

REVEALED!

Secrets to Being A Healthy Woman from
Head to Toe – No Matter Your Age!

“FOR WOMEN ONLY”



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Introduction

Some women are blessed with fantastic health throughout their lives while other women are constantly riddled with illness upon illness. Most women fall somewhere in between...not chronically sick, but not the picture of perfect health, either. Whatever the status of your health, you should always be as vigilant as possible about keeping yourself healthy, while not allowing yourself to become consumed with health matters to the point that you're paranoid about every health decision. It's a fine line, but an important one nonetheless. You owe it to yourself to make sure that you are doing everything you can to get and stay healthy.

WHY YOU SHOULD CARE

You get one body, and that's it. Sure, there are things you can do to tweak your body and change a thing here and change a thing there, but the reality is that you need to take care of your body or else you will definitely feel the effects of your neglect. So many diseases and ailments can be avoided altogether if you simply take care of your body correctly on a continuous basis. Sometimes it's difficult to look at the bigger picture and understand that ultimately you are the only person responsible for your health and well-being. Medical professionals are only one part of the process of getting and staying healthy because if you aren't committed to the process then it just isn't going to work. Nobody can force you into it.

ARE YOU HEALTHY NOW?

The term *healthy* is a term that can be debated. What is healthy? Does it mean you can participate in a triathlon? Does it mean you feel serene on the inside? No matter which definition you choose, the most important person to define what healthy means is you.

DO YOU PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR BODY?

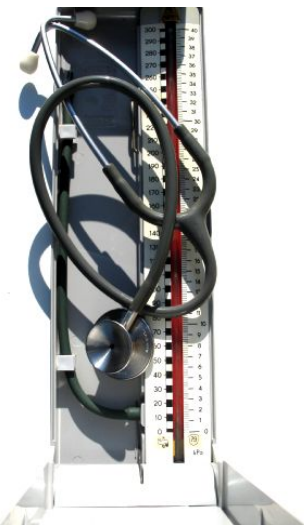
Do you ever feel sideswiped by illness? Sometimes women are so busy that they don't really pay attention to the things that their bodies are desperately trying to tell them. If you constantly feel as though illnesses come out of left field without any sort of warning whatsoever it may actually be that your body has been trying to warn you for some time and you just haven't been paying attention. Huge illnesses rarely hit severely and without any warning, so try to learn how to pay attention to the things your body is trying to tell you. If you listen you may realize that your body is giving you plenty of notice of an impending sickness.

Some people are just afraid of doctors. Many people have good reason for being afraid of doctors. Perhaps these people had bad experiences in hospitals or maybe they were often ill as children and developed a fear of doctors and hospitals after having spent a good portion of their childhood experiencing painful procedures and tests. Things like this are not easy to erase from memory, especially when they happen to someone as a child. Other people just naturally have an aversion to visiting doctors because of the invasive methods some doctors have to use for procedures. Some people just don't like doctors at all, regardless of what procedures are used because they don't like the potential for the things doctors may tell them...they figure that as long as they don't visit doctors then nobody can ever tell them that there is something seriously wrong with their health. Many people feel this way on a subconscious level, and even though it's not a very good philosophy to have it still holds true for some people to the point that they avoid doctors at all costs (oftentimes to their detriment). If you have a phobia of doctors or medical facilities then it's a good idea to take the time to figure out why you feel this way. This may be something that you can work out yourself, or something that you may need to do with a therapist's assistance, but there is probably some solid reason why you feel the way you do.

Sometimes all it takes is visiting an ill friend or relative in a hospital and forever afterwards a person can get the heebie-jeebies just by walking into a doctor's office. After you figure out why it is that you have such problems with doctors and hospitals you can then set to work figuring out what you can do in order to get over your fears so you can start visiting your doctor as often as you should. Sometimes it may be an intensive process in order to get rid of your fears, but sometimes all it takes is the realization that your fears are keeping you from potentially life-saving medical care. If you realize that the best thing for your health is not to avoid doctors and hospitals then you might start to feel better about seeing doctors.

HOW OFTEN DO YOU GET SICK?

Do you go from one illness to another? You may feel as though you have the misfortune of always jumping from one ailment to another. Maybe you go from a cold to the stomach flu to a bladder infection and then back to the cold...or maybe you have the bad luck of dealing with an annoying combination of illness on a perpetual basis. There could be any number of reasons why this happens, but oftentimes being perpetually ill is your body's way of telling you something. Maybe you are working too hard, or maybe your stress level is too high, or it might just be that you are exposing yourself to too many germs without taking



proper precautions. It's not that you should wear gloves wherever you go or bathe in gel sanitizer, but if you work somewhere or frequent a place that is traditionally germmy (such as a daycare or a hospital) then you need to make the practice of washing your hands a frequent habit. Think about it; you get your hands filthy with germs and then move right on to eating a sandwich without first washing your hands. Imagine all the germs that you are allowing to enter into your body via your mouth. If you

are already tired or stressed out then your body is poised to get sick, and by bringing these germs in you're really setting yourself up. Perhaps you aren't actually exposed to germs all that often, and you just have a really hectic life. Remember that there is only so much your body can take, and if you are tired and weary and then a germ works its way into your system then it's not a huge surprise that your body will react by becoming ill. If you just don't seem to be able to shake illnesses, and you can't pinpoint a reason why this happens, then you need to make an appointment to see your doctor to rule out something bigger.

Do you hardly ever get sick? You may belong to the entirely different end of the spectrum: maybe you never seem to get sick. You should consider yourself quite fortunate if you are the kind of person who never seems to fall ill. There are not many women who can lay claim to rarely getting sick, especially since most women find themselves burning the candle at both ends most of the time; making them quite susceptible to illness. The important thing to remember if you are indeed one of the fortunate women is that your good fortune does not mean that you don't need to occasionally check in with your doctor and have the physical exams that are recommended to women of your current age. Take a lesson from the other gender...many doctors say that the introduction of Viagra saved many men's lives because men who would not have ordinarily stepped foot into the doctor's office went in to have a physical exam to get a prescription for Viagra and it was discovered that many of these men had heart problems or other potentially fatal ailments. These problems would not have been discovered if these men had not gone in to see the doctor for a routine exam. In a similar fashion, you should still make the time to go see the doctor once in a while just to have everything checked out and make sure it is all in working order. The truth of the matter is that some diseases and other illnesses do not have overt symptoms that show up in the early stages. You might have something going on inside you that has the potential to go terribly wrong, and you won't even know it if you don't have routine tests done. If you don't know what routine tests you're

supposed to be having then you should talk to your doctor and find out how often you need a physical exam. As a woman, you should also have exams exclusive to women, and you can't avoid these no matter how unpleasant they may be. These exams are recommended for a reason, and if you hope to be as healthy as possible you need to follow the recommendations.

