A Lifetime of Good Health

Your Guide to Staying Healthy

womenshealth.gov

800-994-9662 • TDD: 888-220-5446

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services,
Office on Women’s Health
A Lifetime of Good Health

Your Guide to Staying Healthy

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• An online glossary of health terms
• Daily news on women's health
• A National Breastfeeding Helpline with trained peer counselors
• Health information in Spanish

How are womenshealth.gov and girlshealth.gov different from other websites on women’s and girl’s health?
Womenshealth.gov and girlshealth.gov are sponsored by the federal government with your tax dollars. We don’t represent any special commercial interests. We don’t allow advertisements on our sites. We don’t try to sell you products, magazines, or anything else. We screen all health information for accuracy before it ever appears on our websites or in our publications. Our Information Specialists are trained to help you, whether it’s referring you to the right organization, mailing you free information, or even coaching new moms on how to breastfeed their infants.
Womenshealth.gov and girlshealth.gov exist to help you and your loved ones get the reliable and accurate health information you need to get, or stay, healthy.

What is Healthy People 2020?

What is the Affordable Care Act?
The Affordable Care Act, also called “health care reform,” is a new law that is helping keep Americans healthy. It helps by making health insurance available to more people, by offering screenings and tests at no out-of-pocket cost to you, and more! Learn all about it at http://www.healthcare.gov.

What can I do if I don’t have health insurance?
If you need health insurance, visit http://www.healthcare.gov to learn what options you have under the new health reform law.
A hemorrhagic (heh-muh-RA-jik) stroke happens when a blood vessel in the brain bursts, and blood leaks into the brain. A person might also have a “mini-stroke,” or a transient ischemic attack (TIA). This happens when, for a short time, less blood than normal gets to the brain. You may have some signs of a full stroke, or you may not notice any signs at all. A TIA can last a few minutes or up to 24 hours. Then you’re back to normal.

TIAs are important warning signs to reduce your risk because they are a sign that a stroke will likely occur in the future. TIAs can occur days, weeks, or even months before a major stroke. In about half the cases, the stroke happens within 1 year of the TIA.

The signs of a stroke come on all of a sudden and are different from the signs of a heart attack. Signs include sudden:

- Numbness or weakness of the face, arm, or leg, especially on one side of the body
- Confusion, trouble speaking or understanding
- Trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination
- Severe headache with no known cause
You have probably heard by now that physical activity is good for you. Well, the news in favor of regular physical activity keeps coming in! An active lifestyle can lower your risk of early death from a lot of causes. There is strong evidence that regular physical activity can also lower your risk of:

- Heart disease
- Stroke
- High blood pressure

**What is metabolic syndrome?**

Metabolic syndrome is a group of conditions that put you at risk for heart disease and diabetes. These conditions are:

- High blood pressure
- High blood glucose levels
- High levels of triglycerides, a type of fat, in your blood
- Low levels of HDL, the good cholesterol, in your blood
- Too much fat around your waist

- Unhealthy cholesterol levels
- Type 2 diabetes
- Metabolic syndrome (see box)
- Colon cancer
- Breast cancer
- Falls
- Depression

Regular activity can help you reach and stay at a healthy weight. It can also improve your cardiorespiratory (heart, lungs, and blood vessels) and muscular fitness. For older adults, activity can improve mental function.

It’s never too late to begin physical activity. If you haven’t been active for a while, though, check with your doctor before starting an exercise program.

Physical activity may also help:

- Improve functional health for older adults (your health-related quality of life)
- Reduce waistline size
- Lower risk of hip fracture

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“Flu” refers to sickness caused by a number of different influenza viruses. Most healthy people recover from the flu without problems, but certain people are at high risk for serious complications. Some people may even die from the flu. Pregnant women are especially at risk for serious complications from the flu.

Flu symptoms may include:
- Fever
- Coughing
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Headaches
- Body aches
- Chills
- Fatigue

In H1N1 flu infection, vomiting and diarrhea may also occur. Annual outbreaks of the seasonal flu usually occur during the late fall through early spring. Flu is contagious — that means it can be spread from person to person. Because flu viruses change from year to year, people may not have natural immunity (protection); therefore, a seasonal flu vaccine is available. Vaccination is the best protection against getting the flu. Flu vaccines are safe and recommended for all individuals 6 months of age and older. Flu vaccines are also safe during pregnancy and can be received during the first, second, or third trimester of pregnancy.

Steps you can take:
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. You can also use alcohol-based hand cleaners.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- Stay home if you are sick until at least 24 hours after you no longer have a fever (100°F or 37.8°C) or signs of a fever (without the use of a fever-reducing medicine, such as Tylenol). Ask your doctor about how long to stay away from others.

For current information on the flu, visit www.flu.gov.
If you know you are pregnant, or think you might be, call your doctor as soon as possible and set up a visit. You will need to visit your doctor many times during your pregnancy. Follow your doctor’s schedule for visits and don’t miss them!

You will notice your body is changing in many ways. These changes may be strange at first, but they are all normal. Try to stay as healthy as you can — for you and your new baby!

**Steps you can take:**

- **Stop smoking, drinking alcohol, and doing drugs.** These can cause long-term damage to your baby. Ask your doctor for help.

- **Eat healthy foods.** This includes lots of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and calcium-rich foods. You need 1000 milligrams (mg) of calcium per day. (If you are a teen, you need at least 1300 mg of calcium each day.) Avoid eating a lot of fatty foods such as butter and fatty meats. Choose foods lower in fat, like chicken and turkey (without the skin) and fish. Check with your doctor to find out how much weight gain during pregnancy is healthy for you.

