



# A Lifetime of Good Health



your guide to staying healthy

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888-220-5446 (TDD)

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presented by  
the National Women's Health Information Center  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Office on Women's Health



## About the National Women's Health Information Center

### Why a National Women's Health Information Center?

Have you ever felt that the “age of information” was turning into the “age of confusion”? Now that we have an information superhighway, it seems jammed with health advice. Sometimes you get gridlock, where one piece of information contradicts another or doesn't make sense. Or, maybe you can't find information on the topic you want.

The National Women's Health Information Center (NWHIC) is here to help! It provides a toll-free phone service (**800-994-WOMAN (9662); TDD 888-220-5446**) that is staffed by English and Spanish-speaking information specialists from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. (EST), Monday through Friday, excluding federal holidays. This phone service also serves as a *Breastfeeding Helpline* to help you with common breastfeeding issues and challenges.

NWHIC also has a web site ([www.4woman.gov](http://www.4woman.gov)) with direct links to information sources, news clippings that are updated five days a week, a calendar of women's health events, statistics on women's health, special sections on women's health topics, like pregnancy, minority women, and disabilities, and much more.

### What's the difference between the National Women's Health Information Center and other women's health information web sites?

NWHIC is entirely 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. This means that it does not represent any special commercial interest, and it's not trying to sell you anything. NWHIC is simply here to help you get information you can trust on a wide variety of women's health issues. And it's **FREE**.

Call for free health publications: 800-994-WOMAN (9662) TDD: 888-220-5446

## Introduction

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, trustworthy information to help their constantly growing, changing and beautiful bodies and minds. Your health needs nurturing to live long and well throughout the years. But nurturing your health requires a holistic approach throughout the “health span”— quality years in addition to the number of years. 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 are not difficult 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

Visit the National Women's Health Information Center web site: [www.4woman.gov](http://www.4woman.gov)

# 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 check-up, including weight and height	Discuss with your health care provider	Discuss with your health care provider	Discuss with your health care provider	Discuss with your health care provider
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	Start at age 21, then once every 1-2 years if normal	Every 1-2 years	Every 1-2 years	Every 1-2 years
Cholesterol test		Start at age 45, then every 5 years	Every 5 years	Every 5 years
<b>Bone Health:</b> Bone mineral density test		Discuss with your health care provider	Discuss with your health care provider	Get a bone mineral density test
<b>Diabetes:</b> Blood sugar test		Start at age 45, then every 3 years	Every 3 years	Every 3 years
<b>Breast Health:</b> Breast self-exam	Monthly	Monthly	Monthly	Monthly
Mammogram (x-ray of breast)		Every 1-2 years. Discuss with your health care provider.	Every 1-2 years. Discuss with your health care provider.	Every 1-2 years. Discuss with your health care provider
<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 health care provider.
Chlamydia test	If sexually active, yearly until age 25	If you are at high risk for chlamydia or other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) you may need this test. See STD section.	If you are at high risk for chlamydia or other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) you may need this test. See STD section.	If you are at high risk for chlamydia or other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) you may need this test. See STD section.


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

## 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
Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) tests	Talk to your health care provider if you have or had more than 1 sexual partner, or a history of STDs, or sexual contact with STDs, or a partner with the same.	Talk to your health care provider if you have or had more than 1 sexual partner, or a history of STDs, or sexual contact with STDs, or a partner with the same.	Talk to your health care provider if you have or had more than 1 sexual partner, or a history of STDs, or sexual contact with STDs, or a partner with the same.	Talk to your health care provider if you have or had more than 1 sexual partner, or a history of STDs, or sexual contact with STDs, or a partner with the same.
<b>Colorectal Health:</b> Fecal occult blood test			Yearly	Yearly
Flexible Sigmoidoscopy (with fecal occult blood test is preferred)			Every 5 years	Every 5 years
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
Rectal exam	Discuss with your health care provider	Discuss with your health care provider	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> Vision exam with eye care provider	Once initially between age 20 and 39	Every 2-4 years	Every 2-4 years	Every 1-2 years
Hearing test (discuss with your health care provider)	Starting at age 18, then every 10 years	Every 10 years	Discuss with your health care provider	Discuss with your health care provider
<b>Skin Health:</b> Mole exam	Monthly mole self-exam; by a health care provider every 3 years, starting at age 20.	Monthly mole self-exam; by a health care provider every year.	Monthly mole self-exam; by a health care provider every year.	Monthly mole self-exam; by a health care provider 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 health care provider	Discuss with your health care provider	Discuss with your health care provider	Discuss with your health care provider
<b>Immunizations:</b> Influenza vaccine	Discuss with your health care provider	Discuss with your health care provider	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 health care provider 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


