

Women's

HEALTH

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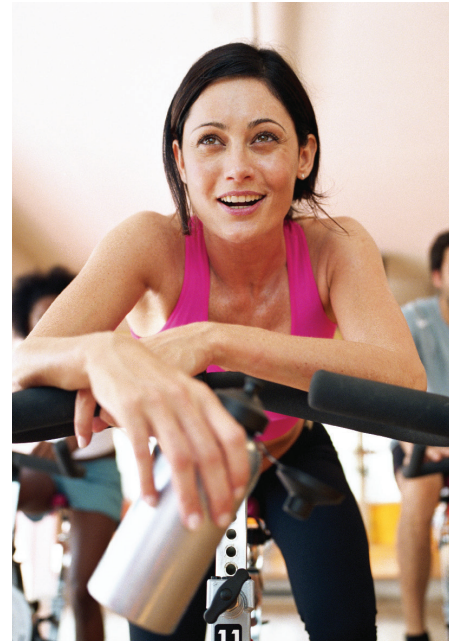
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Fitness classes women can try



Barre classes

Barre classes are inspired by ballet and work on the ballet bar. They are designed to help participants develop a lean and long dancer's body. The classes may be low-intensity or vigorous, depending on the instructor. They certainly will be leg-heavy with a lot of squat or plié type maneuvers.

Zumba[®]

Zumba is a danced-based class that incorporates dance styles from around the world, but tends to feature a notable concentration of Latin moves. The music is full of energy, and instructors engage the classes with fancy footwork that feels more like visiting a dance club than a workout studio.

Cycling

Riding a bicycle pays enormous cardiovascular dividends. Stationary bikes line workout rooms, and the instructor varies the pace and intensity to simulate various real-world conditions.

Circuit classes

Circuit classes feature short intervals at various stations or machines. Participants move around the circuit in predetermined periods of time to complete the exercises.

HIIT

HIIT stands for high intensity interval training. HIIT features short bursts (anywhere from 30 seconds to 3 minutes) of cardiovascular exercises that are designed to work at intense levels with recovery, but not rest periods. This keeps the heart pumping and is designed to boost metabolism. Plus, the workouts are short, so time-crunched people don't have to devote as much time to the gym each day.

Aerial fitness

Those who have been to the circus may have been amazed at the aerial artistry of being twisted and suspended in silk. Aerial fitness classes blend elements of this performance art with gymnastics and yoga. Exercise classes come in many forms and can motivate women to fully commit to their fitness goals.

Ask people what their top New Year's resolution is each year and they're likely to say something along the lines of "lose weight" or "get fit." That is why area gyms run specials throughout the month of January as they seek to attract new people intent on improving their overall health. Too often these resolutions are a distant memory by the ides of March. Despite repeatedly hearing about how important diet and exercise can be for personal health, and even despite the same resolutions made at the start of every year, a survey from Healthy People 2020, an initiative of the Department of Health and Human Services, found only 24 percent of Americans 18 and older met current aerobic physical activity and muscle-strengthening guidelines. Among those who exercise regularly, a study published in the *International Journal of Liberal Arts and Social Science* found women tend to exercise more than men and have different exercise habits and motivation to exercise. Women were apt to exercise to control weight, while men do so to improve fitness level. As women find more time for exercise, they may be drawn to the various classes available that can help them meet their exercise goals.

How to utilize diet to stay healthy



It's easy to underestimate the power of food in personal health. You are what you eat has never been more relevant. The Heart & Stroke Foundation of Canada says eating a healthy diet is one of the essential ways to protect health, as up to 80 percent of premature heart disease and stroke can be prevented through healthy habits. And since heart disease is a major concern for women, healthy eating should be a priority. The World Health Organization says a healthy diet protects against many chronic conditions, such as diabetes, cancer and heart disease. A nutritious diet also helps keep people active throughout the day by providing energy.

What does healthy eating look like?

