



## ***A Guide to Your Health***

*Most health discussions for women typically center on parts of the body unique to women. Remember that you are a woman from your head to your toes.*

*This guide is meant to provide some general education on numerous subjects that affect your overall health, not just right now but also in the future.*

*If you have questions, ask your provider.*

**Women's Health Center  
Texas A&M University  
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# Accidents and Injury Prevention

Motor vehicle accidents have been the leading cause of death for adolescent women, ages 15-24, since the late 1960s. Approximately one-third of these fatal accidents were alcohol-related. Of the remaining, key factors identified in causing accidents include drowsiness and distractions such as talking on cell phones, applying make-up, interacting with passengers and eating.

## Bottom line for female drivers (and men, too):

**Wear your seatbelt**

**Designate a non-drinking driver before going out with friends**

**Avoid driving when you are tired**

**Remove or limit distractions inside your car while driving**



## Personal Safety



*Personal safety is an important issue for everyone, but young women can be especially easy targets for violent crimes. In learning to take good care of your body, here are some tips to protect it from harm's way.*

- 1. Be aware.** Know your surroundings. Know the people you are out with. Know the crime statistics where you live, work or go to school. Know the resources in your area. The more you know, the better decisions you can make about your personal safety.
- 2. Go out in groups.** There is safety in numbers. Make a pact with your friends to always go home with the ones you arrived with, AND never leave friends behind! If you have to go out alone, tell someone where you are going and when you will be back.
- 3. Avoid problems.**
  - a. Alcohol and drugs impair your ability to make good decisions. The more you drink, the more impaired your decision making gets. Binge drinking is not only unhealthy, but it puts you at significant risk of becoming a victim of a violent crime.
  - b. Always hold on to your drink. If you set it down, get a new drink in a new glass.
  - c. If you are alone, use common sense. Avoid dark, secluded places. Keep this in mind as you are parking your car or walking to your destination. Don't wait until you decide to leave.
  - d. Don't "close down the bar". Violent crimes regularly occur late at night. Get you and your friends home safely before closing time.
- 4. Keep your cell phone charged.** If you don't have one, get one with an inexpensive plan for emergency use. Some phones can be programmed to call 911 at the press of a single button even if the keypad is locked.
- 5. Take a self-defense class.**
- 6. Beware of "cyber-friends".** When communicating online, use a nickname and ALWAYS keep personal information such as home address and phone number confidential. Online chat sites may be fun, but they have been shown to be haunting grounds for violent criminals.

# Resources

## **Estronaut**

<http://www.womenshealth.org/>

## **Association of Reproductive Health Professionals**

<http://www.arhp.org/>

## **Center for Disease Control and Prevention**

<http://www.cdc.gov/>

## **American Cancer Society**

<http://www.cancer.org/>

## **Mayo Clinic**

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/>

## **American Academy of Family Physicians**

<http://www.aafp.org/>

## **Nutrition.Gov**

<http://www.nutrition.gov/>

## **Center for Science in the Public Interest**

<http://www.cspinet.org/>

## **American Heart Association**

<http://www.americanheart.org/>

## **Texas A&M University**

A.P. Beutel Health Center  
Student Health Services

## **Women's Health Center**

<http://shs.tamu.edu/>  
(979) 458-8387

## **Health Education**

<http://healthed.tamu.edu/>  
(979) 458-8322



## Vitamins and Supplements

Those with healthy diets typically do NOT need to take vitamin or mineral supplements; however, taking a good multivitamin for women is probably not a bad idea for the typical college-aged woman. With shifting schedules and eating on the run, many college students struggle to consistently maintain a healthy diet. When choosing a supplement, women should be aware of the iron and folic acid content as these are especially important to a woman's health.

- 1. Women require 15mg of elemental iron daily during their menstruating years.** Because of the anticipated blood loss each month with your period, you need to maintain your iron stores with regular intake of iron-rich foods. Iron-rich foods include meats, beans, spinach and breads and cereal products which are specifically fortified with iron. Occasionally, despite efforts to eat well, women may still become low in iron which can cause a condition called anemia. Women with iron deficiency anemia often feel tired and lack energy. If you have been diagnosed in the past with anemia or feel you may be anemic, please talk with your healthcare provider.
- 2. The recommended amount of folic acid needed is 400 micrograms per day.** Proper stores of folic acid (one of the B-vitamins) have been shown to help prevent certain types of birth defects. While you may not be planning to get pregnant at this time, it is still encouraged that women consistently keep up good levels of this vitamin in their system. Certain fruits, vegetables, breads and cereal products are good dietary sources of folic acid.



