WOMEN’S HEALTH GUIDE

INTRODUCTION
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William Shiel Jr., M.D., F.A.C.P.
Chief Medical Editor, MedicineNet.com

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Introduction to Women’s Health

Women and men share many similar health problems but women also have their own health issues, which deserve special consideration.

Women's lives have changed over the centuries. Historically, life was particularly difficult for most women. Aside from the numerous dangers and diseases, women became wives and mothers often when they were just emerging from their own childhood. Many women had a multitude of pregnancies which may or may not have been wanted. In the past, childbirth itself was risky and not infrequently, led to the death of the mother. Most women in the past did not live long enough to be concerned about menopause or old age.

In 1900, a woman's life span was about 50 years. Now, in the new millennium, life expectancy for American women is 82 years of age, and continuing to rise. Not only are women living longer, but they also have the possibility of enjoying a better quality of life throughout their span of years. But to do this, it is essential that women take charge of their own bodies and comprehend how they can maximize their health and fitness. It is also helpful that men understand and are supportive of the health concerns of the women.

Gynecology is the primary branch of medical science concerned with women's health issues. The word "gynecology" is a word consisting of "gyneco," meaning "woman," and "logic," meaning "knowledge." Taken together, it is "woman knowledge."

It is important that every woman has access to knowledge related to the spectrum of women's health issues, not only about her reproductive system, but about all aspects of her body.

Women's General Health and Wellness

There is credible information available to women not only on such problems as eating disorders, stress, alcoholism, addictions, and depression, but also on basic topics such as good nutrition, heart health, and exercise. For example, it is beneficial that a woman maintain her optimum weight. If a woman's waist size measures more than 35 inches (89 cm), she is more likely to develop heart disease, high blood pressure, and diabetes. Eating sensible meals, eliminating after-dinner snacks, and making physical activity a part of daily life are significant ways to help control weight and lower the risk of a long list of health problems.

Drinking an excessive amount of alcohol is also harmful to health. Although women typically begin drinking at a later age than men and tend to drink somewhat less, lower doses of alcohol before developing alcohol are required for women to develop alcohol-related medical problems including alcohol toxicity, cirrhosis, and hepatitis.
Smoking is detrimental to a woman's health (or to anyone else's). Unfortunately, women continue to smoke despite the known health risks. Even though the number of women smoking is declining, still about 19% of women in the U.S. were smokers in 2003. Women are smoking in spite of the well-publicized risks of lung disease including cancer, heart disease, and innumerable other health problems now linked to smoking.

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Women should be aware that they metabolize a number of drugs differently than men. In some cases and for some medications, the rate may be slower, and in other cases, faster. It is, therefore, essential that women are well informed about the kinds and correct dosages of drugs they are taking.

Read full article: http://www.medicinenet.com/womens_health/article.htm

Female Anatomy

There are major differences in body anatomy between males and females that require consideration. As more women are participating in sports, a number of these anatomic differences are being identified, often because men and women athletes sustain different types of injuries. In females, the hamstrings (muscles behind the leg) are not as strong as in males. Women also have a wider hip-to-knee ratio than men. A woman's legs are relatively longer and her torso shorter than a man of comparable size. She has a lower center of gravity, less muscle mass, less dense bones, and higher percentage of body fat.

Anatomic differences between men and women go well beyond the reproductive and skeletal systems. For example, they involve the brain and organs such as the heart. In fact, heart disease is the leading cause of death among women in the United States. It is now described as an "equal opportunity killer." Nine million American women suffer from heart disease. One in ten women between 45 to 64 years of age has some form of heart disease as does one in three women over age 65.

Women tend to suffer their first heart attack 10 years later than men. For reasons that remain unclear (and require more research), the likelihood for a younger woman to die from a heart attack is significantly greater than that of a man. Moreover, the symptoms of an impending heart attack may be somewhat different in a woman than in a man. A woman may more often ignore the symptoms and fail to seek medical attention. Every woman needs to develop her own healthy heart program.

Read full article: http://www.medicinenet.com/womens_health/article.htm
Diseases More Common in Women

Many diseases affect both women and men alike but some diseases occur in women at a higher frequency. For example, gallstones are three to four times more common in women than in men. About 18% of women compared to 6% of men in the U.S. suffer migraine headaches, a ratio of three females to one male. Other conditions which plague women more often than men include irritable bowel syndrome and urinary tract infections.

Urinary tract infections, including cystitis (bladder infection) and kidney infection (pyelonephritis) are significant health problems that especially affect women. Kidney disease is a leading cause of high blood pressure (hypertension). And, after age 50, hypertension is more common in women than in men.

Also more common in women than men are the autoimmune disorders (for example, multiple sclerosis, Sjogren's syndrome, and lupus). In these diseases, the immune system attacks the body's own tissue. Autoimmune disorders afflict at least 12 million Americans and 3/4 of them are women. One autoimmune disorder, rheumatoid arthritis, affects approximately 1.3 million Americans, with 2/3 of the sufferers being women.

Osteoporosis, a condition in which bone density decreases, occurs in both men and women. Overall, however, it is more of a major health concern for women. Some studies have reported that as many as one of every two women over 50 will suffer a fracture related to osteoporosis in her lifetime. By age 65, some women have lost half of their skeletal mass. A woman's doctor can assess her bone density and make recommendations as to how to prevent further bone loss.

