

Women's Health Maintenance

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Exercise

Aerobic exercise such as walking, swimming, running or bicycling improves your cardiovascular system. It strengthens your heart, lungs, and muscles. It also helps control obesity, diabetes, and high cholesterol. The current guidelines suggest an accumulated 30 minutes of aerobic exercise daily. During this, you should never be so short of breath you cannot carry a conversation. Questions? Ask your doctor.

Nutrition

Eating foods for good health and to control weight are virtually the same thing. You should aim for 5 servings of fruits and vegetables each day. No more than 30% of your diet should be fat (and less if you're trying to lose weight). Avoid sugar, fast foods, fried foods and "junk foods". We have a nutritionist at our office who can help you develop a plan for weight loss, better eating, and better health.

Vitamins

The most important way to get vitamins is through a well-balanced diet. If you are not meeting that, consider taking a multivitamin. Also, women of childbearing age should take a daily multivitamin containing 400 mcg of folic acid to help prevent neurologic birth defects in babies.

Osteoporosis Prevention

Osteoporosis is thinning of the bones, which often leads to hip and spine fractures as we age. All women should perform regular weight bearing exercise to keep the bones strong (walking, running). In addition, pre-menopausal women should ingest 1000 mg of calcium each day. Post-menopausal women should ingest 1200-1500 mg per day. Vitamin D is also important. If you are not sure if you meet these recommendations, see our nutritionist or your doctor. Post-menopausal women should also consider estrogen replacement to keep bones strong.

Smoking

If you smoke, the most important thing you can do for your health is QUIT! Smoking contributes to heart disease, heart attacks, lung cancer, strokes, and poor circulation. Cigars and chewing tobacco are also bad for you. Start by selecting a quit date. There are many aids for smoking cessation including the patch, Zyban (a pill), gum, inhalers, and hypnosis. Your doctor can help you explore these options.

Safety

The most common cause of death of healthy people is accidents. Wear a seatbelt even on short trips; wear a helmet while biking. Rollerbladers should wear helmets and knee-hand-elbow pads. Choose a designated driver if you drink alcohol. And be sure any guns at home are unloaded and locked away from children. Your local police department can help you dispose of guns if you choose. All medicines should be out of reach of children. And smoke detectors do save lives. Make sure you have a working detector on every floor.

Breast Cancer Screening

Breast cancer will occur in 1 in 11 women in their lifetime. All women should perform a monthly self-breast exam and have a yearly physician breast exam. Your doctor will discuss with you the optimal time to begin mammography (usually age 40-50, sooner if you have a family history of breast cancer) and then yearly after age 50.

Cervical Cancer Screening

Pap smears are tests to look for cervical cancer. They should begin at age 18 (or sooner if sexual activity begins earlier). Annual exams are generally recommended, but your physician will tell you if you need them more or less frequently.

Colon Cancer Screening

Screening for colon cancer is performed on everyone after age 50 (or sooner if you have a problem or family history of colon cancer). Yearly stool cards looking for blood in the stool should be done. You will need to take these home and return them to the office. Every 3-5 years, a flexible sigmoidoscopy or colonoscopy should be performed.

Skin Cancer Screening

Skin cancer is becoming one of the most common and devastating cancers. To help prevent it, you should avoid the sun especially between 10am and 3pm, wear light cotton clothing to cover skin, and wear sun block on all exposed skin everyday. The sun block should cover both UVA and UVB rays and be at least SPF 15 (more is better). You should watch for skin lesions that grow, change color, bleed or are irregularly shaped.

Cholesterol Screening

High cholesterol can lead to heart attacks, strokes and poor circulation. Eat right! Blood work for cholesterol should be performed about every 5 years starting in the 20's.

Advanced Directives

These are written instructions about end of life issues in the form of a living will or durable power of attorney for health care. It allows you to take care of yourself and your family by making decisions about your future medical care while your health allows you to do so. It is important for each person to document these wishes before serious illness occurs. Just ask your doctor for further information.

Organ Donation

There is a national shortage of transplant organs (livers, hearts, kidneys, etc) for very ill people. You can give the gift of life and become an organ donor by signing your driver's license and notifying your family of your wishes. Call 1-800-545-GIFT (Regional Organ Bank of Illinois, www.ROBI.org) or ask your doctor if you have questions.

Vaccines

A tetanus booster should be given every 10 years or sooner if you have an injury. People over 65 should have a pneumovax (pneumonia vaccine) once and a flu shot yearly. If you have any chronic medical conditions, you should have these more often. The hepatitis B vaccine is being given to all children. Most adults missed this opportunity. If you would like to be protected against Hepatitis B (spread through sex, IV drugs), just ask your doctor. All women of childbearing age should be vaccinated with MMR as well if not done as a child.