

CANYON VIEW WOMEN'S CARE

Decades of Health

FOR THE MATURING WOMAN

Health Promotion and Illness Prevention
for the perimenopausal and menopausal age women (40-65)

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introduction

Living a long, healthy and happy life is dependant upon numerous physical, emotional, spiritual and financial issues. How you choose to spend your time and take care of your body now will determine how well your body will take care of you in the future. More important than the genetic code that you have been preprogrammed with are the lifestyle choices you make on a regular basis to care for yourself.

It's easy to blame weight problems and chronic health conditions on circumstances, heredity or environmental factors but the truth is, YOU have a powerful impact on the course your life will take. Since you can't "trade in" your relatives for better ones, learn to focus on the things you can control...such as exercising regularly, eating a nutritious diet, learning how to manage stress, getting adequate rest and having routine examinations and screening tests done as recommended.

This pamphlet is designed to help improve the quality AND quantity of life by outlining what screening examinations and tests are recommended for women of your age group and by addressing some of the common concerns women have in regards to health. It should be used to guide you toward better health and a better YOU!

attention to prevention: routine health care

EXAMINATIONS

Routine annual examinations are vital to preventing illness and many chronic health conditions that affect quality of life. It is estimated that health care costs for chronic diseases (such as hypertension, diabetes or cardiovascular disease) account for more than 75 percent of total health care costs in America. Routine exams not only promote healthy living but also serve to identify problems early on, typically making disease easier to treat and reducing the chance of serious health risks in the future.

A typical well woman examination focuses on issues regarding reproductive health and organs, an overview of general health habits and an assessment of vital organs. The heart and lungs are auscultated and a breast exam is done. Pelvic examinations and pap smears are done according to age and individual risk factors. Vital signs, such as blood pressure and body mass index (BMI) should be addressed at annual visits.

A normal BMI is between 18.5 and 24.9. Aggressive lifestyle changes will improve BMI

AND CAN

significantly decrease the risk of heart disease, diabetes, cancer and other chronic health conditions.

- A normal blood pressure is less than 120/80. If your pressure is consistently higher than this range, please discuss lifestyle and medication options with your health care provider.

Just as important as the actual exam is the discussion you have with your provider regarding general lifestyle habits. Since this is a general health screening examination, chronic problems or new problems identified that day may require a future appointment for full evaluation and treatment. Many insurance companies also require that refills on medications and other problems be handled at a different visit, otherwise they may not cover your well woman examination.

SCREENING TESTS / PROCEDURES

The following is a schedule of recommended screening examinations and tests that should be considered based on your age. These screening tests and intervals may change slightly with updates in medical research and come from the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) and the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF), which is an independent panel of physicians and specialists who are experts in prevention and evidence-based medicine. Your health care provider will use these recommendations as a guideline and cater to your specific needs based on individual circumstances.

Here are links to the complete and frequently updated lists online:

<https://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/BrowseRec/Index>

<https://www.acog.org/About-ACOG/ACOG-Departments/Annual-Womens-Health-Care/Well-Woman-Recommendations>

	Frequency	When to start	Normal range
Blood Pressure	every year	youth	ideal <120/80 mm Hg
Bone Mineral Density (BMD)	varies	age 65 (or increased risk)	T score > -1.0
Breast Cancer	every 1 - 2 years	age 40 (varies)	
Cervical Cancer	every 1 - 5 years	age 21	
Cholesterol	every 3 - 5 years	age 20 (according to risks)	total < 200 mg/dL
Colorectal Cancer	every 5 -10 years	age 50	
Diabetes	every 3 - 5 years	age 45 (varies)	
Eyes	every 1 - 2 years	age 40	
Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI)	yearly, depending on risk		
Weight	every year	youth	

VACCINATIONS

Widespread disease and death from specific bacteria and viruses has been significantly reduced or eliminated altogether in the United States through routine vaccination programs. However, continued vigilance and persistence is necessary. Random outbreaks affecting tens to hundreds of people could easily spread to affect tens or hundreds of *thousands* of people if routine vaccination of children and adults is not maintained. Many parents are good about childhood vaccination but forget that even adults need shots every once in a while.

The most common vaccines that should be addressed at this stage of life are:

Tdap (Tetanus, diphtheria and acellular pertussis)	every ten years
Influenza (flu vaccine)	annually
Pneumonia (PPSV23, Pneumovax and PCV13, Prevnar 13)	age 65 (younger if increased risk)

Adults who travel, work in high risk areas, haven't received the MMR or Hepatitis A and B vaccine series, or those with specific health conditions may require additional vaccines.

- FOR A COMPLETE LIST OF RECOMMENDED ADULT IMMUNIZATIONS, PLEASE GO TO THE CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL (CDC) WEBSITE AT www.cdc.gov

SKIN CARE

Skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in the United States, with the sun and indoor tanning being the most common causative factors. To prevent premature aging (wrinkles and age spots) and avoid the development of skin cancer make sure you:

1. Wear sunscreen and lip balm every day. The bottle should be labeled broad-spectrum and have a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 30. Look for water resistant varieties and reapply every two hours. Pay particular attention to areas of the skin that may be continuously exposed such as the face, ears, hands, neck, etc.
 - **NOTE:** Sunscreen may also interfere with the body's production of vitamin D and therefore a daily supplement of at least 600 mg per day should be included in your daily regimen.
2. Wear clothes that protect from ultra-violet (UV) rays. This includes hats, light-weight long sleeve shirts and pants and sunglasses.
3. Never use a tanning bed or lamp. Research shows this may increase your risk for melanoma by up to 75 percent. (Melanoma is a potentially deadly form of skin cancer that can spread throughout the body. When melanoma is detected early, the cure rate is nearly 100 percent, however.)