 if it applies	Does your family history include:	Then ask your health care provider 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
	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.

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	Are You:	Then ask your health care provider 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
	Hispanic American	Blood pressure test; cholesterol test; blood sugar test; colonoscopy
	Alaska Native/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
	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
	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 test
	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
	A health care worker exposed to blood	HIV test; Hepatitis screening; Hepatitis A, B vaccines

## 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

 if it applies	Do you have or have you had?	Then ask your health care provider 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
	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

than normal risk for a disease, you may need special screenings or tests more often or at a younger age.

 if it applies	Do you have or have you had?:	Then ask your health care provider 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 vaccine
	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 from 1978-1985	HIV test; Hepatitis screening
	Multiple sex partners (or a partner who has or had multiple sex partners)	STD tests; HIV test; Hepatitis B test; Pap test; pelvic exam
	Alcoholism	Pneumococcal vaccine; TB test; psychological screening; liver tests
	Intravenous (IV) drug use or addiction	Hepatitis screening; Hepatitis A, B vaccines; TB test; STD tests; HIV test; psychological screening
	A sexually transmitted disease (STD)	STD tests; HIV test; Pap test; pelvic exam
	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).

### Covered Services

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#### Bone Mass Measurements for Osteoporosis\*:

Once every 2 years if your health care provider determines you are at risk for bone loss.

#### Colorectal Cancer Screening (Age 50+):

- **Fecal Occult Blood Test**  
Once every 12 months.
- **Flexible Sigmoidoscopy**  
Once every 48 months.
- **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).
- **Barium Enema**  
Doctor can decide to do instead of a sigmoidoscopy or colonoscopy.

#### Pap Test, Pelvic Exam, and Clinical Breast Exam:

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.

#### Diabetes Services (if you have diabetes):

- Coverage for glucose monitors, test strips, and lancets.
- Diabetes self-management training (if requested by your health care provider).

#### Glaucoma Screening\*:

Once every 12 months  
Must be done or supervised by an eye doctor who is legally allowed to do this service in your state.

#### Mammogram Screening (age 40+; one baseline mammogram between ages 35 and 39):

Once every 12 months. Medicare also covers new digital technologies for mammogram screenings.

#### Shots (Vaccinations):

- **Flu Shot**  
Once a year in the fall or winter.
- **Pneumococcal Pneumonia Shot**  
One shot may be all you will ever need. Ask your health care provider.
- **Hepatitis B Shot**  
If you are at medium-to-high risk for hepatitis.

\* Covered for people with Medicare who are at high risk for these conditions.

Call for free health publications: 800-994-WOMAN (9662) TDD: 888-220-5446

## living with a Healthy Heart and Stroke Prevention

Heart disease and stroke - two main cardiovascular diseases - are the first and third causes of death for women in the U.S. Learn more about your heart and blood vessels, and what you can do to protect them and improve your health now and for years to come!

### Steps you can take:

Quit smoking. Smoking increases your risk for heart attack and stroke. Ask your health care provider for help.

Control your blood pressure. Cut down on sodium, salt, and alcohol.

Control your blood cholesterol. Get your cholesterol checked at least once every five years.

Control your weight. Avoid fad diets and diet pills.

Get at least 30 minutes of physical activity on most days of the week.

If you have diabetes, monitor and control your blood sugar levels. Talk with your health care provider about your heart disease risks and your family's heart disease history.