Your body is trying to tell you something. It's time to stop thinking about your body as something separate from you. Your body is just as much a part of you as your mind is. Your body will also start to let you know if something is fundamentally wrong in most cases, and if you pay attention to your body then you will start to realize that you absolutely need to listen to what it is trying to tell you. If it seems like you are feeling run down or if there is something that just doesn't seem quite right within your body, then it's time to head to the doctor and see if there is something going on that you should be concerned about. This does not mean that every little ache or pain should merit a rush to the emergency room. Instead, you need to learn to listen to what your body is telling you, and to know when it is time to seek medical care. You can't hope to learn how to listen to the signs your body is telling you if you don't learn how to pay attention to how you usually feel on a good day of health. In other words, don't just listen to your body when it's ailing...instead, you should pay attention to what your body says *all the time*. Although some diseases do not begin to develop symptoms until they have already progressed quite far, plenty of other diseases and other illnesses make their presence known loud and clear as long as you pay attention.

CHRONIC CONDITIONS

Some chronic conditions are within your control, and some aren't. A condition becomes chronic when it goes on and on and resists treatment. While it is true that there are many conditions over which women have no control, it is also true that there are some conditions that can be completely avoided by living as healthy a lifestyle as possible. If you find yourself diagnosed with a chronic condition then you should ask your doctor what can be done (if anything) to make the condition go away. Once you and your doctor have figured out what can be done, attack it with a vengeance and get rid of the condition that is making you miserable.

Don't ever give up on getting better. The world is peppered with people who were once told that their medical conditions would never improve, yet with hard work and optimism they found that they did indeed recover fully. You never know if you will be the exception to the rules that your doctors tell you about. The idea is to never get defeated by your diagnosis. When you start to get pessimistic then you may not try as hard to beat whatever ailment is riddling you. You may think to yourself, everyone tells me I'm not going to get better, and I feel lousy, so why in the world should I put on some sort of happy disposition? The suggestion is not to ignore your medical problems or to paste a fake smile on your face while whistling show tunes. Instead, the point is that once you allow your mind to give up on ever getting better, then your body will inevitably follow suit. When it comes down to it, you are the only one who can keep your spirits up. You may be fortunate enough to have someone in your life (or a few people) who are really good at keeping you optimistic. Their motivation can only go so far, however, because no matter how many positive people you have around you, your frame of mind will overrule anything they can say or do. It's up to you to stay strong and to never give up on the idea that you can get better, because if you don't believe it then it really doesn't matter.

The amount of time you spend sick is not a direct indication of how healthy you are, in some cases, since some conditions are beyond your control. If there are no underlying conditions, however, you should not be spending all your time in bed, hacking and coughing.

YOUR HEALTH FROM HEAD TO TOE

There are so many different amazing parts to women's bodies. Every system within your body works independently and dependently at the same time, and you want to achieve as harmonious a balance as possible in order to ensure the best health you can have.

HEAD: PHYSICAL AND MENTAL

You need to pay attention to your stress level. Stress can take a mere cold and turn it into something that knocks you out of commission for weeks. Women have a real tendency to lead lives riddled with stress, either by choice or out of necessity. The important thing is to know your threshold and not allow your stress level to get so high as to become detrimental to your health.

Know when to seek help with mental issues. Your brain has more of an effect on your physical self than you may realize. Some patients with depression do not even realize they have depression until the aches, pain, and fatigue associated with depression lead them to seek medical care and the doctor realizes the root problem is depression. Since your mind and body are so intricately tied together, you need to make sure that you pay attention to your mental health and seek help if you need it. You might be incredibly fit physically, but if your mental health is bad then you cannot truly make the claim of being healthy overall. This is why it is so incredibly important to think of your mind and body as one system that works best when everything is functioning normally.

Headaches can be a sign of something bigger. Most women get headaches occasionally, especially during their monthly cycles. If you find that you are constantly barraged with headaches then you should go talk to your doctor. There are medications that can help you manage the pain, even if you experience migraines. The main reason why you should talk to your doctor about constant headaches, however, is because the doctor should get to the root cause of the headaches in order to rule out a bigger problem. Although it is true that certain types of headaches can be signs of something serious, it is more than likely that your headaches are caused by stress or hormonal fluctuations and are nothing to be worried about.

YOUR SKIN

Tanning? Don't even think about it. It doesn't matter if you are tanning outside while slathered up with oil, or if you are heading to the tanning booths at your local salon...tanning just isn't a good idea. Yes, plenty of women feel much more attractive with a tan because it's relatively fashionable and can also hide certain imperfections, such as cellulite. When you examine the overall effect of tanning, however, it becomes blatantly obvious that you're doing much more harm than good. Essentially, tanning is when you burn your skin enough to change the color. It can be loosely compared to the change in color of poultry you might notice when cooking...it starts out a pinkish color and then quickly turns brown the hotter it gets. Is this what you want to do to your skin? Tanning booth owners will often sing the merits of indoor tanning as a way to get essential vitamins into your body, but what you need to remember is that you can get Vitamin D from the sun (even without perpetual outdoor tanning) and from other sources too, such as milk or supplements.

Pay attention to what your skin is doing. If you are “blessed” with a good amount of freckles and moles all over your body then you probably already know the importance of paying attention to what your skin is doing. Medical professionals suggest that people monitor their moles for changes in size and color, and also to pay attention to the formation of new moles as well. Some people even go so far as to have a so-called map of their moles charted each and every year in order to closely monitor any changes. Whether or not you have any moles or freckles you should still take care to pay attention to what your skin is doing. Remember that your skin can be an outward indicator of bigger problems within your body, so if you don’t notice a lesion suddenly appearing or the appearance of an odd-colored mole then you may miss the first indicator of something amiss with your health. Take the time to study your body and see what your skin is doing. Some women do a quick skin check in conjunction with their monthly breast self-examination, and if this is a way for you to remember to do it then you may want to do it then as well. Just remember how great an indicator of your overall health your skin can be...dry, cracked skin may be an



indication that you aren’t taking in as many fluids as you should, for example. Your skin is more than just something that you need to keep pretty and soft. It’s also something that you really need to pay attention to if you are trying to keep in tune with your overall health.