4. Avoid the sun when it is strongest. (between 10 am and 4 pm)
5. Check your *birthday suit* on your birthday. Then do skin self-examinations and periodic clinical exams.

Depending on age, genetics and sun exposure some women are beginning to show signs of photoaging in their forties. Photoaging means the cumulative detrimental effects (such as wrinkles or dark spots) as a result from long-term exposure to sunlight and especially ultraviolet light is becoming visible.

Moisturizers that contain exfoliant ingredients can improve the appearance of the skin by removing dead cells on the surface of the skin. They can minimize some of the visible effects of fine lines and dark spots. Prescription strength retinoids and over-the-counter (OTC) products containing retinoids, such as retinol, are available. OTC products that contain alpha hydroxy acids (AHA) or beta hydroxy acids (BHA) are also beneficial because they change cell growth patterns and may help renew collagen. Be aware, these products will take time to visibly see changes and may have side effects of skin irritation or sensitivity to the sun. Steep prices and marketing claims on products that say things like “deep dermal penetration of nutrients” or “patented oligopeptide” should be viewed with skepticism.

Be sure to read ingredient lists, especially if you have sensitive skin. Products that contain fragrances and preservatives, botanical or antibacterial ingredients or solvents may also be more irritating.

- NOTE: The ingredient list on the label is the only source of reliable, government-required information. There are no government standards for *marketing* terms including:

<i>natural</i>	<i>herbal</i>
<i>dermatologist-tested</i>	<i>allergy-tested</i>
<i>nonirritating</i>	<i>hypoallergenic</i>
<i>cruelty-free, non-animal tested</i>	

The best daily skin care is as follows:

1. CLEAN skin with a cleanser based on your skin condition, whether it tends to be dry or oily. For dry skin, use a mild cleanser (ie: Dove®, Cetaphil® or Aveeno®) and avoid alcohol-containing products. For oily skin, purchase soap that removes the oil and wash more frequently throughout the day.
2. PROTECT skin with a broad-spectrum sunscreen (SPF of at least 30).
3. TREAT individual skin care needs. (ie: effective and inexpensive moisturizers, products to reduce fine lines and wrinkles or fade brown spots as needed).

The ABCDEs of Skin Cancer

A ASYMETRY: one half of the mole is unlike the other half

B BORDER: an irregular, scalloped or poorly defined edge

C COLOR: different shades of color, sometimes white, red or blue

D DIAMETER: bigger than a pencil eraser (0.5cm)

E EVOLVING: changing in size, shape or color

One blistering sunburn in childhood or adolescence more than doubles a person's chances of developing melanoma later in life.
— The Skin Cancer Foundation

The American Academy of Dermatology recommends genetic testing for melanoma in a very small and select group of people. If you have questions on this, please talk to your provider.

VITAMINS & SUPPLEMENTS

The best source of vitamins and minerals comes from eating a nutritious diet. A multivitamin should be considered when whole food categories (ie: elimination diets that avoid gluten or dairy) are excluded from the diet or plenty of multi-colored vegetables and fruits are not consumed on a regular basis. However, “extra” doesn’t necessarily mean better so be cautious in the amount of over-the-counter supplements and herbal or “natural” products you take on a regular basis.

FOLATE is a water-soluble B vitamin. Folic acid is the synthetic form (or man-made form) found in supplements and fortified foods. This vitamin is very important in preventing certain birth defects if you are considering pregnancy. Women who are not actively preventing pregnancy by using some kind of contraception could become pregnant and should take a folic acid supplement every day. (Interestingly, supplemental forms of folic acid are better absorbed than natural food sources because of their chemical composition.) Folic acid prevents anemia, certain forms of birth defects, is important in metabolism and plays a role in cancer prevention.

IRON is essential for regulating cell growth and in transporting oxygen to the body. A deficiency can lead to fatigue, a weak immune system and poor work performance. Normal adults only absorb about 10 to 15 percent of the iron found in their diet. It is common in women during their mid to late forties to experience changes in menstrual flow. Sometimes this means having heavy bleeding. Hence, women with heavy menstrual flow, who don’t eat red meat or who become pregnant may be particularly at risk for developing iron-deficiency anemia. These women should take an iron supplement daily.

■ The **BEST dietary sources of iron** are:

<i>red meats</i>	<i>fish</i>
<i>poultry</i>	<i>nuts and seeds</i>
<i>beans and legumes</i>	<i>dark green leafy vegetables</i>
<i>whole grains</i>	<i>fortified cereals</i>

Iron absorption is enhanced with concurrent intake of vitamin C while calcium consumed at the same time decreases absorption. If using a supplement, iron is best absorbed in its ferrous form and delayed-release formulations should be avoided since absorption into the body is significantly decreased. If iron-deficiency anemia is present, it may take up to three months of daily supplementation in order to restore hemoglobin levels to normal and alleviate symptoms of fatigue.

