

# 5 Most Important Health Concerns For Women



Take Control Of Your Health With  
Prevention And Screenings

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Disclaimer: This publication is for informational purposes only and is not intended to be medical advice. You should always seek medical care from a qualified medical professional for any health concerns or issues you might have.

# Introduction

Men and women are different in many ways and so there are specific medical conditions unique to women that need special attention in order to maximize quality of life and to prolong life whenever possible. In addition, women can suffer from the same diseases that are normally associated with men. These conditions, too, must be prevented or managed in order to attain a maximum healthy lifetime.

An ounce of prevention is worth a thousand cures. This old saying is never more applicable than in the case of your health and wellness. Risks for many diseases can be decreased greatly, and in many cases, early detection can save women's lives.

Often, women neglect to consider their health, until it's too late. Women have busy lives, we work, we take care of the home, kids and spouses, and often we neglect ourselves in the process.

However, imagine living a long life, well into your 80s, enjoying your grandkids, traveling, or simply having the time to relax and do whatever you want in retirement, free of sickness and risk of death from some terminal illness. Now consider the fact that there are so many advances in technology and a wealth of knowledge in modern medicine that living such a long and healthy life is completely possible.

# Most Important Health Concerns For Women

## Breast Cancer

More than 1 in 9 women will develop breast cancer in their lifetime. The incidence of breast cancer is less in women who are of normal weight. If you exercise and eat food that keeps your weight down, you can minimize your chances of getting breast cancer. There are also screenings that can aid in early detection.

## Important Cancer Screenings

**Breast self-exam:** There is controversy as to whether or not a breast self-exam is truly of benefit; however, it doesn't hurt to check your breasts for lumps at least once a month and to see your doctor if something doesn't feel right.

**CBE:** The American Cancer Society recommends that women between the ages of 20 and 30 have CBE (clinical breast exam) that is administered by a doctor once every 3 years. At age 40 and up, the CBE is recommended to be performed once per year.

**Mammograms:** In addition, regular mammograms are recommended for women 40 and older once per year and should continue as long as they are in good health.

**MRI and Mammogram:** Women who are considered high risk for breast cancer are advised by the American Cancer Association to get an MRI and a mammogram every year.

High risk includes women who have a 20% to 25% or greater risk for cancer in the Claus model assessment test based on these criteria:

- Have tested positive for the presence of BRCA1 or BRCA2, both of which are human genes that produce tumor suppressor proteins

- Have a first-degree relative, such as a parent, sibling, or child with a BRCA1 or BRCA2 gene, but have not had any genetic testing themselves
- Had x-rays to the chest at any age between 10 and 30
- Has been diagnosed with Bannayan-Riley-Ruvalcaba, Li-Fraumeni or Cowden syndrome or have any first-degree relative(s) who has or had any of these syndromes

Those women with a lifetime risk of 15% or less for the criteria above are not recommended to do MRI screenings for breast cancer.

## **Heart Disease**

Heart disease is the leading killer of both men and women in the United States. According to the Centers For Disease Control, heart disease is responsible for 29% of deaths in women every year. The real tragedy is that the deaths are typically premature, or a heart attack ends in disability that impacts quality of life, including breathing issues while walking, using stairs, or performing any number of everyday activities due to impairment in mobility. Statistically women are underdiagnosed when it comes to heart disease, often because both doctors and the women themselves miss the symptoms, which include nausea, and shortness of breath.

**According to the American Heart Association, risk factors for heart disease include:**

- Increasing age
- Genetics and race: those with a family history are at higher risk, along with Mexican-Americans, Native Americans, Native Hawaiians, African-Americans, and some Asian-Americans
- High blood cholesterol
- High blood pressure
- Smoking
- Lack of exercise
- Overweight and obesity

- Diabetes

The key to maintaining heart health is to take action early in life because prevention is the best way to avoid heart disease. This means making healthy lifestyle choices, like diet, exercise and not smoking to reduce the overall risks for heart related problems. It is also important to speak with your doctor if you have any of the risks listed above to seek early intervention and appropriate medical advice.

## **Obesity**

Obesity is becoming an epidemic in developed countries such as the US. Ideally, it would be a good idea to prevent your weight from ever exceeding acceptable levels but if you become obese, you can always start developing good eating and exercise habits at any time in order to lose weight.

You can find out whether or not you are overweight by taking your weight in pounds and dividing it by your height in inches squared, multiplying that by 703. A value over 25 means you are overweight and a value over 30, means you are obese. There are also BMI scales to quickly determine where you land in order to assess obesity.

Obesity poses a number of serious health risks, including, heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes (that comes with its own set of hazards) and premature death. You can get control of your weight, and there are many healthy ways to do so. Seeking the guidance of a nutritionist is a great place to start.

## **Colon Cancer**

Women get colon cancer at about the same rate as men. Colon cancer can be completely prevented in most people who get a screening colonoscopy at the age of fifty and every ten years thereafter. Colonoscopies can detect and remove cancer-causing polyps of the colon, virtually eliminating the chances of getting colon cancer.

Those with a family history of colon cancer should have their first screening colonoscopy earlier in life, as early as in their twenties. In addition, diets low in fat and high in fiber can be preventative of ever getting the disease.

## **Type 2 Diabetes**

Type 2 diabetes is a condition of high blood sugar and several serious consequences of high blood sugar that appears to be related to family history and obesity. If you have a family history of diabetes, you should try and keep your weight in the normal range and should have your doctor check a fasting blood sugar on you every 3-5 years. If you are obese, you can still get type 2 diabetes, even if you don't have a family history.

**See your doctor if you have any risk factors for Type 2 diabetes including:**

- Aged over 45
- Overweight or obesity with a BMI of 35 or more
- Have pre-diabetes
- Have had gestational diabetes
- Have family members who have type 2 diabetes
- Don't exercise regularly
- Have low good (HDL) or high bad (LDL) cholesterol levels
- Have high blood pressure
- Members of particular racial or ethnic groups including: African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans and Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders

## **Cervical Cancer**

Cervical cancer can develop in women at any age, usually starting in a woman's twenties and becoming less prevalent as a woman reaches her seventies. Cervical cancer can be partly

prevented by getting a vaccination as early as your teens that protects women against many forms of human papilloma virus or HPV.

HPV infection of the genitals and cervix is a known risk factor for cervical cancer. In addition, women should get routine pap tests from their doctor; the United States Preventive Services Task Force recommends screening for cervical cancer in women age 21 to 65 years with a Pap smear every 3 years. This involves getting a scraping of cervical cells and putting them under a microscope, looking for precancerous changes. If you are 30 or older, your doctor can recommend a combination of a Pap smear with a human papillomavirus (HPV) test to be conducted every 5 years.

## **Bottom Line**

Always remember that you don't have to be a victim to these health conditions. Screening for some of these diseases on a regular basis and preventing them through a healthy diet and exercise program can help you stay healthy for many years to come.