Watch your chemical intake. There are some health experts who advise people to never apply to their skin anything that they would not ingest through their mouth...in other words, your favorite scented lotion or fancy perfume is probably off limits under this philosophy. Although you may not subscribe to this particular philosophy, it’s important to remember that the products you slather onto your arms, legs, and other body parts do find their way into your body because your skin absorbs them. You may not want to completely halt the use of

anything that isn't one hundred percent natural, but you should always take a look at the ingredient listing of the products you use. You may be surprised at some of the interesting – and potentially harmful – ingredients that are prevalent in lotions, cosmetics, and other body products. If you find that you sometimes develop rashes and other unexplained skin ailments you might want to try switching to some products that are a little less chemical-based and more natural. Plenty of beauty stores (for example, The Body Shop, Bath and Body Works, etc) all have beauty lines that are created to be more natural than the other options you find in most department stores. These natural lines may be a little more expensive, but that's because these products rely more on natural ingredients and may cost a little more to produce. The added cost may be worth it, however, because these types of products are indeed the kinds of lotions, creams, and other products that you might be able to actually digest without making yourself severely ill...of course, you don't want to actually ingest these products, but the point is to not pollute your skin with harsh chemicals. If you make the switch to these types of natural products and still have problems with rashes and other skin problems then you will want to consult with a dermatologist (or perhaps an allergist) in order to find out if there is a medical reason for your skin problems.

YOUR EYES, EARS, NOSE, AND THROAT

Sunglasses aren't just cool-looking. Your eyes are oftentimes not something that you really pay attention to unless they stop working like they should. Nonetheless, your eyes need preventive care just like the rest of your body does. For example, slipping on a pair of sunglasses isn't only a fashion statement...it's a way to protect your eyes from UV rays, which can truly do some damage if allowed to work their way into your eyes on a constant basis. When you purchase sunglasses make sure that they come with UV protection; there will usually be a sticker or tag attached to the sunglasses that proclaim the pair as UV-protecting and will also tell you what degree of protection the sunglasses

provide. Another instance when you should be concerned about eye protection is if you indulge in indoor tanning. Yes, it's true that you shouldn't be tanning at all, but if you insist upon it then you need to make sure that you protect your eyes accordingly. Don't pass on the little sunglasses they offer you for the tanning booth because without them you can do some real damage to your eyes. Eye protection is also important when you work anywhere that calls for goggles or some other form of protection. Some women won't wear goggles – or will wear them quite reluctantly – even if their task calls for them to. For example, if you are working with acidic elements (let's say you're involved in a chemistry class as a teacher, student, or observer) and you refuse to wear goggles because you're afraid they will mess up your hair or make you look silly, you're asking for trouble. All it takes is one little splash to ruin your eyesight. The same principal applies to ongoing health concerns with your eyes. If you wear contact lenses, make sure that you are only wearing them for the approved amount of time and not wearing them to sleep if they aren't designed for that. There are some contact lenses that are designed to be worn for days on end and then tossed out in the trash, but if your contacts are designed as daily wear then you shouldn't be sleeping in them. Not only does this deprive your eyes of the oxygen they need, but it may cost you a trip to the doctor (perhaps even the emergency room) if your contacts get stuck on your eyes because you didn't wear them as prescribed. Sure, women can get awfully busy and cut corners on things to get everything done, but how long does it really take to take out a pair of contact lenses? It doesn't take that long at all, and it can make a huge difference when it comes to the health of your eyes.



Get your eyes checked. Most women notice that their eyesight deteriorates at some point, even if it's only small amounts much later in life. Lots of things can change your eyesight, including aging and breastfeeding (the hormones released in your body from breastfeeding might actually temporarily change the quality of

your vision). Even if you don't notice your eyesight changing for the better or for the worse you should still make it a point to get regular eye exams. You may not notice small changes in your vision, and if you make it a point to see your eye doctor on an annual or every-other-year schedule then it will become obvious from your past exams if your eyesight is changing. Your eyes can also develop additional problems beyond bad vision. Ailments such as cataracts, glaucoma, and other eye problems can be discovered in a routine exam. You might also go into your eye doctor's office with what you think is an issue with your eyes – such as blurry vision or flashy lights appearing sporadically in your line of sight – and then find out that it's actually a symptom of something much bigger, such as hypertension. Your eyes react to stress and other problems just like the rest of your body does, so it really does pay to take care when it comes to your eyes. Imagine what it would be like if you suddenly didn't have your vision at all...how would your life change? You want to take care of your eyes to the best of your ability and to make sure that you make eye health a priority. Just like any other part of your body, your eyes shouldn't be ignored.

Snoring isn't just annoying. Snoring can be embarrassing for women because it isn't a very ladylike activity. Many women are completely mortified that they snore while some women just wish they could figure out how to stop it so their partners will stop complaining about it. You should be concerned if you snore because there might be a couple of different causes for the snoring, one of which is sleep apnea. This condition actually makes you stop breathing periodically throughout the night in addition to the snoring, and it is something that is treatable through a variety of means. Your doctor may suggest you lose weight or may actually give you a machine that you place by your bed at night and attach a mask to in order to assist your breathing. Don't be too embarrassed to admit to your doctor that you have a snoring problem, because it might be something that is completely treatable. This goes for any other ailment you may run across; there is nothing you can tell your doctor that he or she probably hasn't heard before, even if it's a traditionally masculine ailment complaint

coming from a woman. Doctors are there to assist you, not to judge whether or not your complaint is ladylike.

A sore throat should be checked out. If you have had a sore throat for days on end then it isn't something that you should ignore. Your throat doesn't get sore just to be annoying; it's trying to tell you something. Don't be apprehensive about visiting your doctor when your throat hurts, even if there is no other symptom that you have to accompany this particular complaint. Your doctor will test your throat to make sure you don't have strep throat and then will discuss the best method of attack to get you feeling better.

Watch the volume on that iPod. Maybe you're doing everything you can to be a healthy woman, and sometimes that will include visits to the gym for workouts.

