

# Health and Wellness for Women over 40



- Staying Healthy
- Understanding Menopause
- Hormone Replacement Therapy
- Long-Term Health Risks
- Bladder Control
- Exam and Shot Schedule

A Krames Publication

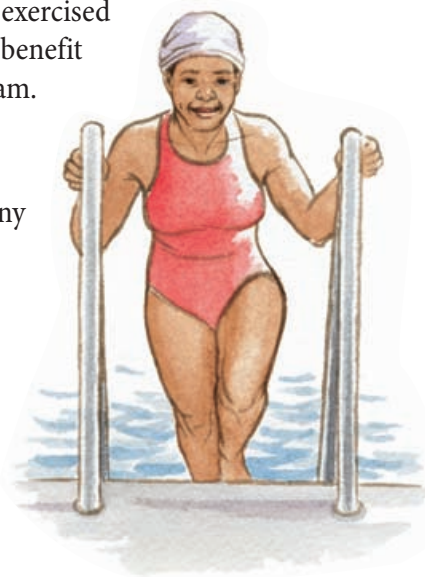
In the past, people thought there was little they could do to stay healthy. They thought disease just “happened.” Now we know better. We know that, in many ways, good health is in our control.

## Exercise

Exercise is very important for good health. Even if you’ve never exercised in your life, you can benefit from a fitness program.

### Aerobic Exercise

Aerobic exercise is any activity that raises your heart rate. Aim for at least 30 minutes of aerobic exercise, three times a week. Good choices include swimming, biking, and walking.



### Other Types of Exercise

Your fitness program should also include **strengthening exercises** (like weight training, sit-ups, and push-ups) and **flexibility exercises** (like stretching, yoga, or martial arts).

### Points to Remember

- Moderate exercise can benefit you as much as intense exercise.
- If you don’t have the time for a 30-minute exercise session, you can split your workout into short sessions spread throughout the day.

## Healthy Diet

As we get older, we need fewer calories to maintain a healthy weight, but the same amount of nutrients to stay healthy. So, making healthy choices and avoiding junk food is more important than ever. For good health:

- Eat a variety of foods every day.
- Choose a diet low in saturated fat, total fat, and cholesterol.
- Eat plenty of fruits, vegetables, and whole grain products, especially those high in vitamin C and carotene. These include oranges, grapefruit, carrots, winter squash, tomatoes, broccoli, cauliflower, and green leafy vegetables.
- Limit foods high in salt, sodium, and sugar.
- Get enough calcium and vitamin D. (See the **Osteoporosis** section for more information.)

## What Else You Can Do

- Maintain a healthy weight.
- If you smoke, quit.
- If you drink, do so in moderation (no more than one drink a day).

### A Word About Vitamin Supplements

If you can’t get the nutrients you need through your food, supplements may be a good option. Never take supplements without talking to your healthcare provider first. Large amounts of some vitamins can have serious side effects.

## Understanding Menopause

Menopause occurs when you stop having periods for good. It is the last stage of a gradual process during which your body begins to make fewer of the female hormones estrogen and progesterone. This process usually begins 3 to 5 years before the last period.

### What to Expect

As menopause approaches, some women have unwanted symptoms. If you suffer menopause symptoms, try to remember that menopause is not a disease. It’s a natural change that every woman goes through.

### Hot Flashes Symptoms

Sudden sensation of intense heat in the upper part of the body. May occur at night and disrupt sleep (night sweats). Face and neck may become flushed. Red blotches may appear on back, chest and arms.

### HomeCare

- Wear layers of loose-fitting clothes that are easy to remove.
- Drink a glass of cold water or juice if you feel a hot flash coming on.
- At night keep a Thermos of cold ice water or an ice pack by your bed.
- Choose cotton clothing, nightgowns, and bedding. Cotton lets your skin “breathe.”



### Vaginal Changes Symptoms

Walls of the vagina become thinner, dryer and less elastic. Vaginal and urinary infections may occur. Bladder control may become a problem.