Eating healthy is a matter of balance. Individuals should choose foods that will offer the nutrients they need without much of the ingredients that can be detrimental to their overall health. This occurs by consuming less salt, trans fats, sugars, and saturated fats, and opting for vegetables, fruit, whole grains, and lean protein sources. Both the United States and Canada offer dietary guidelines for making smart food choices that utilize a plate to demonstrate what healthy eating looks like. They share similar concepts, which include the following:

- Make half of your plate full of fruits and vegetables, focusing on whole fruits and not juices. Vary the produce to take in an array of different colors.
- Fill a quarter of your plate with whole grain foods like brown or wild rice, quinoa, oatmeal, and hulled barley. Whole grains contain fiber, protein and B vitamins.
- The remaining quarter of the plate can be dedicated to protein, like legumes, nuts, seeds, tofu, fish, eggs, poultry, and lean meats. Try to choose plant-based foods more often.
- Switch to low-fat or fat-free dairy, such as milk, yogurt and cheeses. Dairy is important because it provides vitamins A and D as well as calcium.

The benefits of healthy eating

Eating a healthy mix of foods pays dividends. Here are some of the positive side effects.

- **Weight loss:** Focusing more on food choices can help you keep tabs on caloric consumption. In order to lose weight, you need to consume less energy than you are expending.
- **Avoid chronic conditions:** A nutritious diet can lower an individual's risk for many chronic health issues, like cardiovascular disease and diabetes.
- **Strengthen bones and the body:** Calcium rich foods help boost bone health. While dairy notably contains calcium, calcium also is found in sardines, dark green vegetables and calcium-fortified foods.
- **Improve mood:** The insurance experts at Aetna note that studies have shown that nutrition directly affects mental and emotional well-being. Eating nutritionally dense food promotes the growth of "good" bacteria in the gut that influence the production of chemical receptors in the brain related to how a person feels. Sugar is a culprit in poor health because it feeds the "bad" bacteria in the GI tract and is a major culprit in inflammation.

Making smart choices with regard to diet can help women live longer, healthier lives.



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A health care guide for young women

tized, or might be a cause of embarrassment for those who are seeking answers. A recent analysis of 2022 KFF Women's Health Survey data, which studied women between the ages of 18 and 35 with a clinical visit in the past two years, found that more than 45 percent report experiencing a negative interaction during those visits. Common complaints include personnel who are dismissive of patients' concerns. As a result, many women, and particularly young women, often go online to address common concerns instead of making a health care appointment.

Although no advice can replace the expertise of a qualified and caring doctor, nurse practitioner or physician's assistant, young women can be mindful of these health issues.

• **Anxiety and depression:** Feelings of sadness or nervousness are experienced by just about everyone at some point. When these feelings become chronic or are negatively affecting a woman's life, they may be a byproduct of anxiety or depression. These conditions tend to be different sides of the same coin. Mental health experts have determined that women tend to

have higher rates of these common mental issues than men. The good news is that these conditions are highly treatable.

• **Sweating and body odor:** As hormones fluctuate, the body changes in different ways. Excessive sweating and/or the development of stronger body odor may be a symptom. Body odor occurs when sweat mixes with natural bacteria on the skin. Taking showers regularly, wearing cotton or natural fabrics, using an antiperspirant/deodorant, and drinking plenty of water may help.

• **Irregular periods:** It is normal to experience irregular periods for the first few years of menstruation, and sometimes even longer, says Nemours Health. The average menstrual cycle will last between 21 and 35 days. Excessive exercise, failure to eat enough calories, certain medicines, stress, and other conditions may lead to irregularity. The only way to know what is going on is to visit a provider.

• **Breast health:** Breast development differs for girls. Some will develop early, while others, such as those heavy into sports, may see a delay in puberty and breast development. Stretch

marks may form from rapid growth of the breasts. Young women should be mindful of any changes in the breasts, including discharge, skin redness or lumps. Breast care that starts early on can lead to a routine that continues later in life.

• **Healthy diet and exercise:** Cardiovascular disease is the leading killer of women, indicates the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Young women should keep this in mind and develop healthy eating and exercise habits that can promote good heart health throughout life.

• **Energy drinks:** In October 2023, a college student with a heart condition perished after consuming a caffeine-enhanced lemonade at a popular franchise food chain. She did not realize the drink contained more caffeine than many energy drinks. The Center for Women's Health advises that energy drinks are not recommended for teens, and that combining energy drinks with alcohol can be extremely dangerous.

Women's health advocacy should begin early on to set the course for a lifetime of good habits.

