

Wellness Action Plan

Women's Health through the Decades

By Pam Knepper

As women, we can expect our bodies to change over time. Each decade offers opportunities for us to be as healthy as possible. During the 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, 60s and beyond, you'll be making choices about how to take care of yourself. The healthier you are, the better you'll feel and the more you'll enjoy all that life has to offer. With that in mind, on the following pages you will find a decade-by-decade guide that details age-specific exercises, special health concerns and issues that you'll need to address, so that whatever stage you're at in life, you'll find the stay-safe-and-in-shape moves you'll need now and in the years to come.

YOUR 20s

French fries and not notice the results on your hips. But remember, this is only temporary! During this decade, your dress and shoe size stop changing and you can finally spend the money on a designer outfit without worrying that you'll outgrow it. If you leave your body alone at this age, it will usually do great.

Healthy Habits

If you smoke, seek support to stop. According to the American Cancer Society, it is estimated that light smoking (one to four cigarettes a day) can increase your risk of coronary heart disease to 11 percent compared to 3 percent for nonsmokers. In addition, avoid secondhand smoke as well.

Drink alcohol in moderation, and never drive after drinking. Don't drink any alcohol if you are or might be pregnant.

Eat a healthy diet to reduce your risk for many cancers and heart disease and to help with weight management.

Incorporate physical activity in your daily routine, making it a life-long habit.

Use sunscreen to protect against ultraviolet rays that can age your skin and cause cancer.

Reproductive Health

It's important to discuss with your doctor birth control options and how to protect yourself from sexually transmitted diseases. And if you want to become pregnant, talk with your doctor. Common reproductive issues include endometriosis and fibroids. In endometriosis, the tissue

Healthy Moves TO MAKE IN YOUR 20s

Prep your body for pregnancy. Take 400 milligrams of folic acid a day to prevent birth defects.

Lose that extra weight. Gaining just 11 pounds after adolescence ups your risk for breast cancer, heart disease and diabetes.

Perform skin self-exams. Moles that change in size or shape can be a sign of melanoma, the most common cancer among women in their late 20s.

Get 1,000 milligrams of calcium a day, whether it's through food or supplements.

Take up yoga. People who experience high amounts of stress in their 20s are more than twice as likely to have back pain in their 30s.

What to Expect

According to Judith Reichman, M.D. and author of "Relax, This Won't Hurt", by your 20s your endocrine system, which includes your pituitary and adrenal glands, thyroid, ovaries and pancreas, should be set on its course and working at full speed. This means that your hormonal system now knows how to control your body. "You can count on getting your period every month, and your fertility has never been better," says Dr. Reichman. "If you get acne, it tends to be cyclical rather than continuous. Your natural weight has been established in your brain's center, and this will regulate how you use or conserve calories in the years to come." At this point in your life, if you eat too much your body usually accommodates this lapse of eating control and burns the excess calories; while if you eat too little, it slows down to conserve energy. That explains your wonderful and unique ability to recklessly eat those hamburgers and



that forms the lining of the uterus grows abnormally in areas of the pelvis and outside the pelvis. Fibroids are benign tumors of the uterus. They grow in various locations and are present in 20 to 50 percent of all women. While most women don't have symptoms from their fibroids, growth of fibroids could cause heavy or irregular bleeding.

Nutrition

Reducing the amount of fat you eat and increasing your intake of fruits, vegetables and whole grains can help reduce your risk of heart disease, stroke and cancer. The amount of bone you build and strengthen now through diet and exercise will directly affect your risk for osteoporosis later. Include calcium-rich foods, such as dairy products, salmon and leafy-green vegetables in your diet. Boost your intake of folic acid before becoming pregnant; it helps to reduce the risk of some birth defects.

Drink plenty of water; water not only clears your skin, but also makes your body healthy. An average benchmark is to drink six to 10 cups of water every day.

Obesity increases your risk of heart disease. Check your body mass index (BMI). Aim for a BMI of 20-25. Obesity is defined as a BMI of above 30.

Exercise

Now is the time to start thinking about your bones. By age 20, the average woman has accumulated 98 percent of her skeletal mass. But you've still got some wiggle room: The denser your bones are at this stage, the less risk you have of osteoporosis when menopause starts stealing from the bone kitty. One of the best ways to bone up is weight training. "Lifting weights isn't just for athletes, body builders or men anymore," says Club Personal Trainer Bethany Hargett. "In your 20s it is important to start focusing on developing your upper and lower strength." Other bone-building exercises include weight-bearing aerobics like running and stair climbing (not swimming or biking); high-impact activities (racquet sports, jumping rope); and resistance training on gym equipment and hefting your

own body weight (push-ups, squats and yoga poses like the plank and upward-facing dog).

