

LADIES HOME

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Take Charge Of Your Health

America's Top
Woman Doctor
Tells How

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You'll Love It)

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"WE WON THE LOTTERY!"

One Wife's Not-So-Lucky Story



Brett Butler

"How I Said No
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How To Live A Longer, Healthier Life

The **Best** Advice Women Can Get **By Susan J. Blumenthal, M.D.**

On April 25, Susan J. Blumenthal, M.D., Deputy Assistant Secretary for Women's Health and Assistant Surgeon General in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, launched a series of briefings on women's health at a special conference co-sponsored by *Ladies' Home Journal* and the Public Health Service's Office on Women's Health.

At the conference, Blumenthal explained that though women live thirty years longer on average than they did at the turn of the century, and seven years longer than the average man today, chronic illnesses and disabilities affect women at a rate far greater than that for men. And behavioral and lifestyle factors—smoking, diet, lack of exercise, high-risk sexual practices, substance abuse—are substantial contributors to the ten leading causes of death for women. (See list at right.) Making changes in those areas would help prevent premature death and would enhance the quality of women's lives, Blumenthal said. The following steps she highlighted at the conference can help ensure longer, healthier lives for today's woman.



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TOP TEN CAUSES OF DEATH IN WOMEN

Below, how many women die each year from these common illnesses and the risk factors linked to each condition.

1. Heart disease: 380,161 deaths
Risk factors: tobacco, poor diet/exercise, alcohol, delayed screening
2. Cancer: 245,740 deaths
Risk factors: tobacco, poor diet/exercise, environmental toxins, alcohol, delayed screening, sun exposure
3. Stroke: 87,124 deaths
Risk factors: tobacco, poor diet/exercise, drugs
4. Chronic lung disease: 41,473 deaths
Risk factors: tobacco, environmental toxins
5. Pneumonia and influenza: 40,254 deaths
Risk factors: tobacco, infectious agents, drugs, poor diet/exercise
6. Accidents: 28,915 deaths
Risk factors: alcohol, firearms, drugs, failure to wear seat belts and helmets
7. Diabetes: 28,395 deaths
Risk factors: alcohol, obesity, poor diet/exercise
8. Kidney disease: 11,346 deaths
Risk factors: drugs, infectious and toxic agents
9. Infections: 11,140 deaths
Risk factors: tobacco, poor diet/exercise, alcohol, infectious agents, sexual behavior, drugs
10. Hardening of the arteries: 10,503 deaths
Risk factors: tobacco, poor diet/exercise

SOURCE: NATIONAL CENTER FOR HEALTH STATISTICS, CDC, 1992 DATA

WOMEN'S HEALTH GUIDE

Eat for your health

A balanced diet doesn't mean cottage cheese and celery sticks seven days a week. Instead, try to eat plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables and cut down on high-fat and fried foods, limiting fat intake to 20 to 30 percent of total daily calories. To guard against osteoporosis, women aged twenty-five to fifty also need 1,000 mg of calcium a day; from age fifty to sixty-five, women need 1,000 mg of calcium daily if they're on estrogen, and 1,500 mg if they are not. Beyond sixty-five, all women need 1,500 mg. (See chart below for food choices.) Since caffeine can impair your body's ability to absorb calcium, limit coffee to two cups a day. If you're not consuming a completely balanced diet, vitamins and supplements can add needed nutrients.

Food basics

The most recent federal guidelines, known as the USDA's food pyramid, recommend six to eleven servings of breads, cereals, rice and pasta daily. This isn't as much as it sounds: One serving equals, for example, one slice of bread or 1 ounce ready-to-eat cereal. Other suggestions in this food plan: three to five servings of vegetables daily (one serving equals 1 cup of soy, spinach); two to four servings of fruit daily (one serving equals a medium-size apple, for example); two to three servings daily of milk, yogurt and cheese (one serving is 1 cup of milk, for example); and two to three servings of meat, fish, beans, eggs or nuts (no more than 5 to 7 ounces total, though).

Boning up on calcium

You can get your daily calcium needs from a variety of foods, especially dairy products. Be sure, though, to stick to the low-fat kind. Below, foods that add up to healthy bones.

To get 1,000 mg of calcium per day you need:

Food	Calcium level	Quantity
1 cup of skim milk	302 mg	3 1/2 cups
8 oz. plain low-fat yogurt	415 mg	2.5 cups
8 oz. low-fat yogurt with fruit	345 mg	3 cups
1 cup of ready-to-eat cereal fortified with calcium	242 mg	4.1 cups
1/2 cup fresh broccoli	37 mg	13.5 cups!
3 oz. sardines	351 mg	9 oz.