Health and wellness may not be foremost on the minds of most girls and young women. This time in their lives is full of big emotions and significant changes. As a result, health is not often priori-

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When supplements could be necessary



Everybody needs an array of vitamins and minerals to thrive. While many people, women included, believe that offsetting perceived deficiencies with supplements is the best idea for their health, this isn't always the case. Harvard Medical School indicates it was once believed that popping a multivitamin every day compensated for dietary deficiencies. However, multivitamins contain some micronutrients in amounts greater than those recommended in dietary guidelines. Furthermore, the benefits of supplements remain uncertain. Therefore, careful consideration should be given before supplementing on one's own. In addition, dietary changes should be discussed with a doctor or nutritionist to ensure the best outcomes. In most cases, women can get all the vitamins and minerals they need through a balanced diet. Certain populations may need supplementa-

tion at key times in their lives. Also, those with particular deficiencies may need to supplement. Here's how to figure out when supplementation may be advisable.

The Office on Women's Health says there are three groups of women who might need a vitamin and mineral supplement.

- **Pregnant women or those who could become pregnant:** A supplement ensures that this demographic gets the folic acid they need each day to lower the risk of birth defects like spina bifida. At least 400 micrograms of folic acid are recommended and often are found in prenatal vitamins.

- **Postmenopausal women:** Women who are postmenopausal lose bone density faster because of hormonal changes. Supplementing with vitamin D and calcium and engaging in weight-bearing exercises can help prevent the bone loss condition known as osteoporosis. Some postmenopausal women also may need to get extra vitamin B12, as people age 50 or older may struggle to effectively absorb B12 from food.

- **Vegetarians:** Those who eat plant-based diets may need to supplement with minerals and vitamins that are typically found in higher amounts in animal products, like vitamins B12, B2 and D.

People who fall into these categories also can consider supplementation with their doctors.

- **Individuals taking acid blockers:** Those who take a daily acid blocker for heartburn or peptic ulcer disease should consider vitamin B12 supplementation, says Harvard Health.

- **Individuals who lack sunshine exposure:** Individuals who live in northern climates or places where getting enough sunlight to make their own vitamin D through adequate exposure should take a daily 1,000 IU vitamin D supplement. Vitamin D also may be needed by those with diseases that limit fat absorption, such as Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis.

- **Individuals with inflammatory conditions:** Individuals who have joint tenderness or rheumatoid arthritis may want to consider taking fish oil supplements that contain Omega-3 fatty acids. The T.H. Chan School of Public Health also reports that omega-3s are essential for heart health and lower heart disease risk, which is a major concern for women.

Supplements may be needed in certain cases. Women considering taking vitamins and minerals should discuss their options with their doctors.

MENTAL HEALTH

Women should pay careful attention to their physical health, but it's worth noting the importance of tending to one's mental well-being as well. Data concerning women and mental health highlights some eye-opening disparities between women and men.

The American Psychiatric Association says each year one in five women in the United States experiences a mental health problem.

Twice as many women as men experiences depression. In addition, compared with men, women are twice as likely to experience post traumatic stress disorder or anxiety (both generalized anxiety disorder or panic disorder). Women also are more likely to attempt suicide than men, but men are four times more likely to die by suicide. Women exhibit higher rates of various mental health disorders than men (rates of impulse control disorders and substance abuse disorders are higher among men than women). It is important to note that many mental health issues can be successfully treated and women should seek the assistance of a mental health professional if they need help.

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8 things women should know about stress



Stress can be paradoxical. A certain amount of stress can motivate people to get things done. But having too much can cause a person to resist doing anything at all. The

Cleveland Clinic says stress is the body's response to daily events that occur in life. When stress becomes chronic, it can be negative and destructive, making it hard to adapt and cope. Chronic stress is a concern for many women. The Office on Women's Health says women are more likely than men to report symptoms of stress, including headaches and upset stomach. They're also more likely to have mental health conditions that are exacerbated by stress, including anxiety and depression. Learning the facts about stress can help women care for their mental well-being. Here are eight things to know.

1. Stress can manifest in emotional, cognitive or physical symptoms. Notable physical symptoms include muscle tension and headaches as well as fatigue and low energy. Emotional symptoms may include increased worry, mood swings or irritability.
2. Stress can lead to unhealthy habits. Women have higher risk of overeating due to stress, and may become inactive or smoke to cope with stress, says the American Heart Association.
3. Common causes of long-term stress include poverty and financial worries. Women in poverty who care for children or other family members may develop more severe stress, says the Office

of Assistant Secretary for Health.