CALCIUM is required for proper muscular contraction (including the heart), nerve function, and hormonal signaling within the body. Most of the calcium is stored within the bone and teeth with acquisition of peak bone mass between ages 25 and 30. Rapid bone loss may occur with menopause and lead to osteoporosis and potential fractures if care is not taken during this time. The average American woman only consumes 600mg per day compared to the 1000 mg daily recommendation, hence daily deposits of calcium to your bone bank can pay large dividends in the future by preventing osteoporosis. Calcium absorption is significantly improved with vitamin D. Vitamin D is found in very few foods naturally but is produced by the body through a coordinated effort between the skin, kidneys and liver. If there is a problem with any of these systems, you may be vitamin D deficient. Research is just beginning to uncover the vital importance of vitamin D in the body. Daily supplementation of 600 IU is recommended.

■ In addition to dairy products, calcium can be found in:

- fortified products (such as orange juice or soymilk)*
- in tablet form (e.g. calcium citrate)*
- in many chewable antacids (e.g. Tums®)*
- in chocolate-flavored chews (e.g. Viactiv®) or gummies*

Research has shown that **OMEGA-3 FATTY ACIDS** (found in fish oil) have a positive affect on overall health. They decrease inflammation (and therefore may lessen the chance of heart disease and stroke), hypertension, joint pain, autoimmune disorders and mental disorders (depression, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and Alzheimer's disease). For healthy women who eat fish twice a week, a supplement may not be necessary. However, those who don't consume fish regularly will benefit from a prescription of omega-3 fatty acid (Lovaza®) or an over-the-counter natural form of purified fish oil, free of mercury and other contaminants.

- The American Heart Association recommends one to three grams of omega-3 fatty acids per day for the average healthy adult. Look for a product that contains both EPA and DHA, does not smell or taste bad and hasn't exceeded the expiration date listed on the package.
- Seafood, flaxseed, walnuts, canola oil, eggs and pumpkin seeds are good dietary sources of omega-3 fatty acids. While omega-6 fatty acids are also important to good health, these fats are readily available in the American diet and are consumed in excess. Therefore, it is a good idea to limit the use of sunflower, corn, canola, safflower and soybean oils.

the good, the bad, and the ugly: drugs and medications

Medications have certainly improved the quality and quantity of life for millions of people. Medications alleviate annoying symptoms (such as allergies), ease pain, fight infection and literally save lives every day. However, a drug is a drug, and any drug has the potential for side effects or possible harm. Inappropriate use of drugs or medications may cause disease progression, temporary side effects, permanent damage or even death.

Until a woman has gone a year without a period and been declared menopausal, pregnancy is possible. If not actively using contraception, judicious use of over-the-counter and prescription medications should be practiced. Many medications have unknown effects on the developing fetus, while others are known to be very harmful to a child in utero.

If you are wanting to become a mother during later reproductive years, it is recommended to have an examination prior to becoming pregnant in order to discuss individual risks associated with your current health and age. If you are taking medication and inadvertently find out you are pregnant, don't stop the medication abruptly until consulting with your provider. Abrupt cessation of medication with certain chronic conditions (for example asthma, heart disease or depression) may actually cause more harm than benefit.

babyourbaby.org is a great online resource to help answer questions frequently asked during pregnancy and breastfeeding. Questions about medication and pregnancy can be answered at 1-800-822-BABY

It is important to note that approximately 85 percent of couples will conceive within a year without the use of some form of birth control. Therefore, if you are

not *preventing* pregnancy, you're actually trying to conceive. Good information regarding contraceptive options can be found at www.bedsider.org or on the following list, which outlines common contraceptive methods with a brief synopsis on effectiveness and use.

For women who have miscarried:

- Studies reveal that anywhere from 10 to 25 percent of all **recognized** pregnancies will end in miscarriage or spontaneous abortion. These are usually because of chromosomal abnormalities (which is more common with age), improper cell division or problems with chemical signals that maintain pregnancy.
- Don't induce feelings of guilt, particularly when there is no blame. Focus on taking care of yourself through good nutrition and regular exercise. Seek medical help or professional counseling services if you are struggling with grief or loss.

Contraceptive Method

		Effectiveness	Usage	Return to fertility after use	Protection from STD's?
<p>Hormonal</p> <p><i>Work by preventing release of an egg</i></p> <p><i>Tend to make periods more regular, lighter and less painful</i></p>	<p>“The Pill”</p> <p>(Oral Contraceptives)</p>	up to 99%	take 1 pill at the same time every day	1-3 cycles	No
	<p>“The Patch” (Ortho Evra®)</p>	up to 99%	apply once a week for 3 weeks, 4th week off	1-3 cycles	No
	<p>“The Shot” (Depo Provera®)</p>	>99%	monthly or every 3 months	up to 1 year	No
	<p>“The Ring” (NuvaRing®)</p>	up to 99%	insert into vagina, replace monthly	1-3 cycles	No
<p>Implantable Devices</p> <p><i>Work by preventing release of an egg or by making the uterus an “unfriendly” environment and/ or by blocking the sperm from entering the uterus</i></p>	<p>Progestin-Releasing Intrauterine System (ie: Mirena®, Skyla®, Liletta®, Kyleena®)</p>	>99%	3 to 5 years	1 cycle	No
	<p>Copper Intrauterine Device (ParaGard® IUD)</p>	>99%	10-12 years	1 cycle	No
	<p>Implantable Device (Nexplanon®)</p>	>99%	3 years	1 cycle	No

