

# Health tip: Women's health

## Understanding women's health

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

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

## Disease prevalence, risk, and prevention

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

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

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

**Cervical cancer** is another form of cancer that effects only women. Like breast cancer, there are many risks for cervical cancer. However, the major risk factor for developing cervical cancer is being diagnosed with HPV—spread mainly via sexual contact. Therefore, it is recommended to receive a pap smear to screen for cervical cancer once you become sexually active, or by age 25.<sup>6</sup>

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

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

## Facts to know<sup>2,3</sup>

**14.4%**

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

**41.8%**

of women over age 20  
are **obese**

Less  
than **50%**

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

**20M**

women suffer from  
**eating disorders**

## Risk reduction<sup>8</sup>

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

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



### Sources:

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

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

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

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

<sup>5</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. [https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/breast/basic\\_info/risk\\_factors.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/breast/basic_info/risk_factors.htm), 2021. Accessed August 2022.

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

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

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

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# Health tip: Mammogram screening recommendations

New recommendations from the U.S. Preventive Task Force state that women should now begin screening for breast cancer at age 40 rather than 50, as starting breast cancer screening 10 years earlier may save thousands of lives per year.<sup>1</sup>

Usually, women between the ages of 50 and 74 are encouraged to schedule mammograms to detect possible signs of breast cancer, the most common cancer among women in the United States. However, recent evidence shows more women in their 40s are getting breast cancer, with the number of newly diagnosed women increasing about 2% each year.

The newest recommendations by the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force state that women who are between ages 40 and 74 should have screening mammograms every two years. By starting screenings earlier, doctors can detect breast cancers earlier, saving more lives.<sup>1</sup>

Depending on your personal health and health history, your doctor may recommend the mammogram that's right for you,<sup>2</sup> including a:

## Screening mammogram

- Standard test for average risk of breast cancer
- Helps with early detection and earlier treatment

## Diagnostic mammogram

- Appropriate for those with an abnormal breast screening, mammogram or concerns of breast lumps, pain, discharge, thickening of skin, or change in size or shape
- Provides a more detailed X-ray than a screening mammogram

## 3-D mammogram

- Provides a clearer image than a standard mammogram
- Recommended for those with dense breasts
- Increases cancer detection and decreases false-positive rates



Nevertheless, if you've had breast cancer, have a family history of breast cancer, or have other breast problems, you might need to start getting mammograms before the age of 40, or more often.

All that said, there's no right or wrong mammogram. Speak with your doctor about which one may be the best for you to get. For more information about your health plan coverage, go to [myuhc.com](https://myuhc.com).

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## Need a doctor?

### 3 ways to find a doctor in your network:



Download the **UnitedHealthcare® app** and tap *Find Care* then *Primary care*



Sign in at [myuhc.com](https://myuhc.com)® and use the *Find Care and Costs* then *Primary care providers tool*



Call the number on the back of your health plan ID card to speak with Customer Service



#### Sources:

1. The Washington Post: Health panel recommends women get screening mammograms at age 40. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wellness/2023/05/09/mammogram-age-40-breast-cancer-screening/>. 2023. Accessed August 2024.

2. Cleveland Clinic: Mammogram. <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diagnostics/4877-mammogram>. 2022. Accessed August 2024.

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