4. Women respond to stress differently. Healthline indicates women have a higher percentage of perception of stress than men, and also are more apt to realize they must manage it. Seventy percent of women have tried to reduce stress over the past five years.
5. Research reported on by the American Psychological Association says women are more likely to internalize stress, leading more readily to both physical and mental disorders. Men tend to be better at disassociating from stress.
6. Women are more likely to cancel plans due to stress than men, despite realizing they could use more social support.
7. Stress can disrupt hormonal balance in women, leading to menstrual irregularities.
8. Stress can trigger increased pain sensitivity, making women more prone to tension headaches and migraine attacks.

Stress can take its toll on anyone, including women. Recognizing help is needed, setting measurable targets and being realistic about managing stress can help women feel better.

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Warning signs of developing mental health issues



Various mental illnesses are more common among women than men, including depression and anxiety. The Mayo Clinic says it's common to have mental health concerns from time to time, but when one of those concerns becomes frequent or affects one's ability to function, it becomes an illness. According to Clearview Treatment Programs, women often live with mental illness for months, even years before seeking treatment. Individuals may not realize the severity of their conditions, or they may mistake mental illness for stress or feeling overwhelmed. Even though the stigma surrounding mental health issues has decreased considerably in recent years, women still face societal barriers, says McLean Mass General Brigham Hospital. Women may not be inclined to discuss their issues and, in turn, fail to receive prompt care. Signs of mental illness vary, depending on the disorder and additional variables. A condition may affect a person's emotions, behaviors and thoughts. Some signs of a burgeoning mental illness include:

- Significant changes in sleep habits, which may include sleeping more or not at all.
- Changes in eating behaviors, which may include binge eating or going without food.
- Women tend to internalize mental illness, and symptoms can include

ruminating, withdrawal from activities and generally retreating from life.

- Physical conditions that cannot be explained, such as headaches, stomach aches, chronic pain, and even high blood pressure.
- Emotional lability, which means rapid mood swings from happiness to anger and sadness.
- Confused thinking or a reduced ability to concentrate.
- Excessive fears or worries.
- Detachment from reality, resulting in delusions.
- Trouble relating to situations and people.
- Changes to sex drive.
- Excessive anger or hostility.
- Suicidal thoughts or attempts.

Mental illness can affect anyone. According to research, women may have a higher propensity to develop certain mental health conditions and thus need to be aware of the symptoms of those disorders. Anyone in crisis should call 911 or their local emergency number immediately. In the United States and Canada, women can call or text 988 to reach suicide and crisis support.

5 common health conditions that affect women



Men and women share various health concerns. However, certain health issues affect women differently and more frequently than men. In addition, certain health conditions, such as cervical cancer, are exclusive to women.

Women who want to take charge of their health can recognize that various conditions and diseases are more common than others. The following are five common and notable health issues affecting women today.

- **Heart disease:** Heart disease affects more than 60 million women in the United States and is the leading cause of death for women. Heart disease can affect women of all ages. Despite this, the Centers for Disease Control

and Prevention says only 56 percent of women recognize the prevalence of heart disease. In addition, it's important to note that most women between the ages of 40 and 60 have at least one or more risk factors for heart disease and likely do not even realize it.

- **Breast cancer:** Routine mammograms and other breast cancer screenings can help women detect breast cancer at its earliest stage when it is most treatable.
- **Cervical and ovarian cancer:** Cervical cancer originates in the cervix, which is part of the lower uterus, while ovarian cancer begins in the fallopian tubes and ovaries. Pap smears can detect cervical cancer, but currently there is no screening test for ovarian cancer. A pelvic exam and ultrasound or other imaging may be recommended if doctors suspect the presence of ovarian cancer.

• **Reproductive health issues:** The Orlando Clinical Research Center says that reproductive issues can have a major affect on women's quality of life and overall health. Some common issues include uterine fibroids, gynecological cancers, interstitial cystitis, endometriosis, and polycystic ovary syndrome. Pain, heavy or irregular periods and other discharge may be symptoms of these types of conditions.