Annual Screenings TO HAVE IN YOUR 20s

- Annual Pap smear.
- Annual pelvic and breast exams.
- Blood pressure test every two years; more often if your doctor identifies a need.
- Annual dental exam and twice yearly teeth and gum cleanings.
- Baseline cholesterol screening, including the high-density lipoprotein (or "good") cholesterol, low-density lipoprotein (or "bad") cholesterol and triglycerides. Repeat every five years, or more frequently if you have elevated cholesterol.
- Skin examination by a health-care provider every three years; more often if your family has a history of skin cancer.
- Baseline eye exam.
- Monthly breast self-exam.

Commonly Asked Health Questions BY WOMEN IN THEIR 20s

I get bad headaches during my period. Why?

About 18 million American women get severe headaches called migraines, and about 60 percent of them report an increase around their periods. "Menstrual migraines are triggered by the drop in estrogen levels that begins before your period, which can cause inflammation of the nerves around the brain," explains Stephen Silberstein, M.D., director of the Jefferson Headache Center in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. One solution is to take birth-control pills continuously (if you didn't already know, those pills you take the last week are placebos made of sugar) to stabilize hormone levels (this also stops your period). Another option: Frova, a drug that reduces the inflammation of the

brain's blood vessels and blocks the release of pain-causing chemicals.

My OB/GYN says I have HPV. Should I be worried?

Every year, more than 5 million people get the human papillomavirus (HPV), a sexually transmitted disease. You could have acquired it years ago but remained symptom-free (or your husband could have gotten it years earlier and unknowingly given it to you). In 95 percent of cases, HPV clears up on its own, but in some cases it can lead to cervical cancer. So find out what type of HPV you have (this test can be done on the cells gathered from a Pap smear). "If the results are precancerous, the suspicious cells can be removed. Also, rest assured that your husband should be fine,

since HPV doesn't appear to cause cancer in men," says Margaret Polaneczky, M.D., an associate professor of obstetrics and gynecology at New York Presbyterian Hospital-Weill Cornell Medical Center.

Will the Pill affect my future fertility or cause any other health problems?

Not at all. Your fertility should return within days of stopping the Pill. In fact, one study found that women who have been on the Pill were slightly more likely to get pregnant once they stopped taking it than those who were never on it, probably because the Pill guards against potentially fertility-decreasing diseases, such as fibroids and endometriosis. The benefits don't end there. The Pill actually protects you against endometrial and ovarian cancer.

YOUR 30s

Healthy Moves

TO MAKE IN YOUR 30s

Track your periods. Painful periods or heavy bleeding at this age can indicate fibroids or endometriosis.

Make up with your hubby or partner. Fighting between couples weakens the immune system.

Lose that pregnancy weight. Gaining more than 50 pounds during pregnancy can triple your risk of getting breast cancer after menopause.

Memorize your mom's health history. This will show doctors what ailments you're prone to, so they can order the right tests.

Take a multivitamin. Chronic stress may deplete certain vitamins and minerals in your body.

What to Expect

You're still pretty invincible during this decade, but there are nuances of physical changes, some of which you have no control over, others for which you must take total responsibility.

SKIN

Your skin peaked in your 20s. During this time, it had the most collagen, moisture, elasticity and thickness it will ever have. Depending upon your childhood and teenage sun worship, you may start to see significant collagen loss and even wrinkles at this age. Sun damage can decrease the formation of certain types of vital collagen by as much as 50 percent. Smoking has an even greater impact, especially when it comes to crinkling around the lips and eyes. It takes 20 years for sun damage to evolve into skin cancer. This is the decade when you start to pay for all those childhood sunburns.

EXCESS WEIGHT

Beneath your skin, fat cells may be increasing in size, prompting unwelcome flab and sag, especially if you've given birth. If you don't lose your extra pregnancy pounds in the first six months after having a baby, they're especially likely to become permanent, translating into an even greater increase in poundage after a second baby is born. The longer fat is on your body, the more likely it is to linger. Whether you have a childbearing excuse or not, you can no longer eat with abandon

or you may be forced to get rid of your slim-fitting jeans.

REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM

Yes, your biological clock is ticking, but perhaps not as loudly as you think. The most dramatic drop in conception rates occurs between the ages of 35 and 45. During this time, a woman's chances of becoming pregnant in any given month drop from 20 percent to less than 1 percent, notes Bryan D. Cowan, M.D., chairman of the department of obstetrics and gynecology at the University of Mississippi Medical Center in Jackson. "This is mainly because of ovarian maturity, which is a natural process that occurs after age 35."

