-4 years	Every 2-4 years	Every 1-2 years
Hearing test	Starting at age 18, then every 10 years	Every 10 years	Discuss with your doctor or nurse.	Discuss with your doctor or nurse.
<b>Skin Health:</b> Mole exam	Monthly mole self-exam; by a doctor every 3 years, starting at age 20.	Monthly mole self-exam; by a doctor every year.	Monthly mole self-exam; by a doctor every year.	Monthly mole self-exam; by a doctor every year.
<b>Oral Health:</b> Dental exam	One to two times every year	One to two times every year	One to two times every year	One to two times every year
<b>Mental Health Screening</b>	Discuss with your doctor or nurse.	Discuss with your doctor or nurse.	Discuss with your doctor or nurse.	Discuss with your doctor or nurse.
<b>Immunizations:</b> Influenza vaccine	Discuss with your doctor or nurse.	Discuss with your doctor or nurse.	Yearly	Yearly
Pneumococcal vaccine				One time only
Tetanus-Diphtheria Booster vaccine	Every 10 years	Every 10 years	Every 10 years	Every 10 years

PLEASE NOTE: These charts are guidelines only. Your doctor will personalize the timing of each test and immunization to best meet your health care needs.

## Recommended Screenings and Immunizations for Women at High Risk

Use these charts to find out if your personal or family history puts you at higher risk for some diseases. If you have a higher than normal risk for a disease, you may need special screenings or tests more often or at a younger age.

✓ if it applies	Does your family history include:	Then ask your doctor or nurse if you need the following screenings or tests more often or at a younger age:
	High blood pressure	Blood pressure test
	High cholesterol	Cholesterol test
	Heart disease, premature heart disease or heart attack	Blood pressure test, cholesterol test, exercise stress test
	Diabetes	Blood sugar test
	Breast Cancer	Mammogram, ovarian screening tests
	Cervical, uterine, or vaginal cancer	Pap test, pelvic exam, ovarian screening tests, colon screening
	Ovarian Cancer	Pelvic Exam, ovarian screening tests, colon screening, clinical breast exam
	Osteoporosis, bone fracture in adulthood	Bone mineral density test
	Thyroid disease or thyroid cancer	Thyroid test and/or genetic counseling

✓ if it applies	Does your family history include:	Then ask your doctor or nurse if you need the following screenings or tests more often or at a younger age:
	Gum (periodontal) disease	Oral exam
	Hearing problems, deafness	Hearing test
	Vision problems, eye disease, blindness	Vision exam
	Inflammatory bowel disease; colon polyps; colon, ovarian or endometrial cancer	Colonoscopy, sigmoidoscopy, DCBE, rectal exam, fecal occult blood test
	Cancer, heart disease, or any illness at an unusually young age (50 or under)	Genetic counseling, possible early screening tests
	Two relatives with the same kind of cancer	Genetic counseling, possible early screening tests
	Birth defects or genetic disorder (you or your partner)	Genetic counseling, possible early screening tests. If you want to become pregnant, genetic counseling for you and your partner.

## Recommended Screenings and Immunizations for Women at High Risk

✓ if it applies	Are You:	Then ask your doctor or nurse if you need the following screenings or tests more often or at a younger age:
	African American	Blood pressure test, cholesterol test, blood sugar test, vision exam, colonoscopy, genetic counseling for sickle cell anemia
	Latina	Blood pressure test, cholesterol test, blood sugar test, colonoscopy
	Alaska Native or Pacific Islander	Blood sugar test
	American Indian	Blood sugar test
	Ashkenazi Jewish Descent	Genetic counseling for Tay-Sachs disease, if you want to become pregnant
	Ashkenazi Jewish with family history of breast or ovarian cancer	Genetic counseling for possible BRCA1/2 mutation
	Asian American	Blood sugar test
	Age 65 or older	Bone mineral density test, flu vaccine, pneumococcal vaccine
	Between the ages of 60 and 64, weigh less than 154 lbs., and not taking estrogen	Bone mineral density test

✓ if it applies	Are You:	Then ask your doctor or nurse if you need the following screenings or tests more often or at a younger age:
	College age	MMR vaccine, varicella vaccine
	Postmenopausal	Bone mineral density test
	Pregnant	Blood pressure test, blood sugar test, urine test, HIV test, STDs tests, MMR vaccine, hepatitis B antigen test
	A non-pregnant woman of childbearing age	MMR vaccine, varicella vaccine
	A smoker	Blood pressure test, cholesterol test, bone mineral density test, oral exam, vision exam
	Overweight	Blood pressure test, blood sugar test, weight
	Living in prison	Tuberculosis (TB) test, HIV test, STD tests, Hep A, B vaccines
	Living in long-term care	TB test, influenza vaccine, pneumococcal vaccine
	A health care worker	TB test, influenza vaccine, pneumococcal vaccine, MMR vaccine, varicella vaccine, HIV test, hepatitis test, hepatitis B vaccine if exposed to blood

## Recommended Screenings and Immunizations for Women at High Risk

✓ if it applies	Do you have or have you had?	Then ask your doctor or nurse if you need the following screenings or tests more often or at a younger age:
	High blood pressure	Blood pressure test, cholesterol test, blood sugar test
	High cholesterol	Blood pressure test, cholesterol test, blood sugar test
	Heart disease	Blood pressure test, cholesterol test, blood sugar test, influenza vaccine, pneumococcal vaccine
	Diabetes	Blood pressure test, cholesterol test, blood sugar test, vision exam, urine test
	Gestational diabetes (diabetes during pregnancy)	Blood sugar test
	A baby weighing more than 9 lbs.	Blood sugar test
	Breast cancer	Mammogram, ovarian screening tests
	Dense breast	Mammogram, clinical breast exam
	Cervical, uterine, vaginal cancer	Pap test, pelvic exam, ovarian screening tests, colon screening