- **Mental health concerns:** Rates of anxiety and depression are higher among women than men. The Anxiety Disorders Association of America reports that, from the time a girl reaches puberty until about the age of 50, she is twice as likely to have an anxiety disorder as a man. Recognition of the most common health issues to affect women can help them get the care they need to live long, healthy lives.



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Mental health issues that could affect new mothers



Pregnancy and giving birth to a new child is a happy time in a woman's life. However, 10 percent of pregnant women and 13 percent of women who have just given birth experience a mental disorder, says the World Health Organization. In developing countries, these percentages can be even higher. The National Child & Maternal Health Education Program indicates pregnancy and a new baby can cause a range of emotions. Women may feel anxious or sad at various times. For many women, such feelings resolve with time. For others, these emotions may become more serious and persist.

Baby blues

The name given to a common postpartum condition can give people the impression that it is nothing to worry about. Although the "baby blues" are something new mothers may have heard about, and generally produce mild symptoms, they can still be disconcerting. This condition is marked by mood swings that are the result of fluctuating hormone levels during and immediately after childbirth. These feelings occur in up to 80 percent of new mothers, and occur approximately three to five days after delivery, says

Mental Health America. Women whose blues do not resolve when hormones level out, and, in fact, get worse with time, may not realize they have progressed to postpartum depression, which is a more serious situation that often requires medical treatment.

Postpartum depression

Johns Hopkins Medicine says one in five new moms has postpartum depression, a serious, but highly treatable, condition. Postpartum depression is the most common complication of pregnancy and can be life threatening. Postpartum depression is a factor in 20 percent of all maternal deaths, says Lindsay Standeven, M.D., of the Johns Hopkins Center for Women's Reproductive Mental Health. Those who are at risk for postpartum depression include women who have histories of anxiety or mood disorders, a family history of postpartum mood disorders, and activity of certain genes, known as epigenetic biomarkers. Postpartum depression can cause sadness, anxiety, anger, irritability, difficulty sleeping, and intrusive thoughts that may include thoughts of harming the baby.

Postpartum psychosis

In rare cases, women may experience postpartum psychosis, a condition that affects about one-tenth of one percent of new mothers, says MHA. Onset is quick and severe, usually within the first two to three weeks following childbirth. Symptoms include refusal to eat; inability to cease activity and frantic energy; extreme confusion; memory loss; incoherence; paranoia; and preoccupation with trivial things. Hospitalization may be considered for a woman with postpartum psychosis until her condition stabilizes. Families and caregivers should be aware that these conditions can occur following (and during) pregnancy. Therapy and medication can help women alleviate symptoms.

How women can safeguard their mental health



Women face numerous challenges as they move forward in their personal and professional lives. In order to overcome such obstacles, women may feel the need to continually put on brave faces and act strong in assorted situations. Over time, feeling the need to always appear ready to tackle the world can slowly chip away at women's well-being, particularly their mental wellness. In order to right the ship, it may be necessary for women to identify behaviors that can improve and protect their mental health. The following lifestyle strategies can help.

- **Get ample rest.** Give yourself permission to rest when you need it, and do not feel guilty for not being productive. In fact, think of the time you devote to yourself as productive since it is benefitting your health.
- **Consider meditation.** Meditation can help soothe the mind and body. There are different meditation modalities. Some people like to sit listening to soothing music. You may want to join a yoga class where you can learn to breathe deeply. Alternative meditation disciplines may be more in-depth or involve spirituality. Experiment with what works for you.
- **Exercise regularly.** The health organization Women's Care™ says exercising regularly can help maintain mental health. Exercise often is mentioned as a cure-all for many different

conditions, and may produce the same mood-boosting benefits of prescription medications used to treat mental health conditions.

- **Make friends.** Socialization can help you feel less isolated and alone. Participating in activities with others and gaining new connections is a healthy way to boost the brain and improve mental health.
- **Participate in activities you enjoy.** Make time for activities that fuel hobbies or interests rather than just those required for work or maintaining the household.
- **Eat healthy foods.** Food can affect mood in various ways. Certain foods may contribute to inflammation throughout the body, which can increase risk for certain conditions. Choose foods that are rich in omega-3 fatty acids to boost mental health. Others, like those rich in vitamin K, lutein, folate, and beta carotene, can be crucial for the proper function of the brain and nervous system, says the Family Institute.
- **Learn about hormones.** Fluctuating hormone levels during menstruation, pregnancy and menopause may put you at risk for various mental health conditions. Speak with a doctor about what you can do to keep hormones more stable or to treat conditions as they pertain to these hormones. Maximizing mental health may come down to certain practices that prioritize mental well-being.

