



Women's Health **Tip of the Month**

Health Tip #1: Eat a healthy diet. “You want to eat as close to a natural foods diet as you can,” says Donald Novey, MD, an integrative medicine physician with the Advocate Medical Group in Park Ridge, Ill. That means a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables and fewer processed foods. Eat whole grains and high-fiber foods and choose leaner cuts of meat, fish, and poultry. Include low-fat dairy products in your diet as well — depending on your age, you need between 800 and 1,500 milligrams of calcium daily to help avoid osteoporosis, Dr. Novey says. Avoid foods and beverages that are high in calories, sugar, salt, and fat.

Healthy eating will help you maintain a proper weight for your height, which is important because being overweight can lead to a number of illnesses. Looking for a healthy snack? Try some raw vegetables, such as celery, carrots, broccoli, cucumbers, or zucchini with dip made from low-fat yogurt.

If you're not getting enough vitamins and nutrients in your diet, you might want to take a multivitamin and a calcium supplement to make sure you're maintaining good health.

Health Tip #2: Exercise. [Heart disease](#) is the leading cause of death among women in America, but plenty of exercise can help keep your heart healthy. You want to exercise at least 30 minutes a day, five days a week, if not every day. Aerobic exercises (walking, swimming, jogging, bicycling, dancing) are good for women's health in general and especially for your heart, says Sabrena Merrill, MS, of Lawrence, Kan., a certified personal trainer and group fitness instructor and a spokeswoman for the American Council on Exercise.

Health Tip #3: Avoid risky habits. Stay away from cigarettes and people who smoke. Don't use drugs. If you drink alcohol, do so in moderation. Most women's health studies show that women can safely consume one drink a day. A drink is considered to be about 12 to 14 grams of alcohol, which is equal to 12 ounces of beer (4.5 percent alcohol); 5 ounces of wine (12.9 percent alcohol); or 1.5 ounces of spirits (hard liquor such as gin or whiskey, 80-proof).

Health Tip #4: Manage stress. No matter what stage of her life — daughter, mother, grandmother — a woman often wears many hats and deals with a lot of pressure and stress. “Take a few minutes every day just to relax and get your perspective back again,” Novey says. “It doesn't take long, and mental health is important to your physical well-being.” You also can manage stress with [exercise](#), relaxation techniques, or meditation.

Health Tip #5: Sun safely. Excessive exposure to the sun's harmful rays can cause skin [cancer](#), which can be deadly. To protect against skin cancer, wear sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15 if you are going to be outdoors for more than a few minutes. Even if you wear sunscreen faithfully, you should check regularly for signs of skin cancer. Warning signs include any changes in the size, shape, color, or feel of birthmarks, moles, or freckles, or new, enlarging, pigmented, or red skin areas. If you spot any changes or you find you have sores that are not healing, consult your doctor.

Health Tip #6: Check for [breast cancer](#). The American Cancer Society no longer recommends monthly breast self-exams for women. However, it still suggests them as “an option” for women, starting in their 20s. You should be on the lookout for any changes in your breasts and report any concerns to your doctor. All women 40 and older should get a yearly mammogram as a mammogram is the most effective way of detecting cancer in its earliest stages, when it is most treatable.

A woman's health needs change as she ages, but the basics of women's health remain the same. If you follow these six simple healthy living tips, you will improve your quality of life for years to come.