If you are currently using oral contraceptives (birth control pills) or hormone therapy (HT), ask your health care provider if they are safe for you.

Manage your heart disease, if you have it. Your health care provider can treat your heart disease with medicine to help prevent blood clots.

Eat Healthy. Include plenty of whole grains, fruits and vegetables in your diet. Eat foods low in saturated fat and cholesterol, and moderate in total fat, sugars and salt.

If you have ever had a "mini stroke," or transient ischemic attack (TIA), tell your health care provider right away.

Visit the National Women's Health Information Center web site: [www.4woman.gov](http://www.4woman.gov)

## Know the Warning Signs

# Heart Attack

*If you have these symptoms, call 911 right away! Every minute counts, even if the symptoms seem to disappear!*

Know that not everyone gets all of these warning signs. Sometimes these signs can go away and return. Treatments are most effective if given within one hour of when the attack begins.

chest discomfort or uncomfortable pressure, fullness, squeezing, or pain in the center of the chest that lasts longer than a few minutes, or comes and goes  
 spreading pain to one or both arms, back, jaw or stomach  
 cold sweats and nausea

*As with men, women's most common symptom is chest pain or discomfort. But women are somewhat more likely than men to have some of the other warning signs, such as:*

shortness of breath  
 nausea  
 vomiting  
 back or jaw pain



**4 Your Heart**

[www.4woman.gov/heart/index.htm](http://www.4woman.gov/heart/index.htm)

## Know the Warning Signs

# Stroke

*If you have these symptoms, call 911 right away! Every minute counts, even if the symptoms seem to disappear!*

Not everyone gets all of these warning signs. Sometimes these signs can go away and return. Treatments are most effective if given within one hour of when the attack begins.

sudden numbness or weakness of face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body  
 sudden confusion or trouble speaking or understanding speech  
 sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes  
 sudden trouble walking, dizziness, or loss of balance or coordination  
 sudden headache with no known cause  
 blurred or double vision, drowsiness, and nausea or vomiting





## living with Healthy Bones

Most women begin to lose bone mass around age 30. After menopause, bone density can begin to decrease rapidly. This increases your risk for osteoporosis when bones become weak and brittle and break more easily. Bone loss is a serious condition that can be prevented and treated, helping you stay healthy and strong.

### Steps you can take:

Eat foods rich in calcium and vitamin D, such as low-fat milk, yogurt, cheese, fish with edible bones like sardines, and dark, green leafy vegetables, like kale and broccoli.

Do weight-bearing exercise, such as walking, jogging, hiking, and stair climbing. Always check with your health care provider before starting an exercise program.

Don't smoke and quit if you do. Ask your health care provider for help.

Limit alcoholic beverages, high salt, protein, and caffeine intake.

Talk with your health care provider about taking calcium supplements.

Talk with your health care provider about your risks for osteoporosis.

Get a bone density test at age 65. Get one earlier if your health care provider recommends it.

If you are currently taking hormone therapy (HT) or estrogen therapy (ET) to prevent bone loss, ask your health care provider if it is right for you. Recent studies suggest these might not be a good option for many women.

If you are developing osteoporosis, talk with your health care provider about available drugs that preserve bone density or slow bone loss.



## living with Breast Cancer Early Detection

Breast 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, and have a healthy lifestyle.

### Steps you can take:

Do a monthly breast self-exam. Check for lumps or other changes in your breasts and in your underarm area.

Discuss your family's health history and your own risk factors for breast cancer with your health care provider.

If you are in menopause and are taking hormone therapy (HT), talk with your health care provider about whether it is right for you. For some women, it can increase breast cancer risk. Talk with your health care provider about other treatments available to help you manage menopause.

Get a mammogram every 1 to 2 years after age 40, or more often if your health care provider recommends it.

Exercise regularly.

Drink alcohol only moderately, if at all (no more than 1 drink per day for women).

Eat a healthy, balanced diet.



## living with Healthy Lungs

Healthy lungs help our bodies to get all of the oxygen they need to thrive. Did you know that lung cancer kills more women than breast cancer? Learn about the things that can harm your lungs and take control of your lung health.