### HomeCare

- Apply a water-based lubricant (not petroleum jelly) before having sex.
- To prevent infections, avoid bath oils and bubble baths, wear cotton underwear and urinate before and after sex.
- If bladder control is a problem, see the **Bladder Control** section.

### Other Symptoms

- Forgetfulness, trouble concentrating, mood swings (may be due to lack of sleep)
- Decreased sex drive
- Dryness and thinning of the skin
- Weight gain in the waist

### Call your provider if you:

- Have irregular bleeding that doesn’t go away (especially if you are overweight).
- Want to talk about taking hormone replacement therapy to relieve menopause symptoms.

### Menopause and Birth Control

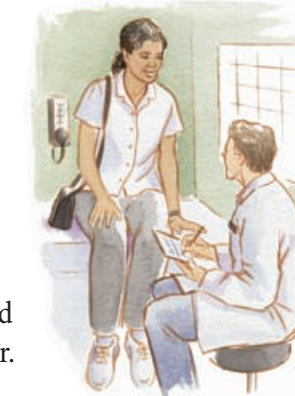
To avoid an unplanned pregnancy, keep using some form of birth control for one full year after the date of your last period.

## Hormone Replacement Therapy

Healthcare providers sometimes prescribe hormones to replace those lost during menopause. This treatment is called hormone replacement therapy (HRT). Some women take the hormone estrogen. Others take both estrogen and progesterin.

### Making the Choice

Although HRT may be the right choice for some women, the risks of long-term use are not yet known. Before you decide, discuss all the possible benefits, risks and side effects with your provider.



### Benefits

- Relieves many menopause symptoms, such as hot flashes, sleep disturbance, and vaginal dryness
- Reduces the risk of osteoporosis by slowing bone loss
- Reduces the risk of colorectal cancer

### Risks

- May increase risk of heart disease
- May increase risk of breast cancer (the longer you take HRT, the higher the risk)
- May increase risk of blood clots
- May increase risk of Alzheimer’s disease and dementia in women over 65
- Can cause unpleasant side effects such as breast tenderness, bloating, cramping, and depression
- Estrogen taken alone (without progesterone) increases the risk of cancer of the uterus (endometrial cancer)

The information in this guide has been accumulated from current medical literature and is generally accepted by the medical community at this time. However, this information is not meant as a substitute for personal medical advice. If you have worrisome symptoms or conditions, contact a physician immediately.

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## Heart Disease

Heart disease is a disorder of the heart's blood vessels that can cause a heart attack. Estrogen may protect younger women against the disease. But, when estrogen levels drop after menopause, that protection is lost and the risk of heart disease goes up.

### Common Risk Factors

- A family history of the disease
- Smoking
- Being overweight
- Lack of exercise
- High blood cholesterol
- High blood pressure
- Diabetes

### Prevention

- If you smoke, quit.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Exercise regularly.
- Eat healthy foods with less fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol.
- If you have high blood cholesterol, high blood pressure, or diabetes, work with your provider to manage your condition.



### Call your provider if you:

- Are at high risk of heart disease and want to talk about ways to reduce your risk.

## Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis makes bones fragile and more likely to break. It is caused by loss of bone mass. After menopause, when estrogen levels drop, bone loss speeds up and osteoporosis risk increases.

### Common Risk Factors

- A family history of the disease
- Being white or Asian
- Being slender
- Lack of calcium and/or vitamin D
- Lack of exercise, or an inactive lifestyle
- Absent or frequent menstrual periods
- History of an eating disorder, such as anorexia nervosa
- Smoking and alcohol intake

### Prevention

- Get enough calcium. Calcium helps build strong bones. High-calcium foods include milk, yogurt, cheese, dark-green, leafy vegetables, oysters, and sardines. Talk to your provider about your specific calcium needs.
- Get enough vitamin D. Vitamin D helps the body absorb calcium. It's made in the skin after exposure to sunlight. It is also in vitamin D-fortified dairy products and in egg yolks, saltwater fish, and liver.
- Get regular, weight-bearing exercise. Good choices include walking, dancing and weight lifting.
- Don't smoke, and limit alcohol intake.
- Ask your provider about bone density testing, as well as medications to prevent and/or treat osteoporosis.