✓ if it applies	Do you have or have you had?	Then ask your doctor or nurse if you need the following screenings or tests more often or at a younger age:
	Ovarian cancer	Pelvic exam, ovarian screening tests, mammogram, colon screening
	Previous abnormal Pap tests	Pap test, pelvic exam
	Early menopause (natural or surgically induced); absent or infrequent menstrual periods; advanced age; a personal history of bone fracture in adulthood; lifelong low calcium intake; lifelong inactive lifestyle or little physical activity; low body weight (fewer than 154 lbs.) or a history of an eating disorder such as anorexia nervosa	Bone mineral density test
	An autoimmune disease (including lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, scleroderma, multiple sclerosis, psoriasis)	Thyroid test, TB test, influenza vaccine, MMR vaccine, pneumococcal vaccine, autoimmune screening test, bone mineral density test

## Recommended Screenings and Immunizations for Women at High Risk

✓ if it applies	Do you have or have you had?:	Then ask your doctor or nurse if you need the following screenings or tests more often or at a younger age:
	Chronic lung disease	Influenza vaccine, pneumococcal vaccine
	Chronic liver disease	Hepatitis A, B vaccines
	Thyroid disease	Thyroid test, influenza vaccine, pneumococcal vaccine, bone mineral density test (of hyperthyroid)
	Gum (periodontal) disease	Oral exam
	Colon polyps; Inflammatory bowel disease	Colonoscopy
	A developmental delay	Vision exam, hearing test
	Eye injury or disease	Vision exam
	Ear injury or prolonged exposure to loud noise	Hearing test
	HIV/AIDS	Oral exam; vision exam; Pap test; pelvic exam; TB test; thyroid test; STD tests; influenza vaccine; pneumococcal vaccine; hepatitis screening; hepatitis A, B vaccines
	A blood transfusion or solid organ transplant prior to 1992	Hepatitis C test

✓ if it applies	Do you have or have you had?	Then ask your doctor or nurse if you need the following screenings or tests more often or at a younger age:
	Received clotting factor concentrates made before 1987	Hepatitis C test
	A blood transfusion prior to 1985	HIV test
	Multiple sex partners (or a partner who has or had multiple sex partners)	STD tests, HIV test, hepatitis B vaccine, Pap test, pelvic exam
	Alcoholism	Pneumococcal vaccine, TB test, psychological screening, liver tests
	Injection drug use (IDU) or addiction	Hepatitis A, B vaccines, hepatitis C test, TB test, STD tests, HIV test, psychological screening
	A sexually transmitted disease (STD)	STD tests, HIV test, Pap test, pelvic exam, hepatitis B vaccine
	Lived or worked with someone exposed to Tuberculosis (TB)	TB test
	A serious injury (cut or laceration)	Tetanus-Diphtheria booster vaccine
	A baby recently (within the last few weeks or months)	Post-partum depression screening

# Medicare Covered Preventive Services



Check this chart to see what screenings and immunizations are covered under Medicare. For more information, call 800-MEDICARE or visit [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov).

<p><b>Bone Mass Measurements</b> Once every 2 years if you're at risk for broken bones. Covered more often if medically necessary.</p>	<p><b>Pap Test, Pelvic Exam, and Clinical Breast Exam</b> Once every 24 months. Once every 12 months if you are at high risk for cervical or vaginal cancer, or if you are of an age to have children and have had an abnormal Pap test within the past 36 months.</p>	<p><b>One-Time "Welcome to Medicare" Physical Exam</b> Covers all people whose Medicare Part B begins on or after January 1, 2005. One-time only exam within the first 6 months that you have Part B.</p>
<p><b>Colorectal Cancer Screening (Age 50+)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fecal Occult Blood Test Once every 12 months.</li> <li>• Flexible Sigmoidoscopy Once every 48 months.</li> <li>• Colonoscopy (no min age req) Once every 24 months if you are at high risk for colon cancer. If you are not at high risk for colon cancer, once every 10 yrs (or 48 months after a screening sigmoidoscopy).</li> <li>• Barium Enema Doctor can decide to do it instead of a sigmoidoscopy or colonoscopy. Once every 24 months if you are at high risk for colorectal cancer. If you are not at high risk, once every 48 months.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Glaucoma Screening</b> Once every 12 months for people at high risk for glaucoma.</p>	<p><b>Mammogram Screening</b> Once every 12 months for women age 40+ One baseline mammogram for women between ages 35 and 39.</p>
	<p><b>Diabetes Services</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Screening: fasting plasma glucose test.</li> <li>• Coverage for glucose monitors, test strips, and lancets.</li> <li>• Diabetes self-management training. Must be requested by your doctor.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Shots (Vaccinations)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flu Shot Once a year in the fall or winter.</li> <li>• Pneumococcal Pneumonia Shot One shot may be all you will ever need. Ask your doctor.</li> <li>• Hepatitis B Shot If you are at medium-to-high risk for hepatitis.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Cardiovascular Screening</b> Includes tests for cholesterol, lipid, and triglyceride levels.</p>	

## Healthy Heart and Stroke Prevention

**H**eat disease and stroke—two main cardiovascular diseases—are the first and third causes of death for women in the U.S. Learn what you can do to improve your health now and for years to come!

### Steps you can take:

- **Don't smoke.** It's no surprise that smoking hurts your heart. So if you smoke, try to quit.
- **Get your cholesterol tested.** If it's high (above 200), talk to your doctor or nurse about losing weight (if you're overweight) and getting more active. Ask if there's medicine that may help.
- **Know your blood pressure.** Have it checked to make sure you're on track! If it is high, talk to your doctor about how to lower it.
- **Get tested for diabetes.** If you have diabetes, keep your blood sugar levels in check! This is the BEST way for you to take care of yourself and your heart.
- **Eat heart-healthy foods.** Eat whole-grain foods, vegetables, and fruits. Choose lean meats and low-fat cheese and dairy products. Limit foods that have lots of saturated fat, like butter, whole milk, baked goods, ice cream, and fatty meats.
- **Keep a healthy weight.**
- **Eat less salt.** Use spices, herbs, lemon, and lime instead of salt.
- **If you drink alcohol, don't have more than one drink per day.** Too much alcohol raises blood pressure and can raise your risk for stroke and other problems.
- **Get moving!** Get at least 30 minutes of physical activity on most days, if not all days, of the week.
- **Take your medicine.** If your doctor has prescribed medicine to help you, take it exactly as you have been told to.



## Know the Warning Signs

### Heart Attack

There are differences in how women and men respond to a heart attack. Women are less likely than men to believe they're having a heart attack and more likely to delay in seeking treatment.