### Steps you can take:

If you have chronic bronchitis, asthma, or allergies, follow your health care provider's recommendations to manage your condition.

Don't smoke. If you do smoke, quit. Ask your health care provider for help.

Exercise regularly.

Avoid tobacco smoke and other pollutants. Being around second-hand (other people's) smoke can be dangerous for you and your children.

Have your home tested to detect any dangerous levels of radon.

If you work around asbestos, wear protective clothing.

See your health care provider immediately if you have any unusual symptoms such as a persistent cough, coughing up blood, and constant chest pain. It could be lung cancer or another serious problem.



## living with a Healthy Pregnancy

Having a healthy baby begins even before you get pregnant. That new life growing inside you will depend on you to make good choices about your health.

### Steps you can take:

Eat a healthy diet with lots of fruits, vegetables, grains, and calcium-rich foods.

Get proper rest and do not overdo it!

Be sure to get at least .4 mg (400 mcg or micrograms) of folic acid every day to reduce the risk of birth defects. Do so also when you are trying to get pregnant. Folic acid is in leafy green vegetables, kidney beans, orange juice, whole grain products and other foods, and in most multivitamins.

Do not smoke, drink alcohol, or use drugs when you are pregnant or trying to get pregnant. These can cause long-term damage to your baby.

Be physically active every day, but only at the pace recommended by your health care provider.

Limit or eliminate your caffeine intake from coffee, tea, sodas, medications, and chocolate.

Stay away from toxic chemicals like insecticides, cleaning or paint thinning solvents, lead, and mercury.

Avoid hot tubs, saunas, and x-rays.

Don't handle or eat uncooked meats or fish.

Do not handle cat litter—it can carry a parasitic infection that can cause birth defects.



Healthy  
Pregnancy

[www.4woman.gov/  
pregnancy](http://www.4woman.gov/pregnancy)



[www.4woman.gov/breastfeeding](http://www.4woman.gov/breastfeeding)

## living with Menopause

Menopause is a time of change for women that allows us to explore a different phase of life. While we all have different menopause experiences, we can use this time to focus on taking better care of ourselves! Regular exercise and a good diet can help to ease the symptoms of menopause and improve your overall health. For years, hormone therapy was standard treatment for the symptoms of menopause. Recent studies suggest however, that it might not be a good option for many women. Talk with your health care provider about other treatments available to help you manage menopause.

### Steps you can take:

**Hot Flashes and Night Sweats**—Avoid hot flash “triggers” like a too warm environment (especially when sleeping), hot or spicy foods, alcohol, caffeine, and stress. Dress in layers, sleep in cotton bed clothes, and keep a fan in your bedroom or workplace.

**Vaginal Dryness**—Over-the-counter vaginal lubricants can help ease vaginal dryness. Your health care provider may also recommend prescription estrogen creams.

**Difficulty Sleeping**—Regular exercise can help with sleep. Avoid alcohol, caffeine, large meals, and working or exercising right before bedtime. Try drinking warm herb tea or milk before bedtime.

**Problems With Your Periods**—If you experience heavy bleeding, spotting between periods, or other unusual bleeding, talk to your health care provider.

**Celebrate the Transition**—It’s time to try new things and above all, take care of yourself!



## living with Reproductive Health

Prevention is important to a woman’s reproductive health. Pelvic exams can detect problems before they become severe. Pap tests are particularly important for early detection of cervical cancer, which when found early can be cured. Talk with your health care provider about any concerns you may have, including tests for sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and HIV (the virus that causes AIDS) if you feel you are at risk.

### Steps you can take:

Have regular pelvic exams and Pap tests. Talk with your health care provider about how often you need them.

See your health care provider right away if you have abnormal bleeding or discharge, or pain during sex, in your pelvic area, or during urination.

To find out where you can get a free or low-cost Pap test in your area, call the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program at 888-842-6355 (toll-free).