In addition, certain conditions may impair fertility: polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), a common hormonal and metabolic disorder that can prevent ovulation; endometriosis, in which pieces of the uterine lining grow in other areas of the pelvis; fibroids, which are benign uterine growths of muscle and fibrous tissue; or scarring of the fallopian tubes, often the result of surgery or a previous sexually transmitted disease (STD). "STDs are the biggest detriment to fertility," says Paula J. Adams Hillard, M.D., a professor of obstetrics and gynecology at the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine. "Many women think they're automatically tested for STDs when they have a pelvic exam, but that's not true."

To protect your fertility and increase the odds of conceiving, you

Commonly Asked Health Questions BY WOMEN IN THEIR 30s

Should I quit breast self-exams?

Last year, the American Cancer Society declared breast self-exams optional. "We found there was no hard data to show that self-exams translated into better survival rates," says Peter Pressman, M.D., coauthor of "Breast Cancer: The Complete Guide." His recommendation: Keep doing them, but don't beat yourself up if you miss a month. "The more familiar you are with your breasts, the better prepared you are to detect any changes," says Pressman.

How can I rev up my metabolism?

You can keep your fat-burning furnace pumped mainly by pumping iron. That's because muscle burns more calories than fat, says Pamela Peeke, M.D., assistant professor of medicine at the University of Maryland in College Park. Also try eating six mini-meals a day, which tricks your body into thinking it should burn calories at a higher rate.

I've been depressed since my baby's birth. How do I know if it's serious?

About 10 percent of moms get postpartum depression. "While it's normal to have mild mood changes, see your doctor if you experience uncontrollable crying, irritability, insomnia or loss of appetite," says Shari Lusskin, M.D., director of reproductive psychiatry at the New York University Medical Center. The treatments will usually include counseling or antidepressants.

may want to modify your lifestyle. First, quit smoking, Dr. Cowan advises, since it can seriously affect your ability to conceive. Second, it's important to maintain a healthy weight. "Being underweight or overweight can interfere with ovulation," says Dr. Cowan. You'll also want to watch your caffeine intake (three or more cups of coffee a day could be

"I wish I had trusted myself more when I was in my 30s. I would have made life-changing decisions much more quickly and not wasted so much of life's precious time just waiting for something to happen."

—Charlene Blethen, 60

a problem). If, despite these measures, you're still unable to get pregnant after 12 months of trying, see your doctor. If you're 35 or older, however, talk with your doctor about whether you should be seen sooner. If you're planning to get pregnant, it's also important to schedule a visit with your OB/GYN for a prepregnancy checkup.

Healthy Habits

Use a facial cleanser such as oatmeal to gently remove dead skin cells on the face to bring fresh cell layers to the surface. Use sunscreen regularly to protect the skin from cancer and to slow the wrinkling process.

Refrain from smoking and engage in cardio exercise, such as walking, jogging, aerobics or biking to minimize the loss of elasticity in the arteries and lungs.

Take calcium and vitamin D to help offset the beginning of bone and muscle loss.

Eat a balanced lowfat diet.

Control your blood pressure and cholesterol levels.

Drink only moderate amounts of alcohol.

Emotional Health

Women in their 30s often have to juggle work and family and developing intimate relationships, while maintaining a career, and these challenges can become a source of stress, notes Diana Dell, M.D., an assistant professor of psychiatry and obstetrics/gynecology at Duke University Medical Center in Durham, North Carolina. "Depression is common at this age, and while anxiety disorders often surface at an earlier

age, they may worsen or persist during this time.

What's more, premenstrual symptoms may emerge for the first time or intensify during your 30s. A woman with a new baby should be alert to the signs of postpartum depression: persistent sadness or fatigue, frequent crying, sleeping or eating disturbances, or thoughts

about harming herself or the baby. "A woman's chance of being hospitalized for psychiatric reasons is higher during the first four weeks postpartum than at any other time," Dr. Dell says.

Nutrition

Reducing the amount of fat you eat and increasing your intake of fruits, vegetables and whole grains can help reduce your risk of heart disease, stroke and cancer. The amount of bone you build and strengthen now will directly affect your risk for osteoporosis later. Include calcium-rich foods in your diet. Boost your intake of folic acid before becoming pregnant; it helps to reduce the risk of some birth defects.

Drink six to 10 cups of plain water everyday.

Obesity increases your risk of heart disease. Check your body mass index (BMI). Aim for a BMI of 20-25. Obesity is defined as a BMI of above 30.