But for women, chest pain may not be the first sign your heart is in trouble. Before a heart attack, women have said that they have unusual tiredness, trouble sleeping, problems breathing, indigestion, and anxiety. These symptoms can happen a month or so before the heart attack.

During a heart attack, women often have these symptoms:

- pain or discomfort in the center of the chest.
- pain or discomfort in other areas of the upper body, including the arms, back, neck, jaw, or stomach.

- other symptoms, such as shortness of breath, breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea, or light-headedness.

### Stroke

A stroke occurs when part of the brain doesn't get the blood it needs. Then, brain cells die. There are two types of stroke:

- An ischemic (iss-kee-mik) stroke happens when blood is blocked from getting to the brain.
- A hemorrhagic (heh-muh-ra-jik) stroke happens when a blood vessel in the brain bursts, and blood bleeds into the brain.

A person might also have a "mini-stroke." This happens when, for a short time, less blood than normal gets to the brain. You may have some signs of a full stroke, or you may not notice any signs at all. But it only lasts a few minutes up to 24 hours.

Then you're back to normal. Many people don't even know they've had it. However, a "mini-stroke" is a sign of a full stroke to come, so it's important to know the signs.

The signs of a stroke happen suddenly and are different from the signs of a heart attack. Look for these signs:

- weakness or numbness on one side of your body
- dizziness, loss of balance, or confusion
- trouble talking or understanding speech, headache, or nausea
- trouble walking or seeing

### Get help right away

If you have signs of a heart attack or stroke, call 911. Call right away—In 5 minutes or less.

## Healthy Bones

**W**omen of all ages need to take steps to keep their bones strong. Unfortunately, millions of women already have or are at risk for osteoporosis (oss-tee-oh-puh-ro-sis). Osteoporosis means that your bones get weak, and you're more likely to break a bone. Because there are no symptoms, you might not know your bones are getting weaker until you break a bone! There are steps you can take to stop your bones from becoming weak and brittle.

### Steps you can take:

- **Get your bones tested.** If you are age 65 and older, get a bone density test. If you are between ages 60 and 64, weigh less than 154 pounds, and don't take estrogen, get a bone density test.
- **Get enough calcium each day.** You can get it through foods and/or calcium pills. Talk with your doctor to see which kind of calcium pill is best for you.
- **Get enough vitamin D each day.** You can get vitamin D through sunlight, foods, and vitamin pills. You need 10 to 15 minutes of sunlight to the hands, arms, and face, two to three times a week.
- **Get moving.** Being active helps your bones by slowing bone loss, improving muscle strength, and helping your balance.
- **Eat a healthy diet.** You can get the nutrients you need by eating foods like lean meats, fish, green leafy vegetables, and oranges.
- **Don't smoke.** Smoking damages your bones.
- **Drink alcohol moderately.** If you drink, do not drink more than one alcoholic drink per day.
- **Make your home safe.** Reduce your chances of falling: use a rubber bathmat in the shower or tub; remove throw rugs; and install grab bars in the bath or shower.
- **Talk to your doctor about medicine.** Some medicines can prevent or treat bone loss.
- **Teach your daughter early.** Making good choices for healthy bones should start in childhood and become habits that last.

## Breast Cancer Early Detection

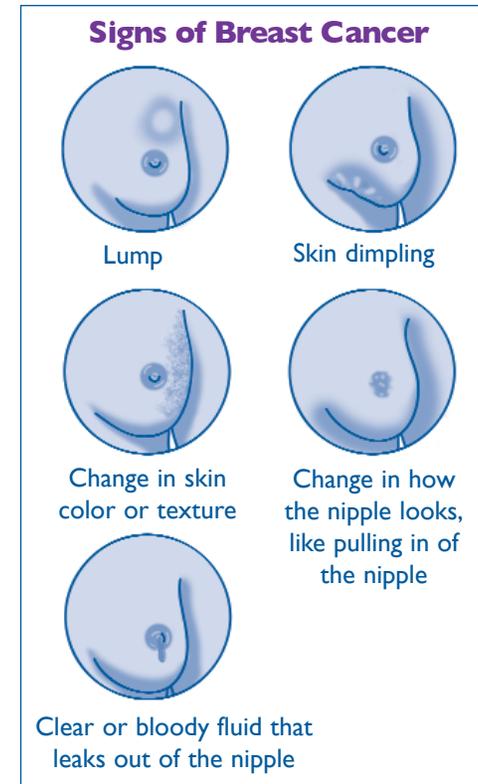
**B**reast cancer is the most common type of cancer in women. The older a woman is, the greater her risk. Most women who develop breast cancer have no special risk factors for the disease, so it is critical to do what you can to detect cancer early.

### Steps you can take:

- Get a mammogram. It is the best way to find out if you have breast cancer. A mammogram is an x-ray picture of the breast. It can find breast cancer that is too small for you or your doctor to feel. **All women starting at age 40** should get a mammogram every one to two years. Discuss how often you need a mammogram with your doctor. If your mother or sister had breast cancer, be

especially proactive about getting a mammogram. Have the mammogram done right after your period because it might be less painful and more accurate than during your period.

- Get a **clinical breast exam**. This is a breast exam done by your doctor or nurse. He or she will check your breasts and underarms for any lumps, nipple discharge, or other changes. The breast exam should be part of a routine check up.
- **Get to know your breasts**. Some women check their own breasts for changes. If you find a change, it's important to call your doctor or nurse for a visit. Make sure to watch the change you found until you see your provider.



## Healthy Pregnancy

If you know you are pregnant, or think you might be, call your doctor as soon as possible and set up a visit. You will need to visit your doctor many times during your pregnancy. Follow your doctor's schedule for visits and don't miss them!

You will notice your body is changing in many ways. These changes may be strange at first, but they are all normal. Try to stay as healthy as you can—for you and your new baby!