### Additional Information

Of course, this handout only mentions a few of the important health issues facing young women. Your healthcare provider will discuss with you these and other appropriate topics during your annual exam. A few miscellaneous items to mention in closing that your may find useful are listed below:

- 1. Vision:** To prevent eye strain when you are studying, make sure the room is well lit. If you are working at the computer, minimize the glare of the screen to a comfortable level and take frequent breaks from the screen. If you have any trouble with your vision or begin having frequent eye soreness or headache, be sure to have your eyes checked.
- 2. Dental:** Brush your teeth using toothpaste that contains fluoride and floss regularly. Decrease the amount and frequency (especially between meals) of sugary foods. Schedule check-ups with your dentist on a regular basis.
- 3. Immunizations:** Adolescents and young adults have had recent changes in their recommended immunizations. Please talk with your healthcare provider if you are unsure about your vaccine status or if you are interested in receiving any new vaccines (such as Human Papilloma Virus, Pertussis or Meningitis). If you plan to study or travel abroad, the Beutel Health Center's Preventive Medicine Department can help you identify any vaccinations you may need. Please note that some immunization series should begin SIX MONTHS BEFORE traveling.

## Bone Health

**Osteoporosis** (thinning bones) may be an "old woman's illness"; however, it can be the result of a "young woman's indiscretions". The following is a list of risk factors for osteoporosis.

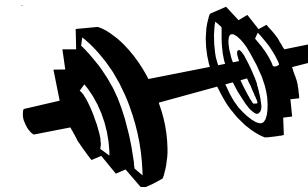
### Factors you can or may NOT be able to change:

- Female
- Caucasian or Asian
- Slender frame
- Age
- Family history
- Delayed puberty
- Early menopause (natural or surgical)
- Long-term use of certain medications (such as steroids, aluminum-containing medications, and medications used to treat seizures, certain thyroid disorders or cancers)
- Certain chronic diseases (such as diabetes, hyperthyroidism and heart failure)



### Factors you CAN choose to change:

- Smoking
- Drinking > 1 alcoholic beverage per day
- Drinking carbonated beverages daily
- Too little dietary calcium
- Sedentary lifestyle
- Eating disorders or frequent dieting



### It's not too late to make a change.

A woman's bone mass usually peaks at age 35. Any changes you make now in this latter part of the "bone building" phase of your life will impact how dense (or strong) your bones are later in life. In addition to controlling the risk factors above, here are some important take home tips to keeping your bones healthy and strong:

- 1. Women need 1000mg of calcium per day.** It is usually best to incorporate your calcium intake into your diet. Nonfat and low-fat dairy products (such as milk, cheese, yogurt and ice cream) are good sources of calcium. Nowadays, many food items are "calcium-fortified". Examples of these include juices, breads, cereals and even fitness water. Any chance you get to add calcium to your diet now – take it! Supplements are an option if you feel your diet is not adequate. Read the label carefully to ensure you get the minimum daily requirement. Be sure to take your supplement with food and divide your doses so that you take no more than 500-600mg per meal. Your body can only absorb this much at a time so higher doses will only "go to waste".
- 2. Fifteen minutes of sunshine daily** provides your body with sufficient vitamin D to maintain bone health.
- 3. Weight bearing exercise** is essential to strengthening your bones. Studies show that to reduce one's risk for osteoporosis requires at least 30 minutes of exercise a minimum of three times per week. Examples of weight bearing exercise include essentially any exercise done in an upright position such as walking, running, aerobics and weight lifting. Swimming and cycling involve little weight bearing so are less apt to help build bone.

# Women and Cardiovascular Disease

Heart disease affects more women than men and more women die from heart disease than from all cancers combined! Heart disease is more of an issue later in life; however, like osteoporosis, many factors can be addressed as adolescents and young adults and have a dramatic impact on reducing your risk for heart disease during your lifetime.