Nonhormonal Contraceptives <i>Prevent pregnancy by providing a barrier against sperm, by interfering with sperm movement or creating an "unfriendly" environment for sperm</i>	Male Condom	up to 97%	new condom with each act of intercourse	N/A	Yes
	Female Condom	up to 95%	new condom with each act of intercourse	N/A	Yes
	Spermicides	94%, use with barrier to increase effectiveness	with each act of intercourse	N/A	No
	Diaphragm	up to 94%	with each act of intercourse	N/A	minimal protection
	Surgical Sterilization Tubal ligation or Vasectomy Essure®	>99 %	permanent and irreversible	permanent	No

“Birth control” or hormones are not only effective in preventing pregnancy, but are also very beneficial in controlling irregular, heavy or painful menstrual cycles. Most women who take birth control don't have any side effects, although a few women are more sensitive to the effects of these medications. Research involving tens of thousands of women has never been able to consistently correlate the popular belief that THE PILL causes weight gain. You can safely assume that if you continue to eat a healthy diet, avoid excess calorie consumption and exercise regularly, you should NOT experience weight gain from birth control pills.

If you need to use hormones to control irregular or heavy bleeding that can sometimes accompany perimenopause (or the transition phase to menopause), be aware that metabolic changes that also occur during this time make it easier to gain weight. It is imperative during this stage to practice mindful eating and exercise most days of the week, whether you are taking hormones or not. Hormones or birth control is not recommended for women who have a history of a blood clot (ie in the lungs or deep vein), with specific types of migraines or for women age 35 or older who smoke.

Contraceptives may take one to three months to adjust to. However, you should contact your provider or go to the Emergency Room if you suddenly experience any of the following:

extreme abdominal pain
severe headache
severe leg pain or swelling

chest pain
eye or visual problem

Illicit drugs should be avoided at every age and tobacco and alcohol IN ANY AMOUNT can be harmful to a developing baby and are not part of a healthy lifestyle. Some women think that prescription drug use is acceptable...that if your doctor prescribes the narcotic medication...that you won't become addicted to the drug. However, addiction and abuse are becoming more and more prevalent. Avoid falling into this trap by using medication only if it is medically necessary. Properly lock up or discard these types of medications when not in use. If you find you need pills on a regular basis just to get through the day, that you are requiring more medication to get the same beneficial effect, you should consult with your health care provider about how to get proper attention and treatment for this issue. Despite the harmless or good intentions you may have, these types of behaviors often lead to destructive ends.

To properly dispose of expired or unused medications, DO NOT flush them down the toilet or drain. Contact your city office or local police department to see if there is a medicine take-back program in your community.

You may also find information for safe disposal at:

medicationdisposal.utah.gov

-OR-

useonlyasdirected.org

hazardous to your health

ACCIDENT PREVENTION

Many aspects of daily life can contribute to injury, including sports, recreation, hazards in the work place or simply driving your car. Alcohol and drugs can also significantly increase your risk of an accident or injury and should be avoided. Practice safety precautions. Always use a seat belt when in your vehicle and a helmet when on a motorcycle or ATV. Use common sense around all equipment.

- According to 2015 statistics from the *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, the leading cause of death in women ages 20 to 44 is from unintentional injuries, however from ages 45 and older, the most common causes of death are from cancer, heart disease and then unintentional injuries.

<https://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/LeadingCauses.html>

ABUSE

Unfortunately, abuse is still a common issue among women and may include offenses of every kind. These included mental, physical, sexual, financial abuse and even neglect. Be wise. Do not place yourself in a situation where abuse can easily occur. If you think you are being abused, don't let this harmful and unjust cycle continue. Seek help from someone you trust.

If you think you may be a victim of abuse, contact:

- Utah County Victim Assistance Program (801-851-8364) or
- The Center for Women & Children in Crisis (24-Hour Hotline 801-377-5500)

Forced sexual encounters are NEVER okay.

- See immediate attention and go to the nearest Emergency Room. Do not shower, scrub your hands or change your clothes.
- For the Outreach and Sexual Assault 24-Hour Hotline, call 801-356-2511.

ILLNESS PREVENTION

The best way to prevent infection is to keep your body and surroundings clean.

Do this by:

- practicing good personal hygiene through proper hand washing
- avoiding touching your mouth, eyes, nose and body openings
- preventing dry, cracked and bleeding skin (common in cold, dry climates, like Utah) since the skin is your first line of defense from potential pathogens
- avoiding sharing of personal items such as towels and lipstick
- using protective barriers where appropriate (ie: gloves, aprons or condoms)
- practicing safe food handling techniques (i.e. storing and cooking foods at the appropriate temperature and by cutting and handling fresh fruits and vegetables separately from raw meats)
- keeping up to date with immunizations

The best way to prevent chronic disease is to practice healthy living through eating a nutritious diet while avoiding over consumption, exercising daily, getting adequate rest, controlling stress and in receiving preventive health examinations on a regular basis.