### Steps you can take:

- Stop smoking, drinking alcohol, and doing drugs. These can cause long-term damage to your baby. Ask your doctor for help.
- Eat healthy foods. This includes lots of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and calcium-rich foods. You need 1000 milligrams (mg) of calcium per day. Drink at least eight glasses of water a day. Avoid eating a lot of fatty foods such as butter, and fatty meats. Choose foods lower in fat like chicken and turkey without the skin, and fish.
- Don't eat uncooked or undercooked meats or fish. Do not eat any shark, swordfish, king mackerel, and tilefish (also called golden or white snapper) because these fish have high levels of mercury.
- Limit caffeine from coffee, tea, sodas, medicines, and chocolates.
- Take at least 400 micrograms of folic acid daily. This will help prevent certain types of birth defects. Your doctor may prescribe a daily vitamin that has it, or you can buy folic acid pills. Eat foods high in folic acid like orange juice, leafy green vegetables, beans, peanuts, peas, and whole-grain products.
- Tell your doctor about all of the medicines you take. This includes prescriptions, over-the-counter medicines you buy without prescriptions, and herbals. Ask if they are safe to take while you are pregnant. Most of the time, the medicine a pregnant woman is taking does not affect her baby. But sometimes it can, causing damage or birth defects. Talk with your doctor about which drugs are safe.
- Stay active. Being physically active during pregnancy helps you in many ways. It prevents a lot of extra weight gain. It helps you have good posture,

which will help you feel better later in your pregnancy. It can help you sleep better and have a shorter, easier labor. If you were physically active before getting pregnant, you can keep doing mild-to-moderate activity, like low-impact aerobic dance, swimming, or walking. If you were not physically active before getting pregnant, you still can become active, but start slowly. Try walking at first, then build up to more. Mild stretching and weight training on exercise machines are ok. Talk to your doctor about which activities are good for you.

- **Avoid toxic chemicals.** These include paint, paint thinners, cleaning products, and those used to kill bugs or that contain lead or mercury. Read

the product label to see if it has a pregnancy warning.

- **Avoid hot tubs, saunas, and x-rays.**
- **Avoid changing cat litter.** It can carry and cause an infection that can cause birth defects. Wear gloves when gardening in areas cats may visit.
- **Get enough sleep.** Try to get seven to nine hours every night.
- **Control the stress in your life.** Don't be afraid to say NO to requests for your time and energy.
- **Learn all you can.** Read books, watch videos, go to a childbirth class, and talk with other moms.



## Breastfeeding

There are many benefits to breastfeeding. Even if you are able to do it for only a short time, your baby's immune system can benefit from breast milk. Why breastfeed?

- Breast milk is free, clean, and saves you time.
- Breastfed babies are more able to fight off infection and disease, such as diarrhea, ear infections, and respiratory illnesses such as pneumonia. They are sick less often and have fewer visits to the doctor.
- Breast milk has the perfect amount of fat, sugar, water, and protein to help your baby grow just right.
- Most babies find breast milk easier to digest than formula.
- Breastfeeding can help a mother to

bond with her baby. Physical contact is important to a newborn and can help them feel more secure, and warm and comforted.

- Nursing uses up extra calories, making it easier to lose the pounds of pregnancy. It also helps the uterus to get back to its original size and lessens any bleeding a woman may have after giving birth.

### Steps you can take:

- Give your baby breast milk only—no formula—for the first six months of life. It is even better for your baby to breastfeed for 12 months or longer.
- You can also give solid foods when your baby is six months old, while you keep breastfeeding.
- Be patient with yourself! What works

for one mom might not work for you. Relax and try to find a routine and positions that work for you and your baby. It will get easier with time.



## Stress

**W**omen today have busy, demanding lives! You may feel pulled in different directions and experience stress from dealing with work, family, and other matters, leaving little time for yourself. Learning to balance your life with time for yourself will give you big rewards.

### Steps you can take:

- Relax. Try deep breathing, yoga, meditation, or massage therapy.
- Make time for yourself. Set aside at least 15 minutes each day to do something for yourself, like taking a walk or calling a friend.
- Sleep. Sleeping helps both your body and mind. Try to get seven to nine hours of sleep every night.
- Eat healthy. Try to fuel up with fruits, vegetables, and whole-grain foods, such as whole-grain crackers and breads.
- Get moving. Believe it or not, getting physical activity not only helps relieve your tense muscles, but helps your mood too!
- Talk to friends. This can help you work through your stress.
- Get help from a professional if you need it.
- Compromise. Sometimes, it's not always worth the stress to argue. Give in once in awhile.
- Write down your thoughts. Keeping a journal can be a great way to get things off your chest and work through issues.
- Help others. Helping someone else can help you. Help your neighbor, or volunteer in your community.
- Get a hobby. Give yourself time to explore your interests.
- Set limits. Set limits with yourself and others. Don't be afraid to say NO to requests for your time and energy.



## Menopause

**M**enopause is a normal change in your life when your period stops. During menopause, your body slowly makes less of the hormones estrogen and progesterone. As you near menopause, you may have symptoms from the hormone changes in your body. Many women wonder if these changes are normal, and many are confused about how to treat their symptoms. You can feel better by learning all you can about menopause and by talking with your doctor about your health and your symptoms.

### Steps you can take:

- **Hot flashes.** Avoid a hot environment, eating or drinking hot or spicy foods, alcohol, or caffeine, and stress, all of which can bring on hot flashes. Dress in layers and keep a fan in your home

or workplace. Regular exercise might also bring relief. Ask your doctor about taking an antidepressant medicine. These medicines can be helpful for some women.

- **Vaginal dryness.** Use an over-the-counter vaginal lubricant. There are also prescription estrogen replacement creams that your doctor might give

### When using hormone therapy for menopause

- Use at the lowest dose that helps
- Use for the shortest time needed
- Check with your doctor every 3 to 6 months to see if you still need it.

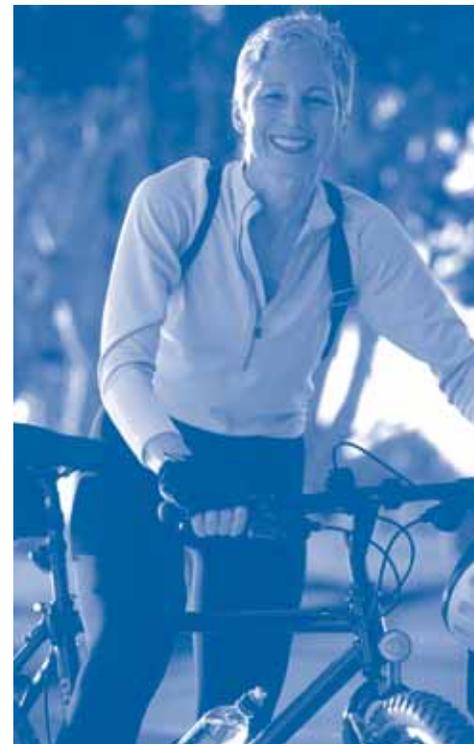
you. If you have spotting or bleeding from estrogen creams, see your doctor.