- 1. Know your family's medical history.** If several family members (especially female members) have had heart attacks or strokes then your risk is higher for heart disease. Talk with your healthcare provider if you have a strong family history of heart disease.
- 2. Know your cholesterol.** Periodic cholesterol testing is recommended in all adults starting at age 20. An otherwise healthy young woman with normal cholesterol levels does not need to have the test repeated for five years unless changes occur in her lifestyle, including weight gain and changes in medication or diet. This recommendation is especially important if you have family members with high cholesterol levels. Damage to blood vessels around the heart is known to start even in teenagers whose total cholesterol is greater than 200.
- 3. If you are a smoker, stop smoking.** As few as three cigarettes a day will DOUBLE your risk for heart disease.
- 4. Know and maintain your normal Body Mass Index (BMI).** The BMI is a measure of your weight relative to your height and is a reliable indicator of total body fat. The higher your BMI is above normal, the greater your risk is for obesity-associated diseases such as heart disease.
- 5. Eat a "heart healthy diet".** Reduce the amount salty foods you eat, and do not add salt to your food. Increase the amount of fiber as well as number of fruits and vegetables (minimum 5 per day!) that you consume. Limit your intake of foods high in fat or cholesterol. Avoid concentrated sweets (candy, cake, ice cream, etc.) in your diet.
- 6. Exercise regularly.** The American Heart Association recommends at least 30 minutes of aerobic-type exercise a minimum of five days per week to lower your risk for heart disease.
- 7. Reduce stress.** While stress is an everyday part of a college student's life, getting plenty of rest and learning relaxation techniques (such as yoga or biofeedback) can help to reduce the effect of stress on your body.
- 8. Get periodic check-ups with your healthcare provider.** Other chronic illnesses such as diabetes and high blood pressure increase your risk for heart disease. Through regular examinations, you and your healthcare provider can better maintain your long-term health.



## Cancer



In addition to certain female-related health issues, the annual exam for women is designed to detect certain cancers which commonly affect women. Specifically addressed during your exam are breast, cervix, ovarian, vaginal and vulvar cancers.

**Melanoma** (the most serious form of skin cancer) is one of the most common cancers found in persons aged <30 years; it is the most common cancer occurring among persons in the 25-29 age group and the third most common in the 20-24 age group. Because like all forms of skin cancers, melanoma is directly related to sun and ultraviolet (UV) light exposure, the following "safe-sun guidelines" are included to help reduce your risk of all forms of skin cancer.

- 1. Avoid the sun.** The sun is strongest during the middle of the day, between 10am and 4pm. During these hours, the sun can do the most damage to your skin. The more damage the sun does to your skin, the more likely you are to get early wrinkles and skin cancer.
- 2. Put on sunscreen.** Use a sunscreen or sunblock with an SPF factor of 15 or greater. Apply at least 30 minutes before you go outside. Reapply your sunscreen every 1-2 hours or any time you get wet or overly sweat. Even if you use "waterproof" sunscreen, it is still recommended that you reapply often.
- 3. Wear protective clothing.** Wide-brimmed hats (not just baseball caps) help protect your face, neck and ears. Protect your eyes by wearing sunglasses that block both UV-A and UV-B rays. If possible, wear loosely fitted long-sleeve shirts and long pants to better protect your skin.
- 4. Don't try to get a tan.** Tanning beds damage your skin just like real sunlight does. Despite anything you may read in the press, chronic exposure of your skin to any form of UV radiation causes damage and increases your risk for skin cancer.
- 5. Know your ABCDE Rules.**
  - A for ASYMMETRY:**  
A mole that, when divided in half, doesn't look the same on both sides.
  - B for BORDER:**  
A mole with edges that are blurry or jagged.
  - C for COLOR:**  
Changes in the color of a mole, including darkening, spread of color, loss of color or the appearance of multiple colors such as blue, red, pink, white, purple or gray.
  - D for DIAMETER:**  
A mole larger than ¼ inch in diameter.
  - E for ELEVATION:**  
A mole that is raised above the skin and has a rough surface.

If you notice a mole that has any feature like those described above, has made ANY changes, or a new mole that does not look like your other moles, visit with your healthcare provider ASAP. Skin cancer can be treated successfully if it is treated early!