It's during these workouts at the gym that many women strap a music player to their arms and turn the volume of the music up to gain some momentum for their workouts. Although this might be something you do that will help you stay pumped up for your workouts, you need to take care at the level of volume you allow to enter your ears. Even going to a really loud concert can damage your hearing, so imagine what years on end of recurring loud music played directly into your ears will do. Remember



that you should be concerned with your overall health, so the health of your ears is something that you should also be concerned about. Your ears can fail you if you abuse them continually, so if you are big on listening to loud music then be prepared to spend a lot of time as an older woman saying, "What? I couldn't hear you!" You might be able to avoid this outcome if you start taking care of your ears now. Loud music isn't the only ear concern. Some women work in loud

environments where ear protection is suggested (or even required), but the unfortunate reality is that some women won't bother to put the ear protection in either because they forget to, they don't think they need it, or because of vanity issues...some women don't think they look attractive or feminine with ear plugs or other hearing protection devices. Vanity should not be the catalyst to make you deaf at a later age, though. Keep the volumes of things as low as you can – stereo, television, et cetera – and remember that loud volumes can harm the ear health of the people around you too. That means that loud television programs can actually harm the hearing of the people around you...your kids might actually suffer because you like the volume loud.

MOVING ON DOWN

Women's bodies are amazing, but they also have the potential to contract some pretty nasty ailments. Be sure that you are vigilant in looking out for signs of a problem while also doing everything you can to stay healthy.

BREAST HEALTH

Do your monthly exam, and do it correctly. You can find plenty of examples of how to conduct your monthly breast exam either through your doctor's office or online. A couple of key things to remember include:

- You're doing this to make sure you are familiar with how your breasts normally feel, and that's why it's so important to conduct your exams on a regular basis.
- Doing your exam during your period may not be a good idea since the shape and feel of the breast can change during this time.
- If you feel something, *make an appointment right away*. Don't wait it out to see if there is a change.

This is definitely an instance when you need to step up and take control of your health.



Breastfeeding does not make you immune

to cancer. Medical professionals used to claim that women who breastfeed were immune to developing breast cancer later in life, but this is no longer accepted as fact. Studies have shown that breastfeeding can in fact lower your odds of developing breast cancer, but it does not completely erase the threat. Breastfeeding is the best choice for your baby...this is generally regarded as fact...but you should be aware that there are some interesting health issues that may pop up while you are in the process of nursing a

baby. Breast infections can occur in nursing mothers, and some of them can become quite serious. Most breastfeeding-related ailments can be remedied easily as long as you seek medical care as soon as possible. For example, mastitis is an infection that occurs in the breasts of some nursing women and can be extremely painful. The treatment includes antibiotics and frequent pumping or nursing of the milk from the infected breast in order to relieve some of the pain. If left untreated, however, the infection can get worse, it can spread, and might result in a breast abscess that needs to be drained. These types of breast infections are usually the exception to the rule, as most women nurse their babies with nary a problem. The thing to remember is that you should seek medical assistance any time the breastfeeding seems to become painful or different than it used to be. You don't want to allow a potential infection to go unchecked because it can result in something much more serious if not treated by a doctor. Besides, your baby is counting on your breasts as a source of

nourishment, so if you allow an infection to get out of control you might wind up having to wean your baby a lot sooner than you had originally planned to wean him or her. The upside of breastfeeding – other than the obvious joy of providing food to your baby and all the bonding that comes with it – is the fact that breastfeeding can burn up to 500 calories a day. What a great trade off! Don't let talk of infections and other breast maladies dissuade you from giving it a try, but do keep in mind that potential problems may arise and you need to be vigilant about staying healthy.

Let's talk about implants. Sure, women generally want to be as attractive as possible, and for one reason or another many men find large breasts attractive. If you were not blessed (or cursed, as some women would claim) with an impressive bosom then medical science can correct the problem for you. There are plenty of risks associated with breast implants. You may be old enough to remember the huge debacle with silicone breast implants when implants started to burst and leak within women's bodies and cause all sorts of medical problems. Women thought these implants were safe and then the next thing they knew it was discovered that they were most certainly *not* safe. This is not to claim that the same thing will happen with the implants being used today, but as a woman you should be skeptical about any surgery you will have that you don't actually need. Any operation that involves you being put under with anesthesia is no joke. You also have to take into consideration that if your implants are too large you are going to be plagued with back problems. If you still decide to go forth and have implants done then be sure that you don't simply go with the lowest bidder. Horror stories abound of women having botched implants done that left them looking uneven, incredibly fake, or even monstrous. Choose a doctor who a friend or other trusted source personally recommends and don't forget that this is a medical procedure that will require recovery time.

HEART HEALTH

Women have heart attacks. Who is the stereotypical heart attack victim? Most people think of middle-aged businessmen who are stressed out beyond capacity. Tell someone to picture someone having a heart attack and the person will probably describe a scene of a silver-haired gentleman, wearing a business suit and doubled over in pain while his loving family surrounds him. The truth of the matter is that women have heart attacks too...in fact, coronary heart disease is the number one killer of women in the United States. Obviously, heart attack and other heart problems are something that you need to be concerned about. When your doctor urges you to exercise and eat right, he or she isn't doing it just because that's what doctors are expected to say. Your doctor is trying to help you keep your heart healthy so that you don't wind up a statistic. Heart disease is a very real threat to you as a woman, and you need to realize this and do what you can to minimize your risks. Remember that if your heart suddenly stops functioning after years of neglect then it's pretty much "game over" for you unless doctors can do something to get it functioning correctly again. Your heart isn't something you want to ignore.

Certain medications increase your risk. If you know that you are at a higher risk of developing heart disease – or if you have already developed heart disease and are dealing with it now – you need to be vigilant in checking to make sure that any medication you take (prescription or otherwise) is not something that will put you at a higher risk for a heart attack or stroke. There are certain medications that should not be taken by people with heart disease. Any time a doctor attempts to prescribe a new drug to you, be sure to talk about the effect it may have on your heart condition. Don't ever assume that your doctor remembers every condition you have! Some doctors see a wide variety of patients on a daily basis and it is entirely likely that your doctor may occasionally need a little help in remembering what medical conditions you have. If you plan to purchase an over the counter medication that you haven't tried before then

you may want to talk to a doctor or pharmacist to make sure it's okay for you to take.