Exercise

Now is the time to prepare your body and to start building a solid aerobic and strength-training base to live an injury and pain-free life. Make sure to include balance, functional and core exercises. "According to ACSM, one must engage in cardiovascular endurance three to five days a week for 30 to 60 minutes, lift weights two to three days a week (with at least one day of rest in between) and stretch daily," says Bethany. General strength-training exercises include: leg press, leg curl, chest press, low row, bicep curl, tricep dips and crunches. Core strength

is particularly important in preventing low-back pain. Using the BOSU ball and physioballs are great ways to develop balance and core strength.



Annual Screenings TO HAVE IN YOUR 30s

- Annual Pap smear (if you are low-risk and 30 or older and have had three negative results on annual Pap smears, you can be rescreened every two to three years after that; or if you have had a negative result on a combined Pap smear and DNA test for high-risk types of the human papillomavirus (HPV, which causes cervical cancer), you should be rescreened no more than every three years.
- Annual pelvic and breast exams.
- Blood pressure test every two years; more often if your doctor identifies a need.
- Annual dental exam and twice yearly teeth and gum cleanings.
- Baseline cholesterol screening, including the high-density lipoprotein (or "good") cholesterol, low-density lipoprotein (or "bad") cholesterol and triglycerides. Repeat every five years, or more frequently if you have elevated cholesterol.
- Skin examination by a health-care provider every three years; more often if your family has a history of skin cancer problems.
- Baseline thyroid test, followed by repeat screenings every five years.
- Monthly breast self-exam.

YOUR 40s



Healthy Moves TO MAKE IN YOUR 40s

See your dentist. Not only does gum disease up your risk for heart problems, but your dentist can check for bone loss, which could signal early-stage osteoporosis.

Eat at least two weekly servings of fatty fish, like salmon or tuna. They're rich in omega-3 fatty acids, which prevent heart disease.

Your brain. Use it or lose it. Reading books, visiting museums or doing jigsaw puzzles may reduce your risk of getting Alzheimer's.

Stretch. You become less flexible as you age, which makes it harder to move around.

Cut your calories after 5 p.m. Try to consume about 70 percent of your daily calories before evening,

What to Expect

Your 40s are a transitional time. You're moving out of your child-bearing years toward menopause; and in the meantime, you may be juggling family, aging parents and work. This can be an exciting, but challenging decade. The signs of physical change that were subtle in your 30s become more noticeable in your 40s. It becomes more important than ever to maintain the positive health habits you established earlier in life.

BREAST HEALTH

Once you hit 40, it's time to plan on regular mammograms. (If you have a family history of breast cancer, you may need to start earlier.) "Seventy-five percent of breast cancer occurs in women without risk factors, such as a family history or a mutation in one of the so-called breast cancer genes," notes Vicki L. Seltzer, M.D., vice president for women's health services of the North Shore-Long Island Jewish Health System. The good news is that the overall death rate from breast cancer has declined in recent years because of aggressive screening and better treatment.

Currently, mammography is the most sensitive technique for diagnosing breast cancer, but "even the best mammograms miss up to 10 percent of breast cancers," Dr. Seltzer says. Moreover, mammography may be more difficult to interpret in younger women, who tend to have denser breasts. That's why it's important to

also have a manual breast exam annually by a physician. You may also want to conduct your own monthly breast self-exam, one week after the start of your period.

REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM

Your 40s can be like going through puberty in reverse as your reproductive organs begin to slow down. The years when menopause-related changes begin are called perimenopause. During perimenopause, you may have irregular periods, hot flashes, fatigue, mood swings and sleep disturbances for a few months to six years—or longer.

BONES

Bone loss accelerates as estrogen production decreases during the early menopausal years, which for some women begins in the 40s. "It's important that you get at least 1,200 milligrams of calcium every day," says Felicia Cosman, M.D., clinical director of the National Osteoporosis Foundation. "Discuss the possibility of estrogen replacement therapy (ERT) with your doctor. ERT has been shown to protect against rapid post-menopausal bone loss, but it may also increase the risk of uterine and breast cancer."

Healthy Habits

You're now "officially" aging. You're no longer building bone mass—you're slowly losing it. Your metabolism has also probably slowed down, so it's harder to keep the weight off. A low-fat diet,

Commonly Asked Health Questions BY

Help! Walking on a treadmill for 30 minutes three times a week doesn't seem to be staving off my emerging belly. How can I get rid of it?