- **Don’t eat uncooked or undercooked meats or fish.** Do not eat any shark, swordfish, king mackerel, and tilefish (also called golden or white snapper) because these fish have high levels of mercury. Do not eat more than 6 ounces of "white" or "albacore" tuna or tuna steak each week.

- **Limit caffeine** from coffee, tea, sodas, medicines, and chocolate.

- **Drink water.** Water helps prevent constipation, hemorrhoids, excessive swelling, and urinary tract or bladder infections. Aim for 8 cups of fluids each day. If you drink enough fluid so that you rarely feel thirsty and produce 1.5 liters (6.3 cups) or more of colorless or slightly yellow urine a day, your fluid intake is probably good.

- **Take at least 400 micrograms of folic acid daily.** This will help prevent certain types of birth defects. Your doctor may prescribe a daily vitamin that has it, or you can buy folic acid pills. Eat foods high in folic acid like orange juice, leafy green vegetables, beans, peanuts, peas, and whole-grain products.

- **Tell your doctor about all of the medicines you take.** This includes prescriptions, over-the-counter medicines you buy without prescriptions, and herbals. Ask if they are safe to take while you are pregnant. Most of the time, the medicine a pregnant woman is taking does not affect her baby. But sometimes it can, causing damage or birth defects. Talk with your doctor about which drugs and supplements are safe.
Did you know?

The Affordable Care Act (also called “health care reform”) requires companies to provide reasonable, unpaid break time and a private, non-bathroom space for breastfeeding mothers to express milk for the first year of a child’s life. Learn more at http://www.healthcare.gov.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Breastfeeding is linked to a lower risk of these health problems:</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>In infants:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Ear infections</td>
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<td>• Stomach viruses</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Diarrhea</td>
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<td>• Respiratory infections</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Atopic dermatitis, also known as eczema or very itchy, dry skin</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Asthma</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Obesity</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Type 1 and type 2 diabetes</td>
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<td>• Childhood leukemia</td>
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<td>• Sudden infant death syndrome or SIDS</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Necrotizing enterocolitis, a disease that affects the gastrointestinal tract in preterm infants</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>In moms:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Type 2 diabetes</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Breast cancer</td>
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<td>• Ovarian cancer</td>
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<td>• Postpartum depression</td>
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• **Mood swings.** Try to get enough sleep and to be physically active. Ask your doctor about relaxation exercises you can do. Ask your doctor about taking an antidepressant medicine, which could help.

There are a lot of ways to stay healthy during this time in your life:

• **Be active and get more exercise.** Try to get at least 2 hours and 30 minutes of moderate exercise each week and 2 days of muscle-strengthening exercise. Try weight-bearing exercises, like walking, running, or dancing. (See the section on Physical Activity for Health on page 26 for more details.) All older adults should avoid inactivity. Some physical activity is better than none, and older adults who participate in any amount of physical activity gain some health benefits.

• **If you smoke, quit.** Ask your doctor for help. (See page 53 for more ideas on Quitting Smoking.)

• **Eat healthy.** Eat lots of whole-grain products, vegetables, and fruits. Choose foods low in fat and cholesterol.

• **Get enough calcium to keep your bones strong.** Before age 50, you need about 1,000 mg of calcium per day. After age 50, you need 1,200 mg per day.

• **If you drink alcohol, drink moderately.** Limit it to no more than one drink per day.

• **Control your weight.** Ask your doctor what a healthy weight is for you.

• **Talk to your doctor about bone health.** Ask if you’re getting enough calcium and vitamin D. Get a bone density test if you’re older than 65, or if your doctor says you have a high chance of getting osteoporosis. Ask about taking medicine to help preserve bone and slow down bone loss.

• **Get preventive screenings.** Have your blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood glucose checked.
dry, scaly, reddish, and slightly raised. See your doctor right away if you find anything unusual.

- **Get vitamin D safely.** Vitamin D is an important vitamin that your body produces when you are out in the sun. But there are other ways to get vitamin D that don’t require you to be in the sun’s rays. You can get vitamin D through fortified milk and orange juice, cheese, butter, cereals, and fish. You can also get vitamin D through vitamin supplements. Talk to your doctor or nurse if you have questions about vitamin D.

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**Did you know that too much sun exposure can cause:**

**Melanoma**
Melanoma (mell-ah-NOH-ma) is the most serious form of skin cancer. Be aware of any unusual skin rashes or of any change in the color or size of a mole, and talk to your doctor or nurse about it. Finding a melanoma early can save your life! Check your skin each month for new or changing moles.

**Nonmelanoma skin cancers**
Nonmelanoma (non-mell-ah-NOH-ma) skin cancers are not as serious as melanoma. However, they can still cause health problems and need to be treated by a doctor. There are two kinds:

- **Basal cell carcinomas** — these are small tumors on the skin that look like small fleshy bumps
- **Squamous cell carcinomas** — these are small tumors on the skin that might appear as red, scaly patches
- **Actinic keratoses**
Actinic keratoses (ack-TIN-ick ker-ah-TOE-sees) are growths on the skin caused by the sun. They are usually found on the face, hands, forearms, and the “V” of the neck. They are usually rough and scaly. See a doctor right away if you notice these growths.

**Early aging of the skin**
Being in the sun — or laying in a tanning bed — without proper protection causes the skin to become thick, wrinkled, and leathery.

Read “Steps you can take” on page 57 for ideas on how to protect your skin from the sun!