- **Problems sleeping.** Avoid alcohol, caffeine, large meals, and working right before bedtime. Try to keep your bedroom at a comfortable temperature. Avoid napping during the day and try to go to bed and get up at the same times every day. Exercise can also help. But avoid exercise close to bedtime.
- **Memory problems.** Ask your doctor about mental exercises you can do to improve your memory. Try to get enough sleep and be physically active.
- **Mood swings.** Try to get enough sleep and be physically active. Ask your doctor about relaxation exercises you can do. Ask your doctor about

taking an antidepressant medicine, which could help.

There are a lot of ways to stay healthy during this time in your life:

- **Be active and get more exercise.** Try to get at least 30 minutes on most days of the week. Try weight-bearing exercises, like walking, running, or dancing.
- **If you smoke, quit.** Ask your doctor for help.
- **Eat healthy.** Eat lots of whole-grain products, vegetables, and fruits. Choose foods low in fat and cholesterol.
- **Get enough calcium to keep your bones strong.** Before menopause, you need about 1,000 mg of calcium per day. After menopause, you need 1,500 mg per day.
- **If you drink alcohol, drink moderately.** Limit it to no more than one drink per day.
- **Control your weight.** Ask your doctor what a healthy weight is for you.
- **Talk to your doctor about bone health.** Ask if you're getting enough calcium and vitamin D. Get a bone density test if you're older than 65, or if your doctor says you have a high chance of getting osteoporosis. Ask about taking medicine to help preserve bone and slow down bone loss.
- **Get preventive screenings.** Have your blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar checked. Have a breast exam and a breast x-ray (mammogram).



## Reproductive Health

**D**id you know that your reproductive system is one of the most fragile systems of your body? It can easily get infected or injured, and, if it does, you might have long-term health problems. Taking simple steps to prevent getting or spreading HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) will pay off both for yourself and for those you love.

### Steps you can take:

- Know that some methods of birth control, like birth control pills, shots, implants, or diaphragms, will not protect you from HIV or other STDs. If you use one of these methods, be sure to also use a latex condom or dental dam (used for oral sex) correctly every time you have sex.
- Don't share needles or IV drug equipment for illegal drugs like

heroin and cocaine, or for legal drugs like insulin. If you get a tattoo or body piercing, make sure the needles are sterile.

- Talk with your sex partner(s) about STDs, HIV, and using condoms. For information, call the National STD hotline at 800-227-8922.
- Talk frankly with your doctor or nurse and your sex partner(s) about any STDs you or your partner have or had. Talk about any sores or discharge in the genital area. If you are living with HIV, be sure to tell your partner and your doctor.
- Have regular pelvic exams. Talk with your doctor about how often you need them. Ask your doctor to test you for STDs.
- If you are pregnant, get screened

for chlamydia, gonorrhea, hepatitis B and C, HIV, and syphilis. Get screened as soon as you think you may be pregnant.

- If you have HIV and are pregnant, you can lower the chances of giving HIV to your baby by taking medicine. Talk to your doctor.



## Cervical Health

Cervical cancer is a disease that you can help prevent. It happens when normal cells in the cervix change into cancer cells. Before the cells turn into cancer, abnormal cells develop on the cervix that can be found by a Pap test. Treating the cervix before the abnormal cells become cancerous can prevent future cancer.

### Steps you can take:

- Get a Pap test. The best time to get a Pap test is between 10 and 20 days after the first day of your last period. Do not have the test done when you have your period and don't use douches, vaginal medicines (unless your doctor tells you to), spermicide foams, creams, or jellies two days before your Pap test. Talk to your doctor about how often to get Pap tests.

- If you have sex, stay with one partner who only has sex with you. Human papillomavirus (HPV) is a group of viruses that can be passed through sex. HPV can cause abnormal changes on the cervix that can lead to cervical cancer. Using condoms every time you have sex may reduce your chances of getting HPV. HPV can also be transmitted by skin-to-skin contact



with sores or infected genital skin that looks normal.

- Ask your doctor about an HPV test. In combination with a Pap test, an HPV test helps prevent cervical cancer. It can detect the types of HPV that cause cervical cancer.
- Eat a healthy, balanced diet with delicious fruits and vegetables. In particular, carotene and vitamins C and E may reduce the risk of cervical cancer. Carotene is found in tomatoes, carrots, sweet potatoes, and broccoli. You can get vitamin C by eating fruits and vegetables. Load up on oranges, green and red peppers, broccoli, and strawberries. Good sources of vitamin E include sunflower seeds, almonds, and peanuts.
- Don't smoke.

## Healthy Eyes and Ears

Vision and hearing loss can happen as you age. Other problems with your eyes and ears can happen as you work and play. Prevention, early detection, and proper treatment for injury or disease to your eyes and ears will help you enjoy independence and a better quality life.

### Steps you can take:

- Get your eyes examined according to this schedule:
  - ♦ between the ages of 20 and 39, get your eyes checked if you have problems or visual changes
  - ♦ every two to four years between the ages of 40 to 65
  - ♦ every 1 to 2 years at age 65 and older

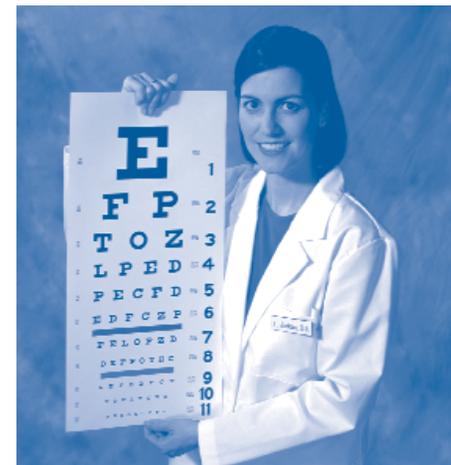
People at higher risk for eye diseases need to be examined more often. For

example, adults with diabetes should have yearly eye exams. Other people at higher risk include African Americans over age 40, people with a family history of eye disease, or those with a history of eye injury.