SUBSTANCES

Tobacco products, in every form (including e-cigs) are associated with increased risk of almost every type of cancer, heart disease, premature aging and more significant symptoms associated with menopause. Talk to your provider about how to quit smoking or visit these sites:

- www.utah.quitnet.com
- www.cancer.org (The American Cancer Society's Guide to Quitting Smoking)
- www.mytimetoquit.com
- www.cdc.gov/tobacco

Alcohol is a drug that alters the ability to think clearly. While it has been shown to improve the risk of cardiovascular disease when used in very low and consistent doses (one glass of wine a day), in the vast majority of cases alcohol causes more harm than good. Vigilant care in drinking any type of amount of alcohol is required. Alcohol during pregnancy or breastfeeding is NEVER considered safe.

Illicit drugs of every kind should be avoided and even prescribed medications need to be carefully monitored. Abuse of either illicit or prescribed medications carry significant health risks and often overlap with destructive behaviors, emotional trauma and criminal activity.

To get help for substance abuse, call your local health department.

- In Utah County, call 801-851-7128 to find out about a substance abuse evaluation or 801-851-7652 to get information about inpatient detoxification.

run for fun: exercise

It doesn't matter what type of physical activity you like to do, the point is JUST DO IT! The positive effects of regular exercise cannot be overstated. Physical activity reduces the risk of premature death, diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, osteoporosis, colon cancer, depression and muscle and joint injury. It is the only thing PROVEN to extend life. Participating in exercise helps to strengthen muscles, increase flexibility, provide energy, control weight, improve mental clarity and mood, treat depression and anxiety, and decrease the risk of osteoporosis and joint disease.

Exercise is encouraged in every age group, the dose isn't dependent on gender or weight. Hands down, it's the best bargain for your money! All you need is a pair of shoes and the motivation to be dedicated to physical activity. Get a day planner, program your cell phone, download an app, plan your schedule, get a buddy to exercise with, find a class at the gym, local community center or church, hire a personal trainer or visit online sites to track your activity and keep you motivated. All these things will help improve consistency with physical activity.

Of course fitness goals and levels of intensity will vary among individuals, but every woman should strive to do a minimum of the following:

1. **Aerobic Activity:** (walk, jog, swim, dance, etc.) for 30 minutes 5 days a week
2. **Resistance Training:** (weights, bands, etc.) for 30 minutes 2 to 3 days a week

Remember to warm up before exercise and cool down afterward for five to 10 minutes. Warm up stretches and light activity will prepare muscles for more intense activity and prevent injury while a cool down period will allow your heart rate to return to normal, improve flexibility and prevent muscle soreness. Exercises that include strength training, stretching and balance (such as yoga or tai chi) can provide these physical benefits as well as mental strength, peace and clarity.

- The average woman spends approximately 10 minutes a day participating in sports, exercise and recreation and about two hours a day watching TV.
— National survey data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics

Avoid injury by being alert to what your body is telling you and varying your activity. The numerous short and long term benefits are well worth it!

Rarely does a condition exclude you from all types of exercise. Find something you like to do and stick to it!

- When starting an exercise program at this age, it is recommended to talk to your provider to evaluate your overall general health. Together you can discuss the types of exercise that will be the most beneficial to you based on your age and individual risk. This is very important if you...
 - *have heart disease, high cholesterol or elevated blood pressure*
 - *have asthma, lung disease or smoke*
 - *have diabetes, liver or kidney disease*
 - *have arthritis or specific joint pain/weakness*
 - *are overweight or obese*

- You should stop exercise and consult with your provider if any of the following symptoms are not relieved by a brief period of rest.

blurred vision

nausea

shortness of breath

sudden pain or swelling

dizziness or lightheadedness

fatigue

chest pain or irregular heartbeat

“chews” wisely: nutrition

Eating a nutritious diet without over-consumption is one of the best things you can do to remain healthy. Adequate, but not excess calories, will improve energy, provide a sense of well-being, strengthen the immune system and lower the risk for numerous diseases and chronic illness. Weight control becomes more difficult with age. Your body WILL change, which means you will need to adapt your lifestyle in order to maintain optimal health.

- The United States has the second highest obesity rate in the world (Mexico is the highest.) Two-thirds of Americans are considered clinically overweight or obese. Fight this epidemic...with your fork!

In general, a healthy diet constitutes one that includes an abundance of vegetables and fruits, lean sources of protein, small amounts of healthy fats, whole grains and adequate hydration.

VEGETABLES AND FRUITS

Plants have been on earth for millions of years and have adapted an “immune system” to help them fight disease, adapt to changes in the climate and thwart destructive influences brought on by humanity. They have developed their own chemical system to heal themselves and kill bacteria and fungi, called **PHYTOCHEMICALS**. Phytochemicals help fight certain disease processes in your body by protecting essential vitamins from destruction and inactivating cancer-causing substances. There are thousands of types of phytochemicals, some of which are available when foods are eaten raw and others when foods are cooked.

