

Women's Health—what are the issues?

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In 2007 there were 153 million women in the United States. Of these women over the age of 18 about 14% were considered to be in fair or poor health. Only 30% were engaged in leisure time physical activity. In 2007, 18% of the women were smokers. For at least 14% their use of alcohol puts them into the category of binge drinkers, consuming five or more drinks in one day. Another concern about today's woman is that 35% of those over the age of 20 are obese and 33% of women have hypertension. These statistics do not paint a picture of good health.

All these factors combine to create several critical health issues for women. The number one risk for women continues to be heart disease, especially past the childbearing years. Cancer is also an issue. More women die from lung cancer, but breast and colorectal cancers also pose major threats. Other issues for women's health are stroke, chronic lung conditions, Alzheimer's, injuries, diabetes, kidney disease, depression, weight issues and autoimmune diseases.

As a society we need to learn how to adopt healthy habits to reduce our risk for those illnesses we have control over. Controlling our weight through getting exercise on a regular basis is a very important step we can all take. Other issues such as managing our stress, getting enough sleep, and controlling our use of alcohol, drugs and tobacco all play important factors on our long term health.

To reduce our risk of some of these health concerns, changes must be made. It can be difficult to change old habits, so start by taking small steps. If you don't already exercise on a regular basis, consider starting to walk. Think of walking as a chance to see nature at its best. Watch the trees turning green in the spring and see the colors change in the fall. Hear the birds. Maybe your walk takes you past some new construction and you get to see a home being built stick by stick; it might even give you a chance to review your day and organize your thoughts.

If you are new to exercise, start small. Begin with 10 minutes a day and increase your time by five minutes each week. By the end of the month you are up to 30 minutes a day. If your morning routine doesn't leave you time for a walk, try taking 10 minutes at lunch or at the end of the day before you head home.

If you don't like to walk alone invite your children, your spouse, your friends or neighbors. Everyone benefits. Having someone to walk with is a good incentive to get out of bed in the morning. I found that the hardest step was the first one out the door. Once that step was made, the rest became easier. Consider purchasing some walking music; plug in your earphones to help you keep up a specific pace and make walking fun.

Making some improvements in your food choices can also benefit your health. If most of the breads, rice and pasta in your current diet are white, try adding whole grains to your menu. Start by using whole grain pastas or rice in your favorite dishes and don't forget to eat plenty of fruits and vegetables throughout the day. Reduce your intake of saturated fats and salt and use lower fat dairy products and lean meats. Learn to read the labels to help you make wiser food choices; maybe you'll be able to find some lower sugar options of your favorite foods. Remember, less sugar and less fat may mean less calories. If you exercise more and eat fewer calories you will slowly see smaller numbers on the scale.

We need to get women to focus as much on their own health as they do on their family members'. If you see me, I'll be the one walking to the oldies with my iPod playing and my earphones on.