- Wear protective eyewear, such as safety glasses, safety goggles, or face shields when working with materials that can harm eyes.
- Protect your eyes during sports. Wear protective eyewear made of polycarbonate plastic and fitted by an eye care professional.
- Get a hearing exam every 10 years between the ages of 18 and 49 and every 3 years after that.
- Wear earplugs when doing loud activities (ones above 90 decibels),

such as attending rock concerts or using a snowmobile.

- Prevent ear infections. Wash your hands frequently.
- Ask your doctor if your medicines are safe. Some medicine can hurt your ears.





## Healthy Lungs

**B**reathing gives your body the oxygen it needs to stay alive. So it's important to keep your respiratory system healthy, so you have no trouble breathing.

### Steps you can take:

**Don't smoke.** If you do smoke, quit. Ask your doctor or nurse for help.

**Stay active.** Exercise helps you breathe better. But if you live in an area with air pollution, take these steps to lower your exposure to air pollution: exercise early in the day or in the evening and avoid congested streets and rush hour traffic.

**Avoid second-hand smoke.** Inhaling the tobacco smoke of others can be dangerous for you and your children.

**Protect yourself and family at home.** Test your home for dangerous levels of radon and asbestos. Call your local health department for help.

**Protect yourself at work.** Use a respirator when working with harmful chemicals, like asbestos, that can hurt your lungs.

**See your doctor immediately if you have these symptoms:** persistent cough, chest pain that worsens by breathing deeply, hoarseness, weight loss and loss of appetite, bloody spit or phlegm, shortness of breath, recurring bronchitis and pneumonia, or a new onset of wheezing.

**Avoid asthma and allergy triggers.** Stay away from things make your asthma and allergies worse.



## Healthy Smile

**G**ood oral health helps you have a lot more than a pretty smile—it also helps your overall health. Keep your teeth, gums, and mouth healthy by having regular oral exams, practicing good oral hygiene, and eating a healthy diet.

### Steps you can take:

- Drink fluoridated water and use fluoride toothpaste. Fluoride protects against tooth decay at all ages.
- Brush your teeth at least twice each day. Aim for first thing in the morning and before going to bed. Once a day, use floss or an interdental cleaner to clean between teeth to remove food that your toothbrush missed.
- See your dentist twice a year for an oral exam. Make an appointment right away if your gums bleed often, if you see any red or white patches on the gums or tongue, have mouth or jaw pain that won't go away, have sores that do not heal within two weeks, or if you have problems swallowing or chewing.
- If you are pregnant, have an oral exam early in your pregnancy.
- Don't smoke. Smoking raises your risk for getting gum disease, oral and throat cancers, and oral fungal infections.
- Have a well-balanced, nutritious diet. Limit sugary foods.
- If you have diabetes, practice good oral hygiene to prevent gum disease.
- Have an oral exam before beginning cancer treatment. This will help prevent or limit other oral problems or tissue damage.



## Healthy Skin

**T**he skin, your body's largest organ, protects you against heat, light, injury, and infection. Tanned skin is not a sign of good health. It means that your skin has been hurt by the sun's ultraviolet (UV) rays. Too much sun without protection can cause skin damage, eye problems, and more serious health problems such as skin cancer and lip cancer. The good news is that you can take steps to protect your natural beauty and your health.

### Steps you can take:

- **Avoid the rays.** Stay inside or in the shade when the sun's rays are the strongest. This is between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. UV rays can also reach you on cloudy days and during any season.
- **Use sunscreen.** Use broad-spectrum sunscreen and lipscreen with SPF 15

or higher every day. Put on sunscreen: 1) 30 minutes before going out, 2) Every 2 hours, and 3) After swimming, sweating, or drying off.

- **Accessorize!** Wear protective clothing, such as a wide-brimmed hat, long-sleeved shirt, and long pants. If you can't wear long shirts and pants, try to stay in the shade and wear sunscreen. Keep your eyes safe with wraparound sunglasses with 100 percent UV ray protection.
- **Don't use tanning beds.** Rays from tanning beds and sunlamps are just as dangerous and sometimes more dangerous than the sun's rays.
- **Check your skin often.** Look for changes in size, texture, or color of moles or birthmarks or patches on the skin that look dry, scaly, reddish, and

slightly raised. See your doctor right away if you find anything unusual.



## Urinary Tract Health

Proper functioning of the urinary system is a natural part of your day—something that you probably don't think about until you have a problem. The urinary tract makes and stores urine. Bacteria (bak-teer-ee-uh), a type of germ that gets into your urinary tract, causes a urinary tract infection, or UTI. This infection can happen in parts of your urinary tract, like your kidneys, bladder, or urethra (yuh-ree-thra). There are steps you can take to try to prevent a UTI. But you may follow these steps and still get a UTI. If you have symptoms of a UTI, call your doctor.

### Steps you can take:

- Urinate when you need to. Don't hold it. Pass urine before and after sex. After you pass urine or have a bowel movement (BM), wipe from front to back.
- Drink water every day and after sex.
- Clean the outer lips of your vagina and anus each day. The anus is the place where a bowel movement leaves your body, located between the buttocks.
- Don't use douches or feminine hygiene sprays.
- If you get a lot of UTIs and use spermicides, or creams that kill sperm, talk to your doctor about using other forms of birth control.
- Wear underwear with a cotton crotch.



## Violence in Your Life

Violence and abuse affect all kinds of people every day. It doesn't matter what race or culture you come from, how much money you have, or if you have a disability. It is most common among women between ages 15 and 54, but it can happen at any age. If you are being abused or have a loved one who is abused, or think there is abuse, get help as soon as you can.

### Steps you can take:

- Call the police or leave if you or your children are in danger! Call a crisis hotline or the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 800-799-SAFE or TDD 800-787-3224, which is available

24 hours a day, 365 days a year, in English, Spanish, and other languages. This helpline can give you the phone numbers of local hotlines and other resources.

