

Health tip: Women's health

Understanding women's health

It is important to understand women's health, as it may vary from that of men. Women are faced with unique health concerns across the lifespan that may impact their overall well-being. Specifically, women may be challenged by things such as certain types of cancers, changes in reproductive health, eating disorders, osteoporosis, and domestic violence.¹

During each stage of life, it is important to understand the types of diseases that may affect a woman, as well as one's risk factors, recommended preventive screenings and healthcare needs. As these things evolve, a woman's best defense toward developing a chronic disease is prevention and action.

Disease prevalence, risk, and prevention

Although women are at risk for many diseases, specific ailments, such as heart disease and certain types of cancer, tend to affect women more often.

Heart disease is the leading cause of death for women, killing 1 in 5 women in the United States. Key risk factors for developing heart disease include high blood pressure, high LDL cholesterol, and smoking.⁴

Breast cancer is the second leading cause of death from cancer in American woman, affecting mostly white females. Although there are several risk factors for developing breast cancer, the main threat is age—most breast cancers are diagnosed after age 50. Prevent the development of breast cancer by receiving a mammogram at the recommended timeframe.⁵

Cervical cancer is another form of cancer that effects only women. Like breast cancer, there are many risks for cervical cancer. However, the major risk factor for developing cervical cancer is being diagnosed with HPV—spread mainly via sexual contact. Therefore, it is recommended to receive a pap smear to screen for cervical cancer once you become sexually active, or by age 25.⁶

Colorectal cancer should also be taken seriously, as it is the third leading cause of death from cancer in the United States, not just among women. Age, family history, and lifestyle choices may increase the likelihood of developing colorectal cancer. Moreover, it is recommended to begin screening for colorectal cancer at age 45, regardless of gender.⁷

To prevent the development of these diseases, it is crucial to understand your risk, get recommended screenings, and see a physician regularly.

Facts to know^{2,3}

14.4%

of women over age 18
are in **fair or poor health**

41.8%

of women over age 20
are **obese**

Less
than **50%**

of women over age 18
meet the federal guidelines
for **aerobic physical activity**

20M

women suffer from
eating disorders

Risk reduction⁸

Many diseases are caused by specific risk factors. Reduce your likelihood of developing a chronic disease and improve your quality of life by making healthier choices. Here are some tips that may help reduce your risk:

- **Quit smoking.** Quitting smoking, or never starting, lowers the risk of health problems such as heart disease, types of cancer, and type 2 diabetes.
- **Eat healthier.** Try to consume a healthier, balanced diet consisting of a variety of fruits, veggies, whole grains, lean protein, and low-fat dairy products. Limit your intake of added sugar, saturated fats, and sodium.
- **Get regular physical activity.** Aim for moderate intensity physical activity (like brisk walking or jogging) for at least 150 minutes a week, with muscle-strengthening activities at least 2 days per week.
- **Avoid excess alcohol consumption.** Over time, excessive drinking may lead to high blood pressure, many cancers, heart disease, stroke, and liver disease. If you enjoy drinking, drink in moderation.
- **Get screened.** To prevent the development of any chronic diseases, or to catch them early, make preventive screenings a part of your medical routine.
- **Get enough sleep.** Insufficient sleep may lead to poor management of chronic diseases and depression. Adults should get at least 7 hours of sleep daily.
- **Know your family history.** If you have a family history of a chronic disease, you are more likely to develop that disease. Be sure to share your family history with your physician to prevent these conditions or to catch them early.



Sources:

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/healthequity/features/7facts-womens-health/index.html>. 2022. Accessed August 2022.

² Sources: 2019-2020 National Health Interview Survey, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/womens-health.htm>. 2022. Accessed August 2022.

³ Mana Medical Associates. <https://www.mana.md/womens-health-and-fitness/#:~:text=More%20than%2038%25%20of%20U.S.,cause%20of%20death%20for%20women>. 2022. Accessed August 2022.

⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/heartdisease/women.htm>. 2022. Accessed August 2022.

⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/breast/basic_info/risk_factors.htm, 2021. Accessed August 2022.

⁶ National Cancer Institute. <https://www.cancer.gov/types/cervical/patient/cervical-screening-pdq>. 2022. Accessed August 2022.

⁷ National Cancer Institute. <https://www.cancer.gov/types/colorectal/patient/colorectal-screening-pdq>, 2022. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/colorectal/basic_info/screening/tests.htm. 2022. Accessed August 2022.

⁸ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/about/prevent/index.htm>. 2022. Accessed August 2022.

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