Exercise for a healthier heart. Losing weight and looking good is not the only reason that you should exercise; neither is increased energy levels or more overall stamina. The best thing you can do to keep your heart as healthy as you can is to exercise regularly and make sure that you do plenty of cardio exercise where you reach and maintain your target heart rate. When you exercise your body you're giving your heart a workout too, so consider how your body feels after you have consistently exercised for a while and then you can imagine the benefits that your heart gets too. The more efficiently your heart works, the easier it can pump the blood through your body. It's when you live a sedentary lifestyle that your heart has to work harder and harder to get the blood to pump through your body, and if you combine this with high cholesterol levels and other factors then you're essentially a heart attack waiting to happen. Even if you do not have a family history of heart disease you still need to get exercise in order to make sure that your heart is as healthy as it can be. Your heart is an important part of your body – one of the most important parts, actually – so it makes sense that you should do whatever you can in order to make sure that you're giving your heart every opportunity to operate at its best. If you have no other reason to exercise, at least do it for the benefit of your heart health. Remember that even something as simple as a walk around the block after dinner is far better than nothing.

Pay attention to your family's heart history. If your family members – particularly your parents and grandparents – suffered from heart disease or dies as a result of heart ailments then you should know that you have a higher possibility of someday developing heart problems than someone else without the family history does. For this reason you need to be vigilant about keeping your heart healthy. Almost nothing is inevitable, after all, so just because a good portion of the people in your family developed heart disease does not necessarily

mean that you are doomed to the same fate, especially if you are proactive in your quest for good health. Be sure to exercise, eat right, and try to avoid unnecessary stress in your life, and you have a great chance of staying away from the same problems your family members had with their hearts.

ALL THE OTHER STUFF

Bladder infections can happen quite often. Women are prone to bladder infections, and there is nothing pleasant about this particular ailment. Bladder infections are painful and can spread to other parts of your body if not treated. How do you know if you have a bladder infection? One of the telltale signs is a burning sensation when you urinate, or having the intense feeling of needing to urinate but only having a short trickle come out. Sometimes the urine will appear cloudy. The only way to know for sure if you have a bladder infection is by submitting to a lab test ordered by your doctor, but any woman who has had a bladder infection probably knows way before the doctor confirms it. You will probably be treated with antibiotics, which will treat the infection but may open you up to a yeast infection. How can you avoid bladder infections altogether? Grandmothers swear by cranberry juice, but making sure you drink plenty of liquids (preferably water) is one of the best things you can do. Talk to your doctor if you have further concerns about bladder infections and the things you can do to prevent and treat them.

You are what you eat. You know that you're supposed to eat healthy foods. You also know that you should include fresh fruits and vegetables in your diet while avoiding sweets and foods loaded with fat and sodium. These recommendations are commonplace, so there is really no reason to spend a lot of time explaining the ideas surrounding them. Instead, emphasis should be placed on why you may not be following these recommendations. Are you too big a fan of sweets? Do you not like the taste of vegetables? Is it just too easy to head to a fast food drive-thru instead of cooking up something healthy at home?

Whatever you're reasoning behind not eating as healthy as you can, it's not a sufficient reason, plain and simple. You are potentially shortening your lifespan when you don't eat healthy foods. You are not allowing your body to function at its highest potential when you stuff yourself with empty calories instead of the types of food your body really needs. You need to figure out what you can do to motivate yourself in order to eat like you should. Don't change your eating habits simply because you want to fit into pants in a smaller size...change your eating habits because you want to live a longer and healthier life.

What medications are you taking? You may not have ever actually sat down



and taken the time to think about this, but do you realize that every medicine and drug you ingest has to work its way through your kidneys? Have you also realized that too many medications and drugs can actually tax your kidneys and

cause harm? You may think this is no big deal, but it is actually a pretty huge deal. If you are like most women you probably have one or two prescription drugs that you take based on your doctor's recommendation. You probably also have over the counter drugs that you use periodically for certain ailments, whether it's headaches or menstrual cramps. Perhaps you also throw some herbal supplements into the mix, either because you want to take pills that purport to make your hair shinier or help you lose weight. You need to realize that everything you take not only has an effect on your kidneys, but these medicines might also react to each other and cause real issues. Don't think that just because an herbal medication doesn't need a prescription that it won't interact with the other medications you take. Try not to load up on pills because the culmination of several different kinds of pills may be to the detriment of your health.

Having great health isn't just about being able to run a lap faster than any other woman at the gym; it's also about knowledge. You need to know what your family's health history is and you also need to know what ailments you may potentially encounter.

WOMANLY STUFF

You might have heard the song that has the line, "I enjoy being a girl." Most women wouldn't trade places with a man even if you paid her all the money in the world. It's great being a woman, but with the feminine mystique, cool shoes, and ability to get out of a traffic ticket by batting eyelashes comes a special set of medical concerns.

WOMEN HAVE SPECIAL MEDICAL NEEDS

Medical care is not one-size-fits-all. Not only do we have different outward physical characteristics than men, but our insides are relatively different as well. We are more prone and less prone to certain diseases and ailments, and we also react to stress and illness differently than men do. This is why you need to make sure that you seek out the care you need, and don't lump yourself into the same category as your husband, son, or any other men in your life. For example, just because your husband's doctor tells him that he should increase his protein intake does not mean that you should take that advice as something that pertains to both of you. Of course, there are some things that are valid for both genders (you should exercise, keep your fat intake low, etc), but there are also other things that are definitely gender-specific. This is why you need to make sure that you pay attention to the things that you, as a woman, need to be concerned with. You need to remember to do your breast self-exams, you need to remember to pay attention to your menstrual cycle, and you absolutely need to see a medical

professional who is going to encourage you to remember to do these types of things. Don't settle for a one-size-fits-all attitude when it comes to your health, because it just isn't the case.

