

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 health concerns such as certain types of cancers, reproductive changes and osteoporosis. Heart disease remains the leading cause of mortality for women.

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.^{1,2}

Disease prevalence, risk, and prevention

While women are at risk for a wide range of diseases, certain conditions, such as heart disease and specific types of cancer, tend to affect women more frequently.

Heart disease is the leading cause of death among women in the United States, responsible for 1 in 5 female deaths. Major risk factors include high blood pressure, elevated LDL cholesterol, and smoking. Understanding these risks and making lifestyle changes, such as improving diet, increasing physical activity, and quitting smoking, may significantly reduce the likelihood of developing heart disease.⁴

Breast cancer is the second leading cause of cancer-related death among American women. Risk factors include reproductive history, physical inactivity, alcohol use, genetics, and age. Most cases are diagnosed after age 50. Regular screenings and healthy lifestyle choices, such as staying active and limiting alcohol, may significantly reduce the risk and support early detection.⁵

Cervical cancer, which affects only women, is primarily linked to infection with the human papillomavirus (HPV), a virus transmitted through sexual contact. Other risk factors include smoking and a weakened immune system. To detect cervical cancer early, it is recommended that women begin receiving Pap smears by age 21 or upon becoming sexually active.⁶

Facts to know^{2,3}

15.6%

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

41.3%

of women over age 20 are **obese**

Less than **50%**

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

15%

of women up to age 50 suffer from **eating disorders** and **only 27% of those seek treatment**

Colorectal cancer is a serious health concern and ranks as the third most common cause of cancer-related death in the U. S. for men and women. Risk factors such as age, family history, and lifestyle choices may significantly increase the likelihood of developing the disease. Screening is now recommended to begin at age 45 for all individuals, regardless of gender or symptoms. Early detection through regular screening can help identify precancerous polyps and improve treatment outcomes, making prevention and timely action essential.⁷

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

Risk reduction⁸

Many chronic diseases are linked to specific risk factors. You can lower your chances of developing these conditions, and improve your overall quality of life, by making healthier lifestyle choices. Here are some practical steps to help reduce your risk:

- **Quit smoking.** Avoiding tobacco use significantly lowers your risk of heart disease, several types of cancer, and type 2 diabetes.
- **Eat healthier.** Try to consume a healthier, balanced diet consisting of a variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean protein, and low-fat dairy products. Limit your intake of added sugar, saturated and trans 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.
- **Limit alcohol intake.** Excessive drinking may lead to high blood pressure, liver disease, stroke, heart disease, and certain cancers. If you choose to drink, do so 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 DMC. <https://www.dmc.org/healthy-living/corporate-content/womens-health-tips-for-decades-how-to-stay-healthy>. 2025. Accessed September 2025.

² CDC. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/womens-health.htm>. 2025. Accessed September 2025.

³ ANAD. <https://anad.org/eating-disorder-statistic/>. 2024. Accessed September 2025.

⁴ CDC. <https://www.cdc.gov/heart-disease/about/women-and-heart-disease.html>. 2024. Accessed September 2025.

⁵ CDC. <https://www.cdc.gov/breast-cancer/risk-factors/>. 2025. Accessed September 2025.

⁶ National Cancer Institute. <https://www.cancer.gov/types/cervical/screening>. 2025. Accessed September 2025.

⁷ National Cancer Institute. <https://www.cancer.gov/types/colorectal/patient/colorectal-screening-pdq>. 2025. Accessed September 2025.

⁸ CDC. <https://www.cdc.gov/chronic-disease/prevention/>. 2024. Accessed September 2025.

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