Sad but true: As you get older, you're more likely to develop belly fat. As you age, your estrogen level becomes more erratic, triggering your body to move fat storage from your hips and thighs to your stomach. The solution: Increase the intensity of your exercise routine, ideally

through interval training, where you incorporate bursts of high-intensity moves into your usual workout.

Would antidepressants help with my perimenopause?

Possibly. "When you go through perimenopause, your ovaries' production of estrogen and progesterone fluctuates, which may cause mood swings, irritability and depression," says NYU's Shari Lusskin.

weight-bearing exercise and physical activity can help with all of these. Also, those suntans of our youth may start catching up with you as the cumulative affect of ultraviolet rays increases your chance of skin cancer. Carefully check your skin on a regular basis for signs of skin cancer.

Emotional Health

“By the time you reach your 40s, you have a better sense of who you are and can enhance your emotional equilibrium,” says Diana Dell, M.D.

“When I was in my 40s, I realized I wasn’t going to live forever, so I decided to give up the battles I had always had with my body and to live life to its fullest.”

—Abbie Morris, 51

But new sources of stress do arise during this decade, particularly if your parents’ health begins to decline and you find yourself joining the sandwich generation of caregivers who are tending to both parents and children. Plus, perimenopausal changes can provoke recurrent anxiety or depression in those who have a tendency toward them.

“For women who have suffered depression in the past,” Dr. Dell says, “this is a biologically vulnerable time for it to recur.” During these years, women also may be more susceptible to developing endocrine

disorders such as hypothyroidism and diabetes, which can affect your mood.

Nutrition

Continue a diet high in fruits, vegetables and whole grains, including sources of folic acid and calcium. Reduce the fat you eat to protect against heart disease, stroke and cancer. You might consider adding soy to your diet; it may help decrease hot flashes and other menopausal symptoms and also has been linked to preventing osteoporosis.

Exercise

Strength training is even more important now to combat the quarter-pound of muscle most women lose every year (while gaining at least that much in fat) after age 40. And consider adding yoga or Pilates to help keep your body supple and injury-resistant. “If you don’t use it, you lose it,” says Bethany. “This goes for strength, endurance, balance and flexibility.”

which is linked to one-third of all cancer deaths,” says Colleen Doyle, R.D., director of nutrition and physical activity at the American Cancer Society. You can also slash your risk of cancer by losing weight: Obesity is linked to about 20 percent of all cancer deaths in women. To check if your body mass index is in the healthy range of 18.5 to 24.9, go to www.consumer.gov/weightloss.

Annual Screenings TO HAVE IN YOUR 40s

- Annual Pap smear (if you are low-risk and 30 or older and have had three negative results on annual Pap smears, you can be rescreened every two to three years after that; or if you have had a negative result on a combined Pap smear and DNA test for high-risk types of the human papillomavirus (HPV, which causes cervical cancer), you should be rescreened no more than every three years.
- Blood-pressure test every two years; more often if your doctor identifies a need.
- Annual dental exam and twice yearly teeth and gum cleanings.
- Baseline cholesterol screening, including the high-density lipoprotein (or “good”) cholesterol, low-density lipoprotein (or “bad”) cholesterol and triglycerides. Repeat every five years, or more frequently if you have elevated cholesterol.
- Skin examination by a health-care provider every three years; more often if your family has a history of skin cancer problems.
- Baseline thyroid test, followed by repeat screenings every five years.
- Eye exam every two to four years.
- Baseline mammogram at age 40 (if you have a family history of breast cancer, your doctor may suggest getting tested as early as 35), followed by one every one to two years until age 50.
- Fasting blood-sugar test to check for diabetes.
- Fecal-occult blood test to check for colon or rectal cancer.
- Baseline bone-mineral-density test after menopause.
- Monthly breast self-exam.

WOMEN IN THEIR 40s

Antidepressants boost serotonin levels, thus countering these affects. You can also ask your doctor about going on the Pill, which will give your body mood-boosting estrogen.

How can I lower my risk of cancer?

About two-thirds of all cancer deaths are due to poor lifestyle habits, according to the American Cancer Society. “The easiest way to reduce your risk? Stop smoking,

YOUR 50s

Healthy Moves TO MAKE IN YOUR 50s

Don't skip mammograms. Age increases your breast cancer risk, so getting regular mammograms is even more important as you move into your later adult years.

Protect yourself from colon cancer. It's also important for your doctor to look inside your colon for pre-cancerous polyps or early signs of colorectal disease. To view your colon, your doctor will recommend a sigmoidoscopy (every five years from ages 50 to 70) or a colonoscopy (every 10 years from ages 50 to 70). These screenings help find cancer at its earliest stage—when it's most treatable—and also help prevent onset of the disease by removing polyps that may later turn into cancer.