Safety first

Keep your home and workplace hazardproof:

Cover wires and cords, and install smoke and carbon monoxide detectors. Also, pay special attention to ingredients and warning labels on all household products. Avoid exposure to certain chemicals and pesticides that have been linked to higher rates of cancer and reproductive disorders.

The road can also be a dangerous place. Protect yourself by always wearing a seat belt and a helmet when riding a motorcycle or bike. And never get behind the wheel when you're feeling sleepy or have been drinking alcohol.

Make sure that any guns in the house are under lock and key.



A sobering thought

Nearly one third of Americans abusing alcohol are women, and 4.4 million women use illicit drugs at least once each month. Experts have long known that substance abuse causes more than heartache: There is a high correlation between alcohol and osteoporosis, ulcers, diabetes, heart disease, cancer and violent acts, including suicide, homicide and car accidents; women who abuse drugs have higher rates of AIDS. Fortunately, help can be found through counseling, medications and support groups (Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous).

Prevent infectious diseases

Most women know that having their children immunized is the first step in preventing disease, but they often forget about themselves. Adults need a tetanus (booster) shot every ten years and should take antibiotics only when they are prescribed, because of possible allergic reactions or interactions with other drugs. Another thing to keep in mind: Combining antibiotics with oral contraceptives may lessen the effect of the birth control, so use additional protection until your next menstrual cycle.



Smoking causes one third of all cancer deaths and 21 percent of all cardiovascular deaths. So don't start; if you have, stop now. Effective ways to break the habit: nicotine patches, counseling and hypnosis.

BE SEXUALLY RESPONSIBLE

If you're not in a monogamous relationship with a partner you are certain is disease-free, you need to protect yourself against unwanted pregnancy and diseases like AIDS, chlamydia, gonorrhea and syphilis. This means asking a partner about his health, and using a condom every time you have intercourse. Women should also talk with their doctor to determine which birth control method—oral contraceptives, diaphragms, IUDs, hormonal implants and injections—will work best for them.

Move it!



Think of exercise as fun, not work

Focus on the activities you enjoy, not the activities you think you should be doing. Exercise includes everything from walking and swimming to biking and playing ball. Be active for at least thirty minutes a day, five days a week. Not only will this strengthen muscles and bones, it can also decrease the risks of heart disease, diabetes, osteoporosis, breast cancer and hypertension.

PHOTO: WALTER L. CHASE; TOP PHOTOGRAPH BY A. WALTER; BOTTOM PHOTO BY W. HOFFMANN/GETTY

Be a shade worshiper

In 1994, 2,600 women died from malignant melanoma, and 15,000 other people were diagnosed with it. Your best defense is the obvious: Stay out of the sun, especially between ten A.M. and four P.M. If you must be outside, generously apply sunscreen with an SPF 15 or higher and wear hats with a two-to three-inch brim, long sleeves and pants. And, just as important, stay away from tanning beds: The artificial light rays are as damaging as their natural counterparts.



Screen test: Make sure you're adequately protected

Stay informed

Know your family's medical history. It will keep you alert for symptoms so that problems

can be detected early. It will also put your doctor on alert for certain conditions that might require testing that's not necessarily recommended for everyone in your age group.

Also, learn to understand your body. If something doesn't appear right, you should feel comfortable consulting your doctor. If you don't, consider finding a new one, and ask friends and relatives for references. You can also check a doctor's reputation with your state medical society board or the medical center your prospective doctor is associated with. Don't be afraid to be an assertive medical consumer. After all, it's your body and your life.

Check it out

Have the following examinations:

- Blood pressure measurements—every one to two years, more frequently if you're at risk of heart disease.
- Breast exams—perform monthly self-exams and have annual exams done by your doctor.
- Mammography—after age fifty, have a mammogram every one to two years. If

you are under fifty, consult your doctor about the best screening interval for you.

- Cholesterol levels—should be checked every five years after age eighteen.
- Pelvic exams/Pap smears—every one to three years, starting at age eighteen or the beginning of sexual activity.
- Rectal exams—especially important annually for women over age fifty. Have exams earlier if you have inflammatory bowel disease or a first-degree relative with colon cancer.
- Blood sugar levels—your risk of developing diabetes increases if there is a family history of it, if temporary diabetes develops during pregnancy or if you are very overweight.
- Skin exams—have moles checked annually by your doctor and do self-exams, looking for irregular shapes and colors.
- Dental exams—see your dentist twice a year for a checkup and cleaning.



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