Although the exact science is not understood, **ANTIOXIDANTS** (which are a type of phytochemical) decrease the incidence of cancer and heart disease by preventing cell damage from **FREE RADICALS**. Free radicals are formed from toxic substances found in foods, the environment or that are produced as the body uses oxygen for energy. Free radicals cause a cascading reaction within the cell, which leads to cellular dysfunction or cell death.

Not only are vegetables and fruits full of disease-fighting chemicals, but they are loaded with vitamins and minerals. These vitamins and minerals play an essential role in the proper functioning of your body, promote weight control, decrease cravings and improve energy levels.

Most Americans get only two to three servings of vegetables or fruits per day but research shows that people who consume seven to ten servings per day have fewer problems with blood clots, stroke, cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, asthma, arthritis, and macular degeneration (an eye condition which causes blindness). Diets rich in vegetables and fruits also help protect against mouth, stomach, and colorectal cancers.

- Plan your day to include a vegetable or fruit with **every** meal and snack of the day

FACTS ON FATS

Eliminating all fat is not necessarily going to promote weight loss or is even good for you. Fat is a vital part of every cell membrane in the body, is used to store certain vitamins, functions to slow the digestion of foods, helps to maintain a feeling of fullness/satisfaction, is an important component of hormones and stores excess energy.

Fats continue to be a very confusing subject for most women. To simplify, remember there are basically two kinds of fats; bad fat and good fat. The **BAD**

FATS are trans fats (also known as hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated fats) and saturated fats. These types of fats tend to promote inflammation, chronic illness and cardiovascular disease.

TRANS FATS are naturally liquid oils that have been chemically altered to be a solid at room temperature. The process of adding hydrogen atoms (hence the alternate names hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated fatty acids) makes the fat more stable and improves the flavor, texture, and shelf-life of food products. These fats are typically found in processed foods such as margarine, vegetable shortening, fried foods, cookies, crackers, frozen meals, ramen, cake mix, nondairy creamers, chips and candy. Despite their prevalence in food, the body hasn't learned how to process these fats correctly. The Nurses' Health Study is one of the largest and longest running research investigations with over a quarter of a million participants. Data collection began in 1976 and has revealed that women who consumed a large amount of trans fat had a 93 percent greater chance of having a heart attack compared to those who had more "good fats" in their diet.

SATURATED FATS are solid at room temperature and come primarily from animals, such as meats and dairy products. Excess saturated fat in the diet is the primary source of increased cholesterol in the blood and contributes to the formation of plaques and potential blockages in blood vessels.

- Use caution with tropical oils (such as palm and coconut) as they also contain saturated fat.

Remember...

TRANS = TOXIC

SAT = FAT (*plaques in the blood vessel*)

Good fats are polyunsaturated (PUFA) and monounsaturated (MUFA) fatty

acids. These fatty acids help fight the affects of aging, decrease the risk of cardiovascular disease and stroke and lessen the incidence of many cancers. They tend to have a positive effect on cholesterol, blood pressure, platelet function and inflammation. **PUFA** and **MUFA** are also necessary for brain growth and visual development.

Foods that contain the **GOOD FATS** are fish, shellfish, whole grains, beans, ground flaxseed, canola and olive oil, soybean products, avocados and nuts.

- For more information on food groups and meal planning go to www.mypyramid.gov or myplate.gov. Harvard Medical School has also published an easy-to-use version of a Healthy Eating Plate.

WHOLE GRAINS

The nutritional value of “multigrain” and “natural” products may be deceiving. These marketing terms make you THINK you are getting a good thing, but the truth is found in reading the label and ingredients list. “Whole grain” means the entire kernel is included in that product including the bran, germ and endosperm along with all the fiber, vitamins and minerals that are originally present in the kernel. Many times grain products are refined and bleached, meaning the outer bran and germ layer have been removed, leaving the flour with only 25 percent of it’s original nutrient value. Enriched products have added thiamin, riboflavin, niacin and iron but have been stripped of 18 of the 22 vitamins and minerals and 93 percent of the fiber found in the original wheat kernel.

Don’t be fooled by the color of the product or marketing terms such as “multi-grain”, “refined”, “enriched wheat bread” or “stone ground”. To be sure you are getting the benefits of the whole grain, review the ingredients list. The first item listed should specifically state **WHOLE GRAIN**.

Whole grains contain complex carbohydrates that will help with weight management, improve blood sugar control, facilitate a feeling of fullness, lower cholesterol levels, decrease the risk of heart disease, prevent certain cancers, treat constipation and lessen the chance of appendicitis and diverticulosis.

Fiber can be broken down into two general categories: soluble and insoluble fiber. **SOLUBLE FIBER** is found in things such as oatmeal and legumes (dried beans). They decrease dietary cholesterol by binding with the cholesterol in the intestine before it can be absorbed into the bloodstream. **INSOLUBLE FIBER** can't be broken down in the body and acts like a street sweeper; cleaning the colon and eliminating waste. Insoluble fiber (generally called dietary fiber on a food label) is found in nuts, seeds, whole grains and vegetables.

