

Health Tips for Women Under 40

1. Cervical Cancer Screening

WHEN: Annual Pap smear and pelvic exam within three years of vaginal intercourse or by age 21 with annual screening till age 30. After three consecutive normal Paps may elect every 2-3 year screening. 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. Remember that an annual pelvic exam remains a part of a well woman check up.

SCHEDULING: See a health care provider in our office or a gynecologist. A referral usually not needed.

2. Breast Cancer Screening

WHEN: Monthly self-breast exam with annual mammograms beginning at age 40. Start earlier if a parent or sister had breast cancer at an early age.

SCHEDULING: Call (978) 287-8100 to schedule a mammogram at either Emerson Breast Health Center at 747 Main Street in Concord or at the Emerson Health Center in Westford. A referral is usually not needed.

3. 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.

4. STD Risk Reduction

WHY: Sexual activity without condoms, with multiple partners, or with partners of unknown status contribute to the 15 million new STD cases each year. Females are often asymptomatic. Latex condoms prevent sexual transmission of the HIV virus and reduce the risk of transmission for other STDs (gonorrhea, chlamydia, trichomonas). They are less effective in preventing STDs that are transmitted by skin-to-skin contact (herpes simplex, HPV, syphilis, chancroid.)

HOW: Consistent condom use with each act of intercourse unless in a mutually monogamous relationship with an uninfected partner. Annual chlamydia screening (a cervical culture) is recommended for females under age 25 and anyone else at higher risk.

5. Heart Attack Risk Assessment

WHEN: Have blood pressure, body mass index (BMI) and pulse checked every 2 years and fasting blood tests for diabetes and cholesterol done every 5 years. Test

more often if you have prior problems with blood sugar (i.e. gestational diabetes), blood pressure, excessive weight or other cardiac risk factors.

SCHEDULING: The Emerson Health Center lab is a walk-in from 8AM till 5 PM every weekday. Fasting blood work is more accurate for diagnosing diabetes and measuring LDL and triglycerides (“bad” lipid types). Fasting means having only water, black coffee, tea or medications for 10-12 hours before testing. A lab requisition from your health care provider is required.

6. 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 for better absorption (note that coral calcium is not recommended). Calculate amounts of calcium in supplements based on “elemental calcium” content.

RECOMMENDED AMOUNTS: Daily intake of 1000-1200 mg of calcium for women ages 25-50 along with daily intake of 800 units of Vitamin D.

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 5 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. Meningococcal vaccine is required for college students living in dormitories. Other vaccines such as pneumovax may be needed for those with diseases of the immune system, diabetes, chronic heart and lung diseases.

SCHEDULING: All of these immunizations are available in our office.