## Breast Cancer

Although all women have some risk of developing breast cancer, risk increases with age. That's why taking care of your breast health is even more important as you get older.

### Common Risk Factors

- A family history of the disease
- Early menstruation (before age 12) or late menopause (after age 50)



### Prevention

- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Eat a low-fat diet, and limit alcohol intake.
- Get regular exercise.

### Early Detection

Breast exams can help catch cancer in the early stages when it is easier to treat.

**Clinical Breast Exam (CBE):** CBEs give your provider a chance to examine your breasts and look for anything unusual. This exam is usually part of a regular checkup.

**Mammogram:** A mammogram is a safe, low-dose x-ray of the breast. It can pick up changes in the breast that are too small to feel.

**Breast Self-Exam (BSE):** Regular BSEs help you get to know the normal look and feel of your breasts. (For more information, see the **How to Do a Breast Self-Exam** section.)

## How to Do a Breast Self-Exam

### Step 1: Look at Your Breasts

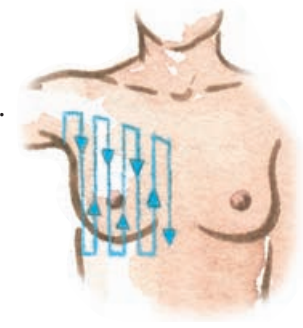
In a mirror, look at your breasts: (1) with your arms raised overhead, (2) with your hands on your hips pressing down, (3) with your arms at your sides, and (4) while bending forward.

### Step 2: Feel Your Breasts

- Lie down and place a pillow or folded towel under your right shoulder. Put your right hand under your head.
- Using the **line pattern** (see below), feel your right breast and the area around the breast with the pads of the three middle fingers on your left hand.
- Move the pillow or towel under your left shoulder and repeat on your left breast.

### The Line Pattern

- Place your fingers under your collarbone, near your shoulder. Using your finger pads, feel down the outside of your breast to the bottom of your bra line.
- Move in one-half inch, and move your fingers back up to your collarbone.
- Keep going row after row, down and up, down and up, until you reach your breastbone.



### Call your provider if you:

- Find unusual lumps, thickening or changes.\*

\*Most breast changes are benign (harmless), but you will need to be checked by your provider.

Many women do not seek help for bladder control problems because they are embarrassed. But remember, poor bladder control can usually be improved.

### HomeCare

- Urinate on a schedule, perhaps three or four times a day. Stick to the schedule even if you don't feel the urge to go.
- When you urinate, empty your bladder as much as you can. Relax for a minute. Then try again.
- Slim down, if you are overweight.
- Avoid coffee, tea, and other drinks that contain caffeine.
- If you leak small amounts of urine when exercising, coughing, sneezing, or laughing, do Kegel exercises to strengthen your pelvic muscles.

### Kegel Exercises

To find your pelvic muscles, stop the flow of urine when you are sitting on the toilet. The muscles you used are your pelvic muscles. To strengthen these muscles:

- Squeeze your pelvic muscles while not urinating.
- Hold for three seconds. Relax for three seconds.
- Repeat 10 to 15 times, three times a day.

### Call your provider if you:

- Have bladder control problems and **HomeCare** has not helped.

Exam/Shot	How Often
Blood Pressure	At least every 2 years
Breast Self-Exam	Regularly*
Clinical Breast Exam	Every year
Mammogram	Every year
Cholesterol Levels	It depends*
Pelvic Exam/Pap Test	Every 1 to 3 years
Sigmoidoscopy	Every 5 years*
Fecal Occult Blood Test	Every year starting at 50*
Blood Sugar Level	It depends*
Skin Exam	Every year
Dental Exam	Twice a year for checkup and cleaning
Sexually Transmitted Diseases	It depends*
Tuberculosis (TB) Exam	It depends*
Tetanus-diphtheria	Every 10 years
Pneumococcal	Once at age 65
Influenza (flu)	Every year starting at 50

\* Talk to your provider about your personal risk factors and testing needs.

Source: The National Women's Health Information Center; The Office on Women's Health; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2005.