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Potential pregnancy complications



Women anticipate many changes to their bodies when they become pregnant. Of course, there are the visual effects that take place, namely the uterus expanding to accommodate the growing fetus. But there are many less visible changes going on that ensure both mother and child can thrive. March of Dimes says there were 3,664,292 live births in the United States in 2021, while Statistics Canada says there were 351,679 live births, excluding Yukon, across Canada in 2022. Millions of children are born each year across North America, and many of these pregnancies and births are free from complications. However, complications can arise during pregnancy. Here's a look at some of the issues women may experience.

Amniotic fluid issues

Amniotic fluid is the liquid sac that surrounds the fetus, says Johns Hopkins Medicine. Too much fluid can cause the sac to rupture and result in preterm labor. Common causes of excessive amniotic fluid include diabetes, multiples pregnancy, incompatible blood types, and birth defects.

Anemia

Pregnancy puts a strain on a mother's body. Anemia is a condition marked by a lower than normal amount of healthy red blood cells. Pregnant women may get iron-deficiency anemia because the body needs more iron than normal at this time. Treating the causes of anemia can help manage the condition.

Diabetes

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

says having diabetes before or during pregnancy increases the risk of preeclampsia, Cesarean delivery and the baby being born too large. High blood sugar at the time of conception increases the risk of birth defects, stillbirth and preterm birth. It's important to manage diabetes throughout conception and pregnancy.

Preeclampsia

The National Institutes of Health says preeclampsia is a serious medical condition that can lead to preterm delivery. The cause of preeclampsia is unknown. The condition presents as high blood pressure and signs of liver or kidney damage in women after the twentieth week of pregnancy.

Hyperemesis gravidarum

Although a certain amount of nausea and vomiting may be expected in the early weeks of pregnancy, hyperemesis gravidarum is a more extreme type of morning sickness. Persistent nausea and vomiting during pregnancy can lead to weight loss and dehydration requiring intensive treatment.

Placenta problems

With placental abruption the placenta becomes detached from the uterine wall too soon, leading to bleeding. The fetus also is deprived of oxygen and nutrients. Placenta previa is a condition where the placenta is attached close to or covering the cervix, obstructing a vaginal birth. Various complications can occur during pregnancy, but the good news is that many of them can be treated or mitigated without affecting women or their children.

Stay healthy while pregnant



Pregnancy can be an exciting time in a couple's life. Ensuring mother and child stay healthy is a foremost concern during pregnancy, and women can do various things to maintain their health during this magical time in their lives.

- **Avoid tobacco and alcohol.** It is never a good idea to smoke or drink alcohol while pregnant. The moment a woman learns she is pregnant, she should cease these habits if she is a smoker and/or drinker.
- **Visit an obstetrician for prenatal testing.** A health care provider can counsel a woman through the stages of her pregnancy. Routine blood tests and additional screenings are part of prenatal care, which is important for learning about the development of the fetus and ensuring a healthy pregnancy.
- **Healthy eating is important.** Nemours Kids Health says eating a nutritious diet is important for anyone, but when a woman is pregnant she needs to pay special attention to her diet to boost her baby's growth and development. Nutritious foods include lean meats, fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat dairy products.
- **Increase fluid intake.** It is important for a

pregnant woman to drink plenty of water and other healthy beverages to support the life inside her. Water can prevent excessive swelling of limbs and urinary tract/bladder infections and help a woman avoid constipation. The Institute of Medicine recommends roughly 10 cups of fluids daily.