If you want a female doctor, say so. Studies and polls both show that many women (as well as men) feel intimidated or embarrassed when in an appointment with their doctors, and for this reason many people don't bring up valid health



questions and concerns like they should. The thought that your doctor is going to judge you or think you are stupid is not something that you should allow to consume you so much that you hold back information from your doctor. You are your own health advocate, and that means that you need to realize what makes you the most comfortable and what you should do in order to partner with your doctor and get the best medical care possible. If a male doctor just makes you feel uncomfortable – or if you spend too much time gazing into

his dreamy eyes so you get tongue tied – then there is absolutely nothing wrong with deciding to switch to a female doctor. Sometimes it doesn't matter how much schooling or experience a male doctor has because there is just always something a little weird about him conducting sensitive exams, at least for many women. The same principal applies to any doctor with whom you just aren't comfortable, regardless of gender. You may find a female doctor who seems to be quite book-smart but who just does not seem to have the best bed-side manner. If a warm personality is important to you then find a different doctor who will make you more comfortable. Remember that you are paying doctors to provide you with a service. Just because they usually have infinitely more schooling and are highly regarded within our society does not mean that they are

infallible. You should always be comfortable enough with your doctor that you feel as though you can bring absolutely any medical concern to him or her and he or she will in turn answer your questions thoroughly and make you feel better about the situation. Some women have a difficult time with being aggressive, especially when it comes to matters involving authority figures. If you hope to take charge of your health, though, you need to get a little more aggressive with not only asking the questions that need to be asked, but also by insisting on a doctor with whom you feel comfortable.

We get ailments that men don't get. This is certainly not to say that all male physicians are inept and have no idea what diseases women can get. To the contrary, there are plenty of fine male physicians out there who probably know the inner workings of the female body better than the majority of women who never attended medical school. This is more of a reminder for you than for your doctor. You have to remember that there are some ailments and diseases that women can get that men don't, simply because the body parts are different. You should be vigilant in paying attention to the parts of you which are distinctly female. Men don't have to worry about what their discharge smells like or the amount of blood they lose every month during their periods because these aren't things their bodies do. Women, on the other hand, need to pay attention to these things in order to make sure that everything is functioning like it should. You should especially make sure to keep all your regular appointments pertaining to those things that only women need to deal with. In other words, just because your husband doesn't have to go see a doctor once a year to have his penis inspected doesn't mean that you shouldn't have to go see your doctor once a year (or however frequently your doctor recommends) to have your pelvic exams and all the other intrusive procedures that women have to deal with simply because we're different and have different equipment.

YOUR PERIOD SHOULD NOT STOP YOUR LIFE

Excessive bleeding isn't necessarily normal. Your period is probably pretty annoying...most women do not find joy in the process of monthly bleeding, and for some women it becomes enough of a problem to inhibit them socially and exhaust them for days. You may be familiar with the joke that some men tell: "I can't trust anything that bleeds for five days and doesn't die." There is an element of truth to that joke, no matter how lame the joke actually is. The truth is that you can't bleed and bleed for days on end and not have some physical residuals from it. When the bleeding becomes so much that you just can't seem to function – or you keep ruining pieces of clothing because the bleeding can't be contained with pads or tampons – then it's time to take your concerns to a doctor. This is especially important if the women in your family do not have a history of heavy bleeding and if you used to have shorter periods with less bleeding than you do now. A sudden or eventual shift to heavy bleeding can be a sign of something serious, but on the other hand it can be just a natural evolution of your body, so try not to panic if this happens to you. Just make an appointment with your doctor and see what options you have. If your doctor agrees with you that your bleeding is more than it should be then you will probably go through a series of unpleasant (but not incredibly painful) tests, which will make sure that there is nothing serious going on. When the results come back negative you will probably be offered a few options:

- You can try to take birth control pills or receive a birth control implant because these things can sometimes lessen your blood flow during your period. If you are already on birth control then this is obviously not an effective solution, unless you are at a low dose and want to try a higher one.

- You can try an endometrial ablation, which is a relatively new procedure. This outpatient surgery uses various methods to actually cook the lining of your uterus. For some women, it stops their periods altogether while other women experience less bleeding, or in some cases, no change at all. You should know that women who have this procedure done are not expected to be able to carry a viable pregnancy afterward, even though they can technically get pregnant. In other words, don't get this procedure done if you ever want to have another baby.
- For women close to menopausal age, some doctors might suggest a hysterectomy. This stops your bleeding altogether, but it also makes it absolutely impossible to ever get pregnant again. This is a much more complicated surgery than an ablation. Some women, however, welcome the idea of getting a hysterectomy and getting it all over with because this means there is no long process leading up to the conclusion of menopause.
- Some doctors will merely suggest you wait it out to see if it changes. Women who have had babies in the not so distant past may be in a situation where their bodies will eventually adjust and the bleeding will subside. This is a good idea for any women who may want to someday have another baby, because any permanent procedures to limit or cease menstrual bleeding will make it impossible.

You should know that there are things that can be done when your life is adversely affected by the amount of bleeding you have every month. If you feel as though you have to put your life on hold every month it is definitely something that you need to bring to the attention of your doctor. You don't have to give up life every month.

Figure out what makes you more comfortable. You have choices when your period rolls around, and you don't need to just do whatever your mother initially taught you (especially since a lot has probably changed since you first had your period). Whether you choose tampons or pads, the main thing is to make sure that you are personally comfortable with whatever you choose. Don't wear pads if you feel disgusting and feel like you're wearing a diaper. On the other hand, don't wear tampons if you get a little freaked



out at the idea of sticking something inside you and holding in all the blood that is trying to leave your body. As long as you are comfortable with the choice you make (although most women know it's hard to be comfortable during a period anyhow) then you can also make sure that for health's sake you are changing your pad or tampon frequently. If you don't change your pad frequently you might wind up with a bad rash, not to mention that it's simply bad hygiene to walk around with a pad all day. As most women know, bad hygiene is only a hop, skip, and a jump away from illness, so you don't want to open the door to getting sick like that. Tampons should also be changed frequently because you don't want to risk winding up with Toxic Shock Syndrome, which is quite rare but still a possibility. If you suffer from cramps during your period, you should make sure to try out a variety of pain relievers to find the one that works best for you. Some women do fine with regular pain relievers, but there is a wide variety of pain relievers manufactured specifically for problems with menstrual cycles. You can choose from acetaminophen or ibuprofen based pain relievers, and many of them include other ingredients to lessen bloating and help with energy levels. The important thing to remember when it comes to using pain relievers for period

pain is that since they are made from things like acetaminophen and ibuprofen you should not take other medications in conjunction with these medicines if they contain the same ingredients. This doubling up is too much for your body, and can actually make you quite sick. For this reason, always check to see what the active ingredient of your pain reliever is before taking another pill. In fact, if you take a pain reliever designed to relieve period pain that might be all you need, even if you suffer from cramps and a headache, for example. If your pain is severe then you can take period pain medicine in addition to another pain reliever as long as they don't both have the same active ingredient.