The average American consumes only 11 grams of fiber per day, whereas the recommended daily intake of fiber for women of this age is approximately 21-25 grams.

- Transition from enriched, white and processed grains, GRADUALLY in order to avoid excess gas and constipation.

don't forget: mental health

Depression affects all people, regardless of age, sex, geographic or socioeconomic position. More than 12 million women are affected by a depressive disorder every year, with even more suffering from anxiety, chronic worry or panic disorder. Many women do not recognize the signs of depression and never seek treatment or guidance. Medical therapy, counseling services, exercise, a healthy nutritional base, and self-help techniques are very helpful in successfully treating these common ailments.

There are good preventive measures to avoid depression and anxiety-related problems. The most important preventive measure is routine exercise. Daily exercise has been shown in scientific studies to be as effective as prescription anti-depressant medications in relieving the symptoms of mild depression. Exposure to sunlight, either natural or artificial, helps many people with seasonal affective disorder (depression during the winter months). Finally, scheduling 'downtime' into your weekly routine can be very helpful. This 'downtime' should be for your quiet relaxation or meditation. (Working on a craft that you must get done for Christmas is not 'downtime'.)

Common Symptoms of Depression

<i>feeling sad</i>	<i>irritability or anger</i>
<i>loss of interest</i>	<i>lack of motivation</i>
<i>insomnia or sleepiness</i>	<i>change in appetite (up or down)</i>
<i>restlessness</i>	<i>inability to focus or make decisions</i>
<i>feelings of guilt or low self-worth</i>	<i>thoughts of death or suicide</i>
<i>crying spells</i>	
<i>unexplained physical problems or pain (headache, stomach ache or back pain)</i>	

Anxiety is a normal reaction to stress and may be beneficial in certain situations. It is common to feel anxious or worried when you are about to take a test, have to make an important decision or are faced with a problem at work or in a relationship. However, it is not normal to experience excessive worry, tension, sleep disturbances related to stress or unexpected feelings of intense fear or panic. Feeling anxious or worried can interfere with daily activities such as job performance, school work and relationships. There are several types of anxiety disorders, such as generalized or social anxiety, panic disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), obsessive-compulsive behaviors and phobias. Collectively, they are the most common mental disorders experienced by Americans and are found more frequently in women. Symptoms of anxiety do not just magically disappear and may increase over time. If you have symptoms of excess anxiety, please talk to your provider. These disorders can be successfully treated with psychotherapy, medication or both.

finding the balance: reproductive health & sexuality

The monumental change that occurs during this time is the eventual cessation of periods, marking the end of reproductive years. Some women make this transition relatively easily and gracefully, while others experience significant physical and emotional changes. **PERIMENOPAUSE** represents the years leading up to menopause and symptoms are caused by the fluctuating release of estrogen from the ovaries. On average, most women begin to experience changes around 47 or 48ish as periods begin to change in regularity and predictability or the amount of menstrual flow. Pregnancy is less likely, but still possible during this time, so if you wish to avoid pregnancy, some kind of birth control is required. Changes in periods should be discussed with your provider during annual examinations to verify that abnormal bleeding doesn't represent a health problem.

MENOPAUSE is defined as no periods for a year as the ovaries naturally stop producing hormones. The average age of menopause is age 51 and women no longer need to worry about contraception after this time.

Common signs and symptoms of perimenopause last for an average of two to five years. They frequently include the following:

- **HOT FLASHES:** A hot flash is a sudden feeling of heat, lasting from a few seconds to several minutes. Frequency may vary from just a few times at night to multiple times...day and night.

- **SLEEP CHANGES:** Changes in sleep patterns occur with the aging process but may be aggravated because of hormonal fluctuations during this time. You may have difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep and night sweats may disrupt rest. You may experience more fatigue or loss of energy.
- **VAGINAL DRYNESS:** The decrease in estrogen may cause thinning of the vaginal tissue causing dryness and decrease in elasticity. This may cause pain during sex or increase the risk of urinary tract infections.
- **WEIGHT GAIN:** Hormonal changes, the aging process, genetics and lifestyle factors make it easier to gain weight, especially around the waist, hips and thighs. Mindful eating and regular exercise are vital in maintaining health during this time and in preventing excess weight.
- **EMOTIONAL CHANGES:** Some women experience emotional symptoms of anxiety, mood swings, irritability or depression.
- **CHANGE IN LIBIDO OR SEX DRIVE:** It is common to experience changes in sexual desire which is brought on because of complex emotional issues or hormonal decline. These issues should be discussed with your provider, especially if sex is causing pain.

There are estrogen and progesterone receptors in multiple areas of the body, so symptoms of menopause will vary among women. Less often women experience changes in memory or concentration, bone or muscle pain or hair and skin changes. Several types of treatment options are available and are driven by symptoms, not laboratory levels.

Hormones are the best way to treat menopausal symptoms and come in a variety of forms including pills, patches, gels, sprays and creams. Estrogen is effective in treating menopausal symptoms and progesterone (or a synthetic progestin) is also required during estrogen therapy if the uterus is still in place. “Bioidentical hormones” do not have a clear definition but typically refers to being chemically identical to the hormones produced in the body. It is more of a marketing term and may not be approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), meaning there is no government regulation of these types of hormones.