- Don't keep it to yourself. Get help. Talk with someone: a family member, friend, colleague, or faith counselor.
- If you've been hurt, get medical attention and call the police. Abuse is a crime and you have rights.
- Set aside some money and choose a place to go. If you decide to leave, you'll be prepared. Put important papers—marriage license, birth certificates, checkbook, and other

papers and items—in a place where you can get them quickly.

- Contact your family court or domestic violence court. Get information about a civil protection order.



## Healthy Weight

An unhealthy diet and physical inactivity are contributing factors to becoming overweight or obese. Being overweight raises the risk of having these health problems: heart disease, type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, stroke, breathing problems, arthritis, gallbladder disease, osteoarthritis, and some cancers.

### Steps you can take:

- **Focus on fruits.** For a 2,000-calorie diet, you will need 2 cups of fruit each day-like 1 small banana, 1 large orange, and 1/4 cup of dried apricots or peaches.
- **Vary your veggies.** Eat more dark green veggies, such as broccoli, kale, and other dark leafy greens; orange veggies, such as carrots, and sweet potatoes; and beans and peas.
- **Get your calcium-rich foods.** Get 3 cups of low-fat or fat-free milk-or an equivalent amount of low-fat yogurt and/or low-fat cheese (1 1/2 ounces of cheese equals 1 cup of milk)-every day. If you don't or can't consume milk, choose lactose-free milk products and/or calcium-fortified foods and drinks.
- **Make half your grains whole.** Eat at least 3 ounces of whole-grain cereals, breads, crackers, rice, or pasta every day. One ounce is about 1 slice of bread, 1 cup of breakfast cereal, or 1/2 cup of cooked rice or pasta. Look to see that grains such as wheat, rice, oats, or corn are referred to as "whole" in the list of ingredients.
- **Go lean with protein.** Choose lean meats and poultry. Bake it, broil it, or grill it. Vary your protein choices with more fish, beans, peas, nuts, and seeds.
- **Limit saturated fats.** Get less than 10 percent of calories from saturated fatty acids. Most fats should come from sources of polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fatty acids, such as fish, nuts, and vegetable oils. When selecting and preparing meat, poultry, and milk choose lean, low-fat, or fat-free.
- **Limit salt.** Get less than 2,300 mg of sodium (approximately 1 teaspoon of salt) each day.
- **Get moving.** Thirty minutes of physical activity on most days of the week can greatly improve your health.

## Diabetes

**W**hen you take steps to prevent diabetes, you also lower your risk for heart disease, stroke, kidney disease, blindness, and amputation. Small changes in your lifestyle can make a difference.

### Steps you can take:

- Get moving. Get 30 minutes of physical activity most days of the week.



- Lose 5 to 7 percent of your body weight. Choose low-fat foods and foods high in fiber. Eat low-fat dairy products, lean cuts of meat, fish, poultry, fruits, and vegetables.

### Prevent Health Problems Caused by Diabetes

- Eye disease and blindness. Control your blood sugar and blood pressure and get a dilated eye exam once a year.
  - Kidney disease. Control blood sugar and blood pressure. See your doctor if your urine is cloudy or bloody, if you feel like you have to urinate often, or if you have pain or burning when you urinate. Have a urine test once a year.
  - Foot problems. Check your feet every day for cuts, sores, bumps, blisters, or red spots. Ask your doctor to check your feet at every office visit.
- Have a complete foot exam every year.
  - Mouth problems. Twice a year, have a dentist clean your teeth and check your gums. Use dental floss at least once a day. Brush your teeth with a soft toothbrush after each meal
  - Nerve damage. Nerve problems can come in many forms. Tell your doctor if you have any problems in your feet, legs, hands, or arms or problems digesting food or with urination.
  - Flu and pneumonia. Get a flu shot every year. Also ask your doctor about getting a shot to protect you from pneumonia.
  - Stiff hands. Keep your blood sugar under control and stretch your hands. Using clay or putty can keep your hands strong.

## National Centers of Excellence

The 21 National Centers of Excellence in Women's Health (CoE), and the 14 National Community Centers of Excellence in Women's Health (CCOE) are health care delivery systems that focus on health care for women. Their goals are to provide comprehensive care to women across the lifespan in an environment supportive of

women. The goal is to treat you as a whole woman. This means when you visit a doctor or nurse they make sure that you are seen or referred for other services you may need. So, if you need immunizations, Pap tests, mammograms, dental work, heart treatment, or help dealing with stress, you can get it all in one facility!

To contact a CoE or CCOE near you, please visit our web sites:

CoEs: [www.WomensHealth.gov/COE/centers/index.htm](http://www.WomensHealth.gov/COE/centers/index.htm)

CCOEs: [www.WomensHealth.gov/owh/CCOE/index.htm](http://www.WomensHealth.gov/owh/CCOE/index.htm)

### Centers of Excellence in Women's Health (CoE)

Boston University Medical Center  
Boston, MA  
Phone: 617-638-7428 or 9563

Brown University/Women & Infants Hospital  
Providence, RI  
Phone: 401-274-1100

Harvard University  
Boston, MA  
Phone: 617-732-8866

Indiana University School of Medicine  
Indianapolis, IN  
Phone: 317-630-2243

Magee Womens Hospital  
Pittsburgh, PA  
Phone: 412-641-4747

MCP Hahnemann University  
(doing business as Drexel University)  
Philadelphia, PA  
Phone: 215-842-7007

Oregon Health & Science University  
Portland, OR  
Phone: 503-418-4500

Tulane/Xavier Universities of Louisiana  
New Orleans, LA  
Phone: 877-588-5100

University of Arizona  
Tucson, AZ  
Phone: 520-694-6010

Visit the National Women's Health Information Center web site: [www.WomensHealth.gov](http://www.WomensHealth.gov)

University of California at Los Angeles  
Los Angeles, CA  
Phone: 800-825-2631

University of California at San Francisco  
San Francisco, CA  
Phone: 415-353-2668

University of Illinois at Chicago  
Chicago, IL  
Phone: 800-UIC-1002

University of Michigan Health System  
Ann Arbor, MI  
Phone: 734-936-8886

University of Minnesota  
Minneapolis, MN  
Phone: 612-626-3444

University of Mississippi  
Jackson, MS  
Phone: 601-815-3281

University of Missouri- Kansas City  
Kansas City, MO  
Phone: 816-404-5165

University of Puerto Rico  
San Juan, PR  
Phone: 787-758-2525 ext. 2813 or  
787-764-3707