Douching, tampons, and all that jazz. Let's get one thing straight: your crotch is not supposed to smell like flowers and incense. While most women have a concern about vaginal odor, it's important to remember that there is a big difference between a very slight odor (or even the absence of any scent at all) and a really smelly vaginal odor. A foul odor merits a visit to the doctor because it can be indicative of an imbalance or an infection, most of which can be easily remedied. If you do not have a foul odor emanating from that area, however, you should take that as an indication that everything is fine and you shouldn't be messing with the chemical balance down there. Think about it: douching is essentially introducing a bunch of stuff into your body that isn't supposed to be there. It's not natural, and it can actually cause quite a few problems. The same goes for using so-called feminine sprays...why in the world would you want to spray perfume into your vagina? You're asking for trouble when you throw the balance of your body off like that. Another potential problem comes in the form of tampons. Although these can be great since many women do not like wearing pads, you can't put a tampon in at the beginning of the day and then just forget about until you head to bed at night, no matter how light your flow is. Think about it this way: By using a tampon you are forcing your body to hold on to the things it is trying to get rid of, and so your body doesn't get to get rid of that particular waste until you replace the tampon. Don't hold that stuff in there for too long. Take the warnings seriously on the tampon box that warn you about Toxic Shock

Syndrome (TSS). The company wouldn't put the warning on the box if it wasn't a true possibility. If you wear tampons, be sure to change them as recommended on the box.

SEXUAL HEALTH

Take charge of your sexual health. It may take two to tango, but women must take complete responsibility for their own sexual health. If you were brought up thinking that sex is dirty and immoral then you might have adopted the idea that you should not be proactive in sexual issues because it just doesn't seem like something you should be thinking about. Worse yet, you may be of the frame of mind that it's the man's job to provide birth control, or even to decide whether to abstain from sex or go full speed ahead. Why in the world would you hand over such important decisions to someone else when the results can be so physically and mentally devastating to you? Even if your partner is the most loving and concerned person in the entire universe, you still need to take control of this aspect of your health. If you have a partner with whom you are monogamous then you can make the decisions regarding your sexual health as a joint effort (with you as the decisive vote, of course), but if you are not necessarily committed to only one person then you especially need to make sure that you are taking care of your sexual health. Figure out what kind of birth control works for you. Figure out how you will prevent sexually transmitted disease. Figure out how you will keep yourself healthy while still indulging in sex...or how to abstain altogether. Two monogamous and committed people within a relationship indulging in sexual relations is common, but unfortunately so are sexually transmitted diseases, unplanned pregnancies, and women who have sexual intercourse even though they really don't want to. Think of it this way: if you tell a man that you don't want to have sex and as a result he leaves you then you're actually doing yourself a big favor. You're protecting yourself physically and mentally while also ridding yourself of an insensitive guy who probably wouldn't be good for you anyhow.

A lack of desire can be a medical issue. There are about a million jokes that men tell about how a woman's sexual desire wanes after marriage, and although not every woman is this way there is certainly a degree of truth to these jokes. Most experts agree that it is normal to have a sexual appetite that decreases a little, and many things can make this happen, such as certain medications, stress, and lack of sleep (which happens quite a bit if you have a baby). If you encounter a sudden drop in your sexual desire, however, then you should pay attention and get to the bottom of the root cause because sometimes this can be an indication of a problem. It may be a case of something physical, or it can also be an indication of something emotional. Physically, a lack of desire can indicate that there is a hormonal imbalance or some other issue within your body that can be corrected by medical means. Perhaps you have a physical issue that has manifested into a lack of sexual desire...for example, if you have a difficult time with vaginal lubrication then you may have unknowingly started to avoid sex because you are so frustrated with your physical issue. Sheer emotions can also have a huge effect on your sexual desire whether you realize it or not. Sometimes women who have problems with their husband or partner can find that they have a tough time getting aroused, even if they try to separate the relationship issues from the element of intimacy. Remember that your brain is a part of your body too, so if your mind is consumed with ideas of how you are miserable in your relationship, or you don't feel respected, or whatever the issue is, then you may not be able to get aroused even if you want to. Don't accept a huge drop in sexual desire as simply something that is inevitable. It really doesn't have to be that way. You should mention the issue to your doctor and get to the root cause of what is thwarting your libido. It may be something relatively simple that can be corrected quickly, or it may be a symptom of something bigger, which may take a little more time to resolve. Whatever the cause, it's not something you should ignore.

All it takes is one instance of unprotected sex. Most women understand that one instance of unprotected sex can result in a sexually transmitted disease or pregnancy, but for one reason or another many women still occasionally indulge in sex without any form of protection. There seems to be a mentality of, “that won’t happen to me,” or “we just got caught up in the passion of the moment.” Try to understand that no matter how much passion you have going for you, it is not worth the huge risk you are taking. Sex can be pleasurable, but what amount of pleasure is worth contracting something like herpes (which will *never* go away) or something like AIDS (which might wind up *killing* you?) You simply cannot justify unprotected sex in present day unless you are with another person with whom you are committed and seeing exclusively...and you know for a fact that the person is in the same position. In other words, if you have any doubt whatsoever about the commitment of your sexual partner then it’s time to whip out a condom if you aren’t already using one...or better yet perhaps it’s time to say goodbye to that particular partner. Get this into your head: no matter how great the sex is, it’s not worth dying for. Even if you don’t contract a sexually transmitted disease you could easily wind up pregnant. Pregnancy in and of itself is not necessarily a death sentence (although some parents may jokingly disagree with that statement) but if you are not ready or willing to have a baby then it’s a tough situation to be in. When you think about everything that can come from one brief moment of unchecked passion then you know that it’s just not worth it. For your health’s sake you need to be the type of woman who has the self-control necessary to always insist upon proper protection when engaging in sexual activities. You needn’t be embarrassed by insisting upon protection, and it’s one of the best things you can do to ensure your overall good health for years to come.

It can be a lot of fun being a woman, although it comes with its special set of issues and potential problems. As long as you remember that as a woman you are fundamentally different from men, and that there are special considerations you must keep in mind when it comes to your medical care and how you take

care of yourself. Remember that you are the person most responsible for your own health, and you should act accordingly. Be diligent in seeking out the best medical care and always pay attention to the things that your body is trying to tell you.