Take calcium and vitamin D to head off osteoporosis and help keep your bones strong.

Continue to eat plenty of fruits and vegetables.

Take up yoga, which uses your own body weight to build muscle, but also hones flexibility and balance.

Commonly Asked Health Questions

BY WOMEN IN THEIR 50s

What to Expect

By the time you get over the shock of becoming 40, you've reached the big 50. There's no question that this decade is dominated by menopause.

MENOPAUSE

The average age of menopause is 51. For smokers, menopause may occur at an earlier age than the average. Contrary to many women's perceptions, menopause isn't an illness or a condition that has a cure. A woman has entered menopause, a milestone that marks the culmination of her reproductive years, when she goes one year without a period. "Menopause is a natural transition, and it's an opportunity for women to

mones had a five-year safety zone for breast cancer. That balloon has been punctured by the WHI," Dr. Schiff says. In light of this news, many doctors are now recommending other strategies for reducing future health risks: exercising, not smoking, monitoring your cholesterol and watching your weight to prevent heart disease, increasing your calcium intake and performing weight-bearing exercise.

Meanwhile, many women are scrambling to find ways to relieve bothersome menopausal symptoms. "Severe hot flashes can affect the quality of sleep and the ability to manage from day to day," Dr. Schiff notes. "Women ought to feel they can use estrogens, which are the

"When I hit my 50s, I finally learned to accept the fact that my body was getting older and that I needed to alter certain things, so I could continue living life to its fullest." —Merrily Ludlow, 58

look forward to the next phase of life and determine how they can stay healthy," says Isaac Schiff, M.D., chief of obstetrics and gynecology at Massachusetts General Hospital.

Since the ovaries stop producing estrogen during menopause, women may experience symptoms such as hot flashes, vaginal dryness and night sweats. Until the findings of the Women's Health Initiative (WHI) were released in 2002, many women opted for hormone replacement therapy (HRT) to ease the transition with hardly a second thought. But the WHI found that HRT does not prevent heart disease, as was previously believed and that it may increase the risk of breast cancer. "We used to think women on hor-

best medication for hot flashes, as long as they weigh the risks and benefits involved." If you do use HRT, the goal is to use the lowest-possible dose for the shortest time. Other ways to manage hot flashes: avoid alcohol, caffeine and spicy foods; wear layers of light clothing so you can peel them off as needed; set your thermostat to a lower temperature or stay in air-conditioned rooms as much as possible; exercise regularly; and discuss the use of antidepressants with your doctor.

Healthy Habits

As you age, your skin becomes thinner, drier and more fragile. Take good care of your skin by using sunscreens, washing with mild soaps

Will hormone replacement therapy make me gain weight?

According to a long-term study reported in the "Journal of the American Medical Association", hormone replacement therapy (HRT) does not result in weight gain. However, regardless of whether you are taking

HRT, women are more likely to gain some pounds with aging. A good diet and regular exercise can help avoid weight gain.

Everyone says menopausal women are moody. Is it true?

Not really. A lot of women do

and using a moisturizer if your skin is dry. Don't smoke and drink plenty of water. Perform a skin self-examination once a month; skin cancer accounts for half of all malignancies in the United States. Continue your monthly breast self-exams.

Emotional Health

As you go through menopause, you may experience sleep disturbances that affect your daytime mood and energy levels. And chronic conditions such as arthritis or hypertension can induce downward mood changes as well. But there's good news on the horizon: Once your hormones settle down, you'll likely "reach a cruising altitude where the absence of fluctuating hormones seems to have a quieting affect," explains Diana Dell, M.D. "The rates of depression tend to decrease after menopause." Plus, you may be gaining autonomy as your children go off to college or as you approach retirement, both of which can give you a sense of liberation.

Nutrition

As you age and your risk for heart disease and cancer increases, a lowfat diet rich in vegetables, fruits and whole grains becomes even more important. Also, because your body has less muscle, it burns calories more slowly. Eat in moderation to help control your weight.

Exercise

Ideally, you still want to get 30 to 60 minutes a day of aerobic exercise, but now you can mix in a moderate activity such as walking with high-intensity workouts. Make sure you also do some strength training—again, ideally, two to three times a week. Perform eight to 15 repetitions in a row, have a minute of rest and

repeat. If you've never been an exerciser, please don't let that stop you from starting. "The Surgeon General recommends engaging in physical activity most days of the week," says Bethany. "Along with working out, physical activity can also include gardening, washing the car, cleaning the house and so on. Any activity is good if it gets your heart rate up and doesn't involve sitting in front of the television."



experience mood swings and depression during menopause, some of them severely, but menopause is not directly responsible. Hormonal fluctuations do make women more vulnerable to stress, so that they might not cope as well with life's ups and downs as they usually do. Depres-

sion does occur during menopause, and it needs to be taken seriously (doctors can help with medication or psychological treatments). But it does not seem to be any more common than in other age group; menopause does not cause depression on its own.