The effectiveness and safety of “bioidentical hormones” may be less predictable. “Natural” usually means that the hormone is derived from a plant or animal source, rather than being made in a lab. Many “natural” formulations require commercial processing or compounding to be used in the body.

Over-the-counter (OTC) plant and herbal products (ie: soy, black cohosh and Chinese herbal remedies) have limited studies regarding their effectiveness and safety. These types of supplements are not regulated and may or may not help symptoms and potentially cause other unwanted side effects. For women who do not want the risks of OTC medications or hormone therapy, other medications may be helpful in minimizing the symptoms of menopause, including antidepressants, certain blood pressure medications or anti-seizure medications.

After menopause, three cardinal things should be remembered.

1. The protective cardiovascular effect of estrogen diminishes over time and within 10 years, women are at equal risk (compared to men) for some type of cardiovascular event, such as a heart attack or stroke. Metabolic changes also accompany menopause and may affect blood pressure, cholesterol and increase the risk for diabetes.
2. Bone loss can rapidly occur within the first few years of menopause if adequate exercise, calcium and vitamin D are not maintained. A DEXA scan, which is a specific type of X-ray to evaluate bone density and the risk for a fracture, is typically recommended by age 65 for men and women. Women with specific risk factors may be advised to have a DEXA scan sooner.
3. After a woman is declared menopausal, vaginal bleeding is not normal and always requires evaluation.

Problems with urination or urinary incontinence may become more of a problem in the 40's and 50's. Please address this with your provider as there are several options available to improve these symptoms, including lifestyle changes, medications and surgical options.

SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS

Over the past 20 years medicine has advanced, allowing the ability to screen, detect and treat numerous infections that are transmitted through intercourse and exposure to body fluids. However, even adults don't always “think clearly” and may be exposed to an infection that can linger with them for the rest of their lives. Avoid physical, emotional and spiritual damage by avoiding sexual encounters with casual relationships. The best method to prevent infection from intercourse is abstinence or condoms and in maintaining a monogamous relationship within a couple.

There is no way to test for everything, so PREVENTION is by far the best practice to employ.

BREAST HEALTH

Breast cancers are a function of genetic risk factors, personal and environmental risks and of age. Nearly eighty percent of all breast cancers are found in women over the age of 50, however, cancers that strike earlier in life tend to be more aggressive and fatal.

It is a good idea to become familiar with your normal breast tissue, recognizing that most women have lumps and bumps in their breasts. Sadly, monthly breast self-examinations do not prevent breast cancer death, but self-examination may help in early detection and hence more effective treatment.

There has been much controversy regarding when to start doing mammograms and how often. The American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) recommends beginning annual mammography for most women at age 40. Talk to your provider regarding your individual risk. Anyone with a strong family history of breast cancer or early onset breast cancer should consider genetic testing or earlier screening.

SEXUALITY

A woman's sexuality includes how you think and feel as a woman, not just what your sexual practices are. Learning about sex is a lifelong process and is shaped and reshaped through the influence of early role models, religious practices and sexual experiences, both good and bad.

Typically, a woman's sexual desire and response peaks in her late 30's and early 40's but sexual intimacy can be satisfying and pleasurable earlier and much later in life. Unfortunately, women are not programmed the same as men, who have large amounts of testosterone flowing through their veins and the ability to turn off the outside world. Many women experience libido issues, at various times during life, but are more prone to decreased sexual desire at menopause. Libido issues in women are not usually quickly and easily resolved by hormones or a pill. Women have to work and have to want to make sexual intimacy a priority in their life. This can be done by setting aside time for each other, working together as a couple to come up with common goals in life, communicating effectively about sexual desires, being patient enough for orgasm and communicating what types of discussions, atmosphere and touch facilitate stimulation and arousal.

Sexuality is an important part of womanhood and intimacy and is a key component to a healthy relationship. Don't let the busyness of life get in the

way. If these resources don't help, ask your provider for tips or a referral to a sex therapist.

REFERENCE BOOKS:

Becoming One: Intimacy in Marriage by Robert Stahmann, Wayne Young and Julie Grover

And They Were Not Ashamed: Strengthening Marriage Through Sexual Fulfillment by Laura Brotherson

take time for yourself—conclusion

Thank you for taking the time to read this booklet which introduces important issues concerning women's health during the transition from reproduction to menopause. Hopefully, you have gained insights to your own health and have learned how to avoid problems in the future as well as how to address current concerns. Strive to achieve balance in your life, celebrate personal success and continue to set goals for tomorrow. You will live longer, stronger, healthier and happier because of it!

PLEASE ASK IF YOU HAVE INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS.

Reliable web resources on general women's health issues include:

- The U.S. National Library of Medicine, NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH www.nlm.nih.gov
- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services www.womenshealth.gov
- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, AGENCY FOR HEALTHCARE RESEARCH AND QUALITY www.ahrq.gov
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention www.cdc.gov
- American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists www.acog.org
- The Mayo Clinic www.mayoclinic.com
- Harvard Medical School has several *Special Health Reports* that focus on specific health information and concerns



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