If you are sexually active, get regular checks for STDs such as chlamydia, gonorrhea, and genital herpes. STDs are especially dangerous in pregnancy and can harm you and your baby. You can help prevent STDs and HIV/AIDS by using condoms every time you have sexual contact. But, condoms aren’t 100% foolproof and the best way to avoid STDs is to practice abstinence (don’t have sex). Birth control methods other than condoms, such as pills and implants, won’t protect you from STDs or HIV.

If you think you have been exposed to HIV, get tested. You can call the CDC National AIDS hotline at 800-342-2437 (English) or 800-344-7432 (Spanish) or 800-243-7889 (TTY) for more information.

Become educated about the different methods of birth control. Talk with your health care provider about which option is best for you.

## living with a Healthy Outlook

Women 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 some time for yourself will pay off with big benefits – a healthy outlook and better health!

### Steps you can take:

Stay in touch with family and friends.

Be involved in your community.

Keep a positive attitude and do things that make you happy.

Learn to recognize and manage stress in your life. Signs of stress include trouble sleeping, frequent headaches and stomach problems, being angry a lot, and turning to food, drugs, and alcohol to relieve stress.

Good ways to deal with stress include regular exercise, healthy eating habits, and relaxation exercises (like deep breathing or meditation). Talking to family members and friends can help a lot too. Many women find that interacting with their faith community is helpful in times of stress.

Get enough sleep and rest – adults need around 8 hours of sleep a night!

Talk to your health care provider if you feel depressed for more than a few days; depression is a treatable illness. Signs of depression include feeling empty and sad, crying a lot, loss of interest in life, and thoughts of death or suicide. If you or someone you know has thoughts of suicide, get help right away. Call 911, a local crisis center, or 800-SUICIDE.



## living with Healthy Eyes & Ears

Vision and hearing loss can happen as we age. Other problems with our eyes and ears can happen as we 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 quality life.

### Steps you can take:

Get your eyes examined once initially between the ages of 20 to 39; every 2 to 4 years at age 40 to 64; and every 1 to 2 years at age 65 and older. If you need glasses or have other eye problems, talk with your health care provider about how often to get an exam.

At age 50, talk to your health care provider about having a hearing exam.

See your health care provider right away if you have any signs of hearing loss or vision problems.

Wear protective glasses when working with materials that can harm eyes, and wear sunglasses when outside, even if it's cloudy. When playing sports, wear protective eyewear made of polycarbonate plastic and fitted by an eye care professional.

Don't smoke, and control high cholesterol—these increase your risk for age-related macular degeneration (AMD), a common cause of vision loss in people over age 60.

Wear earplugs when doing loud activities (above 90 decibels) such as attending rock concerts, or using a snowmobile, chainsaw, lawn mower, or motorcycle.

Never insert anything into your ear canal, and wear a helmet when bicycling or doing other activities that could cause head injury.



## living with Colorectal Health

Colorectal cancer is the third most diagnosed cancer in women, following breast and lung cancers. It can be a “silent” disease because many people do not develop symptoms until the cancer is difficult to cure. The good news is that colorectal cancer is preventable and 90% curable when detected early.

### Steps you can take:

Eat a low-fat, high-fiber diet and reduce fats.

Consider taking calcium supplements and increasing intake of foods with high levels of vitamins C, A, and D.

Avoid becoming overweight.

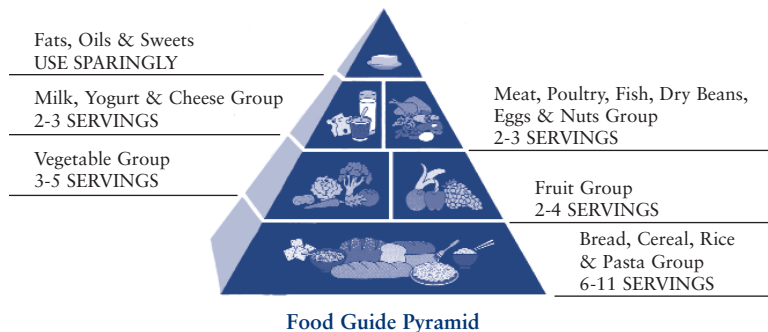
Drink alcohol in moderation, if at all.