Annual Screenings TO HAVE IN YOUR 50s

- Annual Pap smear and physician pelvic and breast exams.
- Annual mammogram.
- A full blood lipid test every five years.
- Fasting blood-sugar test to check for diabetes every three years.
- Annual blood pressure test.
- Annual dental exam and twice yearly teeth and gum cleanings.
- Baseline cholesterol screening, including the high-density lipoprotein (or "good") cholesterol, low-density lipoprotein (or "bad") cholesterol and triglycerides. Repeat every five years, or more frequently if you have elevated cholesterol.
- Skin examination by a health-care provider every two years; more often if your family has a history of skin cancer problems.
- Eye exam every three years.
- Annual rectal exam.
- Fecal occult blood test annually and a sigmoidoscopy every five years to check for colorectal cancer.
- Colonoscopy every 10 years to check for colorectal cancer.
- Bone-mineral-density test every two to three years after menopause.
- Thyroid hormone test every five years to determine whether the thyroid gland is functioning properly.
- Electrocardiogram every five years to identify irregularities in heart function or the beginnings of heart disease.
- Tetanus booster every 10 years.
- Monthly breast self-exam.

YOUR 60s & BEYOND

Healthy Moves

TO MAKE IN YOUR 60s & BEYOND

Get a flu shot. The best time to get vaccinated is from October through November to help protect yourself during the flu season's peak from November through April.

Play Games. Believe it or not, playing cards with friends can be a real health booster. Games such as bridge are praised for the cognitive challenge.

Volunteer in your community or at a nonprofit organization. It ups your feeling of purpose in life.

Make sure you are eating good sources of lean protein. Studies show adults in their 60s and beyond skimp on meat, fish, poultry and beans.

What to Expect

In your 60s and beyond, you still have many good years ahead of you, so make the best of them. If you've had a healthy lifestyle, you're more likely to continue to enjoy good health and your independence.

OSTEOPOROSIS

Women lose an average of 42 percent of mineral from the lumbar spine during their lifetimes, which contributes to osteoporosis and the risk of fractures. "This loss in bone mass can be greatly reduced with regular weight-bearing exercise, such as running and walking," says Judith Reichman, M.D. "Adequate calcium intake is also crucial to maintaining bone mass and daily exercise improves the body's absorption of calcium."

HEART DISEASE

Hypertension, diabetes and cholesterol abnormalities all increase with age, making coronary artery disease the No. 1 health concern for women in their 60s. Vigilance in diagnosing and treating any of these problems will vastly improve wellness and the duration of your life.

CANCER

Probably one of the scariest diseases in any age group is cancer. Because the aging immune system loses its ability to cancel out mutations and halt the growth of resulting abnormal cells, the longer you live, the more likely you are to develop cancer. "Approximately half of all cancers occur between the ages of 65 and 90," says Dr. Reichman. "But

the good news is that when it comes to lung and breast cancer, age may result in less aggressive tumors that are more responsive to therapy." Despite this, there is a tendency on the part of some doctors to think that older people don't warrant diligent cancer screening and, once diagnosed, don't need to be treated aggressively. "Age should not be the decisive factor in choice of therapy. Even in the case of advanced cancer, rigorous treatment can delay progression, minimize disability and improve chances of survival."

VISION PROBLEMS

A gradual decline in vision is normal, but cataracts and glaucoma are special risks. Cataracts, which gradually cloud the lens of the eye, can in most cases be treated successfully. Glaucoma, a buildup of internal pressure that can lead to blindness, also responds well to treatment.

FALLS

Certain physical conditions are common in women 60 and beyond, including weakened vision, slowing reflexes, circulatory and arthritic conditions. These problems, along with dizziness, which is often caused by prescription drugs, may contribute to the likelihood of falls. "Brittle bones,



Commonly Asked Health Questions

BY WOMEN IN THEIR 60s & BEYOND

What is Alzheimer's disease and can it be treated?

Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause of dementia. It affects nerve cells in the brain causing a large number of cells to die. According to the Alzheimer's Foundation, as many as 4 million Americans have this disease with it affecting more women than men, probably because women live longer. No one

test can accurately diagnose Alzheimer's disease. However, a thorough examination, complete medical history and psychological evaluation can help doctors identify reversible conditions and make a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease. Getting early diagnosis allows people to explore treatment options and plan for the future.