- **Maintain a healthy weight.** Weight gain is common during pregnancy, but it is important to avoid gaining too much extra weight. Physical fitness helps keep the heart, bones and mind healthy during pregnancy. So after checking with her doctor, a pregnant woman should engage in workouts that align with her physical abilities.
- **Be mindful of medication.** Certain over-the-counter and prescription medications are unsafe during pregnancy. A woman should speak with her doctor to find out which medications should be avoided.
- **Take an Rh factor blood test.** According to the Mayo Clinic, Rh factor is an inherited protein found on the surface of red blood cells. Having the protein makes a person Rh positive. The absence of the protein makes one Rh negative. Rh positive is much more common. During pregnancy, problems may arise if a mother is Rh negative and the baby is Rh positive. Although the blood of both mother and fetus don't usually mix during pregnancy, a small amount can mix during the birth, introducing antibodies. While this will not affect a first pregnancy, subsequent pregnancies can be impacted. An injection of Rh immune globulin typically will be administered if a woman is Rh negative during pregnancy. A second shot may come after the birth if her infant is found to be Rh positive. Women can employ various strategies to increase their chances of enjoying a healthy pregnancy.

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Start preventing osteoporosis now



Osteoporosis is a condition that weakens bones weakened to a point of making them brittle. It may only take a small bump or fall for bones affected by osteoporosis to fracture. The National Institute on Aging says osteoporosis is a “silent disease” because people who develop it may not notice any changes until a bone breaks. Typically a hip, spine or wrist are the areas of the body where these fractures occur. Johns Hopkins Medicine says that 50 percent of women in the United States age 50 or older will break a bone due to osteoporosis, and about 55 million Americans have the condition. Osteoporosis affects women more often than men, particularly because women have lower bone density than men. Loss of estrogen in the later years of life can increase a woman's risk for osteoporosis.

The good news is that osteoporosis is largely preventable, and proper bone health that begins early and lasts throughout life can help.

• **Sufficient calcium intake:** Women age 50

and younger should consume 1,000 mg of calcium each day (1,200 mg of calcium each day is recommended for women over the age of 51). Calcium can come from foods, beverages and supplements.

• **Proper protein intake:** Protein also is a necessary nutrient for bone health, says the International Osteoporosis Foundation. Choose lean protein sources.

• **Get enough vitamin D:** Vitamin D is made in the skin after exposure to the sun, but the average person does not get enough. Supplementation often is the answer to ensure healthy levels of vitamin D and by eating foods rich in vitamin D, such as eggs, mushrooms and fortified dairy foods or juices.

• **Keep active:** It is important to engage in regular weight-bearing and muscle-strengthening activities, which also helps to strengthen bones.

• **Maintain a healthy weight:** Maintaining a healthy weight also is important, as being too thin or having a BMI under 19 is harmful to bone health.

• **Prevent falls:** Take steps to reduce falls. This includes removing slippery rugs and installing grab bars in the bathroom. In addition, engage in activities that can improve balance, posture and coordination to prevent fall risk.

• **Get screened for bone density:** A bone mineral density test is a special X-ray capable of detecting bone loss.

Women who are concerned about osteoporosis are urged to speak with their doctors to learn more about prevention and treatment.

The impact of heart disease on women



Hearth health is vital. Despite widespread recognition of the importance of a healthy heart, cardiovascular disease (CVD) is the leading cause of death around the world. CVD includes coronary artery disease and other issues affecting the heart or blood vessels. e. Even though heart disease affects both men and women, it's often mistakenly seen as a condition that mostly affects men. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says that heart disease, namely coronary artery disease, is the leading cause of death for women and those assigned female at birth. It occurs when plaque develops in the walls of the arteries and slows down the flow of blood supply to the heart and other parts of the body. Women are particularly at risk because, after menopause, hormone changes like a reduction in the production of estrogen can cause higher risk of coronary heart disease, especially in smaller blood vessels. In addition to hormonal changes after menopause, the risk factors for heart disease in

women include:

• **Diabetes:** Women with diabetes are more likely to develop heart disease than men with diabetes. There's also an increased risk of silent heart attack since diabetes can change the way women perceive pain.

• **Mental health:** Emotional stress and depression can affect women's hearts more than men's, as depression may compromise a woman's ability to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

• **Smoking:** Smoking is another risk factor for heart disease.

• **Inactivity:** A sedentary lifestyle increases heart disease risk.

• **Inflammatory diseases:** Individuals with arthritis, lupus and other inflammatory conditions may be at an elevated risk for heart disease.

Learning about the warning signs of heart attack and stroke can help women stay on top of their health. Here's what to look for, courtesy of GoRedForWomen.org.



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