Avoid salt-cured, pickled, and smoked foods.

If you smoke, quit. Ask a health care provider for help.

Get regular physical activity.

When you turn 50, start getting regular colorectal screening exams. These include yearly rectal exams and stool blood tests, as well as sigmoidoscopy every 5 years and colonoscopy every 10 years. If family members developed cancer at a young age, talk with your health care provider about testing at an earlier age.



## living with a Healthy Lifestyle

A healthy lifestyle can help you thrive as you move through the seasons of life that every woman experiences. But, making healthy choices isn't always easy! It can be hard to find the time and energy to exercise regularly or prepare healthy meals. Your efforts, though, will pay off in many ways, and for the rest of your life!

### Steps you can take:

Be physically active for 30 minutes most days of the week. Break this up into three 10-minute sessions when pressed for time.

Eat a well-balanced diet with lots of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Choose a diet low in saturated fat and cholesterol; moderate in sugar, salt and total fat. Choose vegetable oils and soft tub margarine rather than solid fat (meat and dairy fats, butter, lard and shortenings). Use the Food Guide Pyramid as a starting point.

Avoid injury by wearing seatbelts and bike helmets. Use smoke and carbon monoxide detectors in the home, and street smarts when walking alone.

Drink alcohol only in moderation (no more than 1 drink per day for women). Never drink before or when driving, or when pregnant.

Don't smoke, and quit if you do! Ask your health care provider for help.

Use prescription drugs wisely—read the label, ask your health care provider or pharmacist for details about the medicine, keep a record of the medicines you use, take medicine(s) correctly, and report side effects to your health care provider.

Ask someone you trust for help if you think you might have a problem with drugs or alcohol.



## living with a Healthy Smile

Good 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 after meals with a soft or medium bristled toothbrush. Also brush after drinking, before going to bed. Use dental floss daily.

See your dentist twice a year for an oral exam and call right away when you have any problems like bleeding gums, mouth sores, or trouble swallowing or chewing.

If you are pregnant, have an oral exam early in your pregnancy.

Don't smoke and quit if you do. See your health care provider for help. Drink alcohol only in moderation, if at all.

Have a well-balanced, nutritious diet, and limit sugary foods.

If you have diabetes, practice good oral hygiene to prevent gum disease.

If you have a baby, wiping your baby's gum ridges with a soft cloth or baby toothbrush after nursing or feeding can help remove sugars that cause tooth decay.



## living with Healthy Skin

The skin, your body's largest organ, protects you against heat, light, injury, and infection. A suntan is not a sign of health – it can lead to skin damage, and eventually, premature aging, wrinkling or skin cancer. Skin cancer can be prevented and it is never too late to start taking better care of your skin!

### Steps you can take:

Stay out of the sun, especially between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. when the sun's harmful rays are strongest. Don't think you are safe if it is cloudy or if you are in the water, harmful rays pass through both.

Use a broad spectrum sunscreen that guards against both UVA and UVB rays, with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or higher. Reapply the lotion often, especially if you are getting wet or sweating, or even if the product is water resistant.

Wear protective clothing like a wide-brimmed hat and loose, lightweight, long-sleeved shirts and long pants or long skirts when in the sun. Select sunglasses that block 99 to 100 percent of the sun's rays.

Do not use sunlamps, tanning beds, and tanning pills. None of these are safe. You can use tanning make-up products safely, but remember they are not sunscreens and will not protect your skin from the sun.

Check your skin often, ideally after a shower or bath, for any changes in moles or birthmarks or for precancerous skin lesions that look dry, scaly, reddish, and slightly raised. Report any changes immediately to your health care provider. You can also get a yearly skin and mole exam from a health care provider.



## living with Urinary Tract Health

Proper function of our urinary system is a natural part of our day and we usually don't think about it until we have a problem. To keep your urinary tract healthy, practice good hygiene, prevent urinary tract infections (UTIs), and see your health care provider about any problems.

### Steps you can take:

Natural ways to prevent UTIs are to drink plenty of water daily and take vitamin C. Cranberry juice also helps keep the bacteria that cause UTIs out of your system.