How can I help reduce my chances of developing heart disease?

It's always smart to start by checking with your doctor. You should also consider quitting smoking, controlling your blood pressure and cholesterol levels, starting an exercise program, avoiding obesity, limiting your intake of fat and cholesterol and lowering stress.

fragile skin and small blood vessels make the bruises or fractures caused by falls a serious matter to many women,” says Dr. Reichman. “To guard against falls make sure to wear glasses, wear well-fitted shoes with nonslip soles, ensure that carpets and floor coverings are secure, minimize clutter on floors and stairs, keep light at bedside and at stairways, secure handrails near bath and toilet and make sure no wires trail loosely along the floor.”

SENILE DEMENTIA

Dementia, a brain disorder that results in progressive loss of mental functions, may develop at any age. After age 65, senile dementia is most frequently caused by Alzheimer’s disease. However, such conditions as depression, chest infections and stroke may cause symptoms of dementia. “Because treatment for underlying disorders and practical help with the affects of Alzheimer’s are available, it’s important to seek diagnosis as early as families suspect the onset of dementia,” recommends Dr. Reichman.

Healthy Habits

Because of longer life expectancies, most women can expect to spend some of their later years alone. However, women who become socially isolated are three times more likely to die from various cancers. It’s important to continue pursuing your current interests and to look for some new ones as well. Keep up with your friends and family and enjoy an active social life. Don’t forget to continue to exercise and eat a calcium-rich diet to slow down bone loss.

Nutrition

As you age, you may lose some of your appetite and not eat as well. This can result in a number of health problems, so be sure to continue to eat a complete, healthy diet. Talk to your doctor about taking a multivitamin/mineral supplement to ensure you’re getting all the necessary nutrients.

In every decade of life, a woman has important health decisions to make and has important health steps to take to enjoy maximum vigor and wellness. Hopefully, this decade-by-decade guide has provided the steps necessary for you to enjoy life to the fullest ... at any age!

Exercise

Stretch after you do your regular strength and endurance exercises. Stretch at least three days a week (five days is ideal) for 20 minutes. Each stretch should be held for 30 seconds and repeated three to five times. Avoid “bouncing” into a stretch and focus on a slow, steady movement instead. Full-body stretching should include exercises for all major muscle groups. Always warm up before stretching exercises and remember that stretching should never cause pain. “Think of your muscles as a piece of rubber,” says Bethany. “When they’re cold, they do not bend very well. But once they are warmed up, you can mold them and they can stretch out.”

Maintaining balance also plays a crucial role for women in their 60s. Balance helps prevent common problems such as falls. Falling is the major cause of broken hips and other injuries, which can often lead to disability. Most exercises to improve balance can be done using a table or chair. Following are several balance exercises to try. Do two sets of eight to 15, alternating repetitions from right to left side.

ABCS Stand on one leg and spell out the alphabet with the other foot. If this becomes less challenging, close your eyes.

SIT/STAND Get up and out of a chair and then sit down again.

HIP FLEXION Stand straight holding onto a table or chair, slowly bend one knee toward chest (without bending waist or hips), hold position for one second and slowly lower back down.

HIP EXTENSION Same as hip flexion, except lift one leg backwards without bending the knee, pointing the toes or bending the upper body, hold for one second, then slowly lower leg back down.

Annual Screenings

TO HAVE IN YOUR 60s & BEYOND

- Annual Pap smear and physician pelvic and breast exams
- Annual mammogram.
- A full blood lipid test every five years.
- Fasting blood-sugar test to check for diabetes every three years.
- Annual blood pressure test.
- Annual dental exam and twice yearly teeth and gum cleanings.
- Baseline cholesterol screening, including the high-density lipoprotein (or “good”) cholesterol, low-density lipoprotein (or “bad”) cholesterol and triglycerides. Repeat every five years, or more frequently if you have elevated cholesterol.
- Skin examination by a health-care provider every two years; more often if your family has a history of skin cancer problems.
- Eye exam every three years.
- Thyroid test every five years.
- Annual rectal exam.
- Fecal occult blood test annually and a sigmoidoscopy every five years to check for colorectal cancer.
- Colonoscopy every 10 years to check for colorectal cancer.
- Bone-mineral-density test every two to three years.
- Electrocardiogram every five years to identify irregularities in heart function or the beginnings of heart disease.
- Tetanus booster every 10 years.
- Get a flu shot every year.
- Monthly breast self-exam.