More Reading on Women’s Health:

- Female Anatomy
- The Female Reproductive System
- Female Hormones
- Cancer In Women
- Women's Cosmetic Concerns
- Menstruation
- Sexuality
- Fertility, Birth Control and Infertility
- Pregnancy
- Motherhood
- Menopause
- The Mature Woman - Post Menopause

Read full article:
http://www.medicinenet.com/womens_health/article.htm

REFERENCES:
National Cancer Institute
Breast Cancer Quiz

Q: A lump in the breast is almost always cancer. True or False?
A: False.

A lump in the breast is not always cancer. When a lump turns out not to be cancer, what else might it be? It could be a cyst, an abnormal noncancerous growth, or a blood clot that causes lumpiness. It could also be a "pseudo lump," caused by hormonal changes that isn't a lump at all. Still, whatever the cause, it's important to get any lump evaluated.

Q: How often do doctors recommend breast self-exams?
A: Once per month.

It was once widely recommended that women check their own breasts once a month. The current thinking is that it's more important to know your breasts and be aware of any changes, rather than checking them on a regular schedule.

Q: Breast cancer CAN BE inherited. True or False?
A: True.

If you have a strong (positive) family history for breast cancer, ovarian cancer, or even prostate cancer, this information is relevant to your diagnosis. A strong family history in this case usually means that a mother, sibling, child, or father has had a related malignancy. Information about other family members (aunts, nieces, etc.) is also important.

Take the Breast Cancer Quiz:
http://www.medicinenet.com/breast_cancer_quiz/quiz.htm
Why Screening Tests Are Important

Getting the right screening test at the right time is one of the most important things you can do for your health. Screenings find diseases like cancer or diabetes early, often before you have symptoms, and when they're easier to treat. Which test you should have depends on your age and your risk factors. Learn more about the screenings your doctor may recommend for you.

Related Slideshows

15 Cancer Symptoms Women Ignore
Women tend to be more vigilant than men about getting recommended health checkups and cancer screenings. But not always. Watch this slideshow on 15 cancer symptoms women ignore and clues to finding and detecting cancer early.


18 Embarrassing Beauty Questions and Answers
You're not vain for wanting to banish cellulite, razor bumps, stretch marks, bad breath, or a unibrow. Watch this slideshow to learn the connection between your appearance and health and how to fix troublesome beauty problems.

http://www.medicinenet.com/womens_beauty_questions_pictures_slideshow/article.htm

Surprising Health Benefits of Sex
When you're in the mood, it's a sure bet that the last thing on your mind is boosting your immune system or maintaining a healthy weight. Watch this slideshow on the surprising health benefits of sex, including stress relief, improving cardiovascular health and more.

http://www.medicinenet.com/sexual_health_pictures_slideshow/article.htm
Question: How do you cope with chronic fatigue syndrome?

Comment from: Abbegirl, 55-64 Female (Patient) Published: September 04

I am so frustrated and so angry! I have been suffering with this for almost 4 years now. I have gone to several doctors, only to be told the same thing, "It's depression!" I know my body and I know my mind, and this is NOT depression! When it feels like someone has pulled the plug from my body and every ounce of energy is being drained, and I don't have the energy to even sit up. That is not depression! I admit I am probably somewhat depressed because this goes on daily, and anyone would be depressed if they don't have the energy to enjoy their life anymore. I am at a loss here!

Related Reading: chronic fatigue syndrome | depression

Comment from: Bek, 19-24 Female (Patient) Published: October 07

I'm 24 and have been diagnosed with CFS. I was told it was fibromyalgia by several doctors and never felt right with that diagnosis. In reading about CFS it fits my feelings like a glove. But...now i feel hopeless. I'm a pre-med student that has to come to the realization that I simply can't keep up with all the classes and homework anymore. I feel as if my dreams were taken away. I'm hoping I can figure out how to get back in the "swing of things".

Related Reading: fibromyalgia

Comment from: 45-54 Female (Patient) Published: March 13

I was diagnosed with CFS after an initial incorrect diagnosis of mono a year and a half earlier. I found the greatest relief from acupuncture and Chinese herbs, but also got noticeable results from anti-depressants and naturopathic treatment, in that order. My symptoms disappeared entirely for several months after the birth of each of my two children but returned 6-9 months later. My symptoms improved very gradually over the next several years and disappeared entirely when I began early symptoms of menopause at age 38. I have been able to lead a completely normal life for the last 10 years. No one has ever been so happy with menopause.

Related Reading: acupuncture | menopause

View all Comments: http://www.medicinenet.com/chronic_fatigue_syndrome/discussion-235.htm
Suggested Reading on Women’s Health by Our Doctors

Related Diseases & Conditions
- Urinary Tract Infection (UTI in Adults)
  - Urinary tract infection (UTI) is an infection of the kidney, ureter, bladder, and/or urethra. Not everyone with a UTI has symptoms. Common symptoms include

- Night Sweats
  - Night sweats are severe hot flashes that occur at night and result in a drenching sweat. In order to distinguish night sweats that arise from medical causes

- Bladder Infection
  - E. coli is the most common cause of bladder infections. Bladder infection symptoms and signs include frequent urination, burning urination, and

Medications
- 3 articles

Procedures & Tests
- 24 articles

Pictures, Images & Quizzes
- 16 articles

Doctor’s & Expert’s Views
- 65 articles

Health News
- 211 articles

Health Features
- 79 articles

More on MedicineNet:

http://www.medicinenet.com/womens_health/focus.htm

Suggested Reading on Women’s Health Across the WebMD Network

Women's Health on WebMD.com
http://women.webmd.com/

Women's Health Center on Medicinenet.com
http://www.medicinenet.com/womens_health/focus.htm

Women's Health Center on eMedicineHealth.com
http://www.emedicinehealth.com/womens-health/center.htm

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