Each day, cleanse the area around the rectum and vagina.

Always urinate when you feel the need and wipe from front to back to prevent bacteria from entering the vagina or opening to the urinary tract.

Cleanse the genital area before sex, and empty your bladder before and after sex.

Avoid douching and using feminine hygiene sprays, which irritate vaginal tissue.

Wear underwear with a cotton crotch which allows moisture to escape. Too much moisture creates a breeding ground for infections.

To prevent kidney infections, see your health care provider as soon as you have symptoms of a UTI. Symptoms include: a frequent urge to urinate, but only passing a small amount of urine; burning, pressure or pain in the bladder or when urinating; feeling tired, shaky or washed out.

Talk to your health care provider about bladder control problems. Don't let these problems limit your activities.



## living without Violence in Your Life

Violence against women is never justified and is always wrong. It affects not only women of all ages and racial, cultural, and economic backgrounds, but children, families, and friends of the victims. Unfortunately, it is not uncommon, with 1 in 4 American women reporting being raped or physically assaulted at some time in their life by someone they know. Don't let violence stifle your spirit. If you or someone you know are experiencing violence, there is help available.

### Steps you can take:

Call the police or leave if you or your children are in danger.

Understand that you're not alone. Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline (800-799-SAFE, TDD 800-787-3224) 24 hours a day for help and referrals to local hotlines and other resources like shelters. The Hotline has operators to talk to you in English, Spanish, and other languages.

Don't keep it to yourself. Get help. Talk with someone: a family member, friend, colleague, workplace counselor, or faith counselor.

If you've been hurt, get medical attention right away and call the police. Any type of abuse, including domestic violence, rape, and stalking are all crimes.

Talk to a local family court counselor about civil protection orders to protect yourself from further abuse, domestic violence, or stalking.

If you decide to leave, choose a place to go and set aside some money. Put important papers and items in a place where you can get them quickly.

**Violence  
Against  
Women**

[www.4woman.gov/violence](http://www.4woman.gov/violence)

## Pick Your Path to Health

An Educational Campaign from the Office on Women's Health

Women today are confronted with numerous challenges—from the demands of home and family to the pressures of work. Although the decisions we make in these areas are important, nothing influences our fate more than the choices we make about our own personal health and well-being.

**PICK YOUR PATH TO HEALTH, A PUBLIC EDUCATION CAMPAIGN** sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office on Women's Health, helps women take simple and manageable steps to improve their health and provides tools for local communities to promote practical, culturally relevant action steps to wellness.

Previous health campaigns aimed at women have emphasized long-term goals, such as losing weight or quitting smoking. Pick Your Path to Health recognizes the multiple demands women have on their time and energy, and therefore suggests specific, life-oriented action steps—such as taking the stairs instead of the elevator—in an effort to ease the path to better health. The campaign delivers these easy-to-incorporate health messages through 12-month pocket planners, newspaper articles, posters, a community action kit, a campaign newsletter, postcards, and a listserv—a weekly e-mail message offering women's health tips based on the campaign's monthly themes.

The Campaign encourages health awareness among all women, with special emphasis on minority women. Together, participating partners are sponsoring health fairs, screenings, and other educational activities in communities nationwide. If you would like to learn more about the Campaign, obtain a community action kit, or get a poster, please contact:

### **NWHIC**

**Phone:** 800-994-WOMAN (9662)

**TDD:** 888-220-5446

**Internet:** [www.4woman.gov](http://www.4woman.gov)

## Talking with your Health Care Provider

Knowing how to talk to your health care provider (HCP) will help you get the information you need to make better health care decisions. Here are some tips for talking with your HCP:

Make a list of health concerns and questions to take with you to your visit. Share the list with your HCP.

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 HCP decide the best course of treatment, along with any tests you may need.

Tell your HCP 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 HCP if you are being treated by another HCP, including a mental health professional.

Don't be afraid to ask questions and don't feel embarrassed about discussing sensitive topics. Your HCP 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 your HCP. 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 Health Care Provider

## General Health and Wellness Questions

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

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?