University of Texas Health Science Center at  
San Antonio  
San Antonio, TX  
Phone: 210-567-5035

University of Wisconsin-Madison  
Madison, WI  
Phone: 608-267-5566

Virginia Commonwealth University  
Richmond, VA  
Phone: 866-829-6626

West Virginia University Health Sciences  
Center  
Morgantown, WV  
Phone: 304-598-4880

### **Region VIII CoE Demonstration Projects**

University of North Dakota  
Grand Forks, ND  
Phone: 701-777-3255

University of South Dakota  
Sioux Falls, SD  
Phone: 605-357-1500

## **Community Centers of Excellence in Women's Health (CCOE)**

Christiana Care Health Services  
Wilmington, DE  
Phone: 302-428-4414

Great Plains of Greely County  
Tribune, KS  
Phone: 620-376-4251

Griffin Hospital  
Derby, CT  
Phone: 203-732-0699

Jefferson Health System  
Birmingham, AL  
Phone: 205-918-2364

Kokua Kalihi Valley Comprehensive  
Family Services  
Honolulu, HI  
Phone: 808-848-0976

Mariposa Community Health Center  
Nogales, AZ  
Phone: 520-281-1550

Morton Plant Hospital  
Clearwater, FL  
Phone: 727-467-2546

North Point Health & Wellness  
Minneapolis, MN  
Phone: 612-302-4600

Northeast Missouri Health Council, Inc.  
Women's Care Connection  
Kirksville, MO  
Phone: 660-627-5757 or 660-626-2262

NorthEast Ohio Neighborhood  
Health Services, Inc.  
Cleveland, OH  
Phone: 216-231-7700

Northeastern Vermont Area Health Education  
Center  
St. Johnsbury, VT  
Phone: 802-748-7300

Oakhurst Medical Centers Inc.  
Stone Mountain, GA  
Phone: 404-298-7562

St. Barnabas Healthcare System and Hospital  
Bronx, NY  
Phone: 718-960-9358

Women's Health Services  
Santa Fe, NM  
Phone: 505-988-8869

## **Rural/Frontier Women's Health Coordinating Centers**

Arizona Association of Community Health  
Centers  
Phoenix, AZ  
Phone: 602-253-0090

Utah Navajo Health System, Inc.  
Montezuma Creek, UT  
Phone: 435-651-3291

Women's Wellness and Maternity Center, Inc.  
Madisonville, TN  
Phone: 423-442-6624 or 800-440-3385

Visit the National Women's Health Information Center web site: [www.WomensHealth.gov](http://www.WomensHealth.gov)

## Talking with your Doctor or Nurse

Knowing how to talk to your doctor or nurse will help you get the information you need to make better health care decisions. Here are some tips:

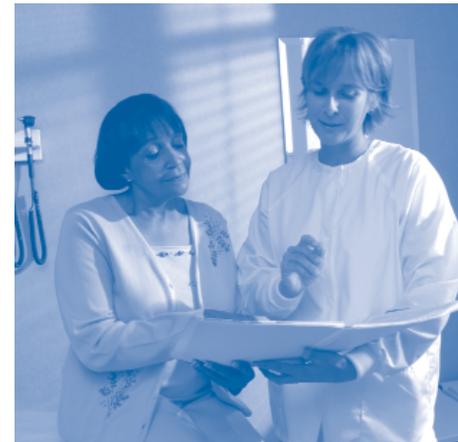
- Make a list of health concerns and questions to take with you to your visit. Share the list with your doctor or nurse.
- Describe symptoms clearly and briefly. Say what the symptoms are, when they began, how they make you feel, what triggers them, what (if anything) makes them stop, and what you've done to relieve them. This helps your doctor decide the best course of treatment, along with any tests you may need.
- Tell your doctor or nurse what prescription and over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, herbal products,

and other supplements you're taking. Be honest about your diet, physical activity, smoking, alcohol or drug use, and sexual history. Discuss allergies to drugs, foods, or other things. Tell your doctor or nurse if you are being treated by another doctor or nurse, including a mental health professional.

- Don't be afraid to ask questions and don't feel embarrassed about discussing sensitive topics. Your doctor or nurse is used to talking to people about personal concerns. Don't leave something out because you're worried about taking up too much time.
- Be sure you understand everything before you leave. This includes treatment recommendations and any follow-up tests or referrals. If you

don't understand something, ask to have it explained again.

- Bring a family member or friend with you to take notes and offer moral support. An extra pair of eyes and ears can help you remember your questions as well as the answers.



# Checklist of Questions to ask your Doctor or Nurse

## General Health and Wellness Questions

How often do I need a physical exam, breast exam, pelvic exam and Pap test?

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Do I need a flu shot or other immunizations?

---

Will changing my lifestyle (diet, exercise, smoking, drinking) help me avoid certain diseases? What can I do to be more healthy? Is there any reading material or videotapes on these topics? Are there support groups or community services that can help?

---

## Medical Test Questions

What will we know after the test is done?

---

How do I find out the results? How long will it take to get the results?

---

What does the test involve? What do I do to get ready for it?

---

Are there any dangers or side effects with the test?

---

## Symptoms and Diagnosis Questions

Could my symptoms be caused by or related to something other than my current condition?

---

What may have caused my current condition?

---

### Treatment Questions

- How is this condition treated or managed? What long-term effects (if any) will it have on my life?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- How soon should treatment start? How long will it last?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Are there other treatments available?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- How much will the treatment cost? Is it covered by insurance?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- What are the treatment's risks and side effects?  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Medication Questions (you can also ask your pharmacist)

- What are the side effects?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- What should I do if I miss a dose?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Are there foods, drugs, or activities I should avoid while taking this medicine?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Is there a generic brand available at a lower price?  
\_\_\_\_\_





**U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**  
**Office on Women's Health**  
200 Independence Ave, SW  
Room 712E  
Washington, DC 20201

10/2005

[www.WomensHealth.gov](http://www.WomensHealth.gov) 1-800-994-9662 TDD: 1-888-220-5446