

Health Tips for Women Over 40

1. Breast Cancer Screening

WHEN: Begin annual mammograms at age 40. Start earlier if a parent or sister had breast cancer at an early age.

SCHEDULING: Call (978) 287-8100 to schedule at either Emerson Breast Health Center at 747 Main Street in Concord or at the Emerson Health Center in Westford.

2. Cervical Cancer Screening

WHEN: Begin annual Pap smear by age 21 but after three consecutive normal Paps may elect every 2-3 year screening. Consider stopping at age 65-70, but continue annual screening if high risk based on sexual habits or prior abnormalities. A Pap smear is not necessary after total hysterectomy for non-cancerous conditions.

3. Colon Cancer Screening

WHEN: Begin colonoscopy at age 50; repeat every ten years if normal. Start earlier for family history of colon cancer or colon polyps.

SCHEDULING: Call one of the Emerson hospital gastroenterologists: Dr. James Andreson 978-369-0223, Dr. Mark Epstein 978-371-1551, Dr. Frank Linn 978-371-2288, Dr. Andrea Fribush 978-371-7176, Dr. Richard Schwartz 978-772-7500, or Middlesex Gastroenterology: Drs. Jaya Agrawal, Raj Devarajan, Gail Herzig, Peter Krims, Michael Older 978-429-2010.

4. Heart Attack Risk Assessment

WHY: Have blood pressure checked yearly and blood tests for diabetes and cholesterol done every 2-4 years. Start earlier and test more often if you have prior problems with blood sugar (such as gestational diabetes), blood pressure, or excessive weight.

SCHEDULING: The Emerson Health Center lab is a walk-in from 8AM till 5 PM every weekday and 8:30AM till 12:30PM on Saturdays. Fasting blood work is more accurate for diagnosing diabetes and measuring LDL and triglycerides. Fasting means having only water, black coffee or medications for 10-12 hours before testing. A lab requisition is required.

5. Take Calcium and Vitamin D

WHY: To help prevent osteoporosis.

HOW: Sources of dietary calcium include yogurt, milk, hard cheese, tofu, some fortified cereals and orange juice. Many supplements are available and should be taken in divided doses of not more than 500 mg with food for better absorption (note that coral calcium is not recommended).

RECOMMENDED AMOUNTS: Daily intake of 1200 mg of calcium for women ages 25-50 and 1500 mg for women over age 50. Daily intake of 800 units of Vitamin D is recommended for all ages.

6. Skin Cancer Screening

WHEN: Full skin exam with each annual physical.

SCHEDULING: See a dermatologist annually if you have a prior history of abnormal skin lesions, skin cancer or a family history of melanoma. A referral is usually needed.

7. Limit Alcohol, Fat and Cholesterol Intake

WHY: Increased alcohol intake is a risk factor for many types of cancer as well as liver disease. Women reach higher blood alcohol levels than men after the same intake and show greater organ damage. Excessive dietary intake of total calories, fat, and cholesterol can lead to obesity and increased risk of diseases such as diabetes, heart attack, and stroke.

LIMITS: One alcoholic drink per day on average (12 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine, or 1.5 ounces of hard liquor constitutes one drink). Dietary calories from fat should be no more than 30% of daily total. For most women, total daily calories should not exceed 2000, total fat intake should be less than 65 grams, saturated fat intake should be less than 20 grams, and cholesterol intake should be less than 300mg. Every gram of fat contains 9 calories and every gram of carbohydrate or protein has 4 calories.

8. Exercise

WHY: Women who do not exercise have twice the risk of dying from heart disease than women who exercise. Weight bearing exercise also helps prevent osteoporosis.

WHEN: The American Heart Association recommends aerobic activities like brisk walking, running, swimming, biking, skating or jumping rope for 30-60 minutes at least 3-4 times per week

9. Update Your Immunizations

WHEN: Update tetanus/ diphtheria every ten years with a booster for pertussis (whooping cough) once. Influenza annually after age 50 and pneumococcal pneumonia vaccine (Pneumovax) once at age 65 (starts earlier for those with diabetes and certain other chronic diseases). Shingles vaccine (Zostavax) after age 60.