TOES AND MORE

Picture this scenario in your mind: You dash from one meeting to another in your fabulous heels and delightful (yet uncomfortable) clothing. You stop for your fifth coffee of the day (and it's only ten o'clock in the morning) while thinking about how you should forget about sleeping tonight in order to go out and dance the night away with your friends. Does this sound appealing to you, or perhaps even similar to how your life is now? Women are expected to multi-task while looking fabulous and while still maintaining a social life. You should stop and take a moment to think about your expectations for yourself, and if these expectations are actually to your physical detriment.

SUFFERING FOR FASHION

Do you stuff yourself into too-tight clothing? As legend has it, women who wore tight corsets back in the day when they were the fashion norm would tighten these corsets so tightly that their internal organs were actually squished and injured and ribs were broken. Did this stop women around the world from wearing these monstrosities? No, not until they fell out of fashion. What sort of things are you wearing now that you do for the sake of fashion but to the detriment of your health? Any woman who has ever worn a super-tight pair of jeans or an itchy sweater knows that there are certain lengths that women will go to in order to look or feel physically attractive. You should realize that sometimes the things you do for fashion can actually hurt your health. For example, if you wear tight-fitting pants and lacy underwear all day you might be opening yourself

up to a yeast infection. Your vaginal area needs air once in a while, after all, and if you wear tight pants all the time then your vagina gets deprived of the air it needs while also breeding more moisture. If you are prone to yeast infections then you are truly flirting with disaster. Most women understand the need to feel attractive and sometimes a tight pair of pants and lacy underwear can make some women feel quite attractive. Remember, though, that your primary concern when picking out what to wear should be that it's relatively comfortable and isn't something that might actually harm you. If you aren't sure what is meant by this then try to think back to a time when you wore an outfit that was entirely too small and how great it felt at the end of the day when you took the outfit off...your clothes should not be something so horrendous that taking them off is a source of elation. Instead, choose clothing that is fashionable yet relatively comfortable. It's not impossible to find clothing that looks good yet doesn't hinder your health...you just have to look for it.

What kind of shoes are you wearing? Every woman knows how great it can feel to step into a pair of high heels and go out for a night on the town. Of course, the phrase "how great it can feel" does not pertain to the actual physical feeling associated with high heels, but rather pertains to what kind of woman it makes you feel like. If you wear high heels on a regular basis – especially if the heels are really high and you spend a lot of time on your feet – you're asking for trouble. Think about the unnatural position you're forcing your body into. You're not a Barbie doll...you're not designed to walk around with all your weight on your tippy-toes. Your back is one of the biggest sections of your body that will start to rebel when you wear high heels consistently, even if you don't notice the back pain right away. You are probably compiling back injuries that you won't even become aware of until something really starts to hurt. Remember that your back is a tricky part of your body because one muscle pull can result in massive spasms and other problems that won't go away easily. Simply taking the high heels off and not wearing them again won't be enough to stop the pain if you've done enough damage to create an actual injury. If you insist on wearing high

heels throughout the day then perhaps you can switch between high heels and more sensible shoes depending on what you're doing. For example, sitting at your desk might be a good time to wear your high heels whereas a walk down the street to pick up coffee and run to the bank might merit a change to some different shoes that aren't going to make your back cry. Also make sure that the heels you buy are quality shoes with good traction...or at least as much traction as high heels can have. If you have never had back problems before then trust this statement: Back problems can be horrible, and are not easy to resolve. You just don't want to mess around with your back, especially for the sake of making your legs look cute in a skirt.

Remember that clothing is supposed to be protective. Our bodies are not meant to be out in the elements without some form of protection. Think about all the things your body is exposed to throughout the day. Depending on what type of environment you live in, you might find that your clothes protect your body from harmful UV rays from the sun, or if you live in a climate that experiences bitter cold winters then your clothing protects you from the cold. When you are getting dressed in the morning, consider what it is that your clothes should protect you from that particular day. If you know you will be exposed to the sun for a good portion of the day then wear long sleeves, long pants, and a hat if possible because this will protect your skin and prevent bad sunburn. If you know that the temperatures will be dropping to ridiculously cold during the day, you should dress accordingly and protect your body from being exposed to the cold for too long because you may otherwise wind up ill. Although it is not true in most cases that simply being out in the cold will make you sick (you actually need to be exposed to a germ or virus before you can get sick) you should know that being out and about in the cold



weather without proper protection can hinder your body's ability to fight off a possible attack from a virus or germ. Make it a habit to always dress according to the weather, and to consider your clothes functional and protective. Sometimes it's hard for women to think beyond how clothes look because fashion can be such an important influence in what we choose to wear. That's why you should make an absolute conscious effort to make sure that you look beyond what clothes look like and instead think about their functionality as well.

STARVING

Your body NEEDS nutrients. You can't live on Diet Coke and celery sticks for long. What you need to understand is that your body actually needs certain nutrients and vitamins in order to *survive*, so no matter how thin you want to be you must still take into consideration what your body needs in order to keep going. This is why you need to be careful when it comes to diets that exclude whole food groups from your menu, because this inevitably removes some type of source of a specific nutrient from your plate and can cause real problems. There are stories of people who follow strict vegan diets (which can be healthy when done properly) but who didn't pay attention to the need for certain vitamins commonly found in animal products and then wound up severely ill. If you are going to diet then make sure that the range of food you are eating is balanced according to what you need. Although other diets may help you to lose weight, they are not doing any favors to your overall health. You can't just think about the numbers on a scale or the size of your jeans. You need to take into consideration and think of the bigger picture about the potential damage you may be doing to your health when you exclude certain foods from your diet. This is certainly not to say that you shouldn't heed the advice of a diet guru who suggests you eliminate processed foods or fast food from your diet, because these changes will help your health instead of hindering it. Instead, take care when you receive advice about scrimping on (or eliminating) fruits, dairy, or some other type of food from your diet. If you are going to eliminate something from

your diet completely then you need to figure out what you can do to replace the missing nutrients and vitamins. A registered dietician can help you with that, and it would be well-worth the expense to make sure that you are doing everything right.

Skinny does not automatically equal healthy. Don't look at someone walking down the street that happens to be skinny and automatically assume that the skinny person must be healthy. This isn't necessarily true. You should not strive to simply get skinny. Doing something like this will inevitably result in you sacrificing health for weight loss, and even though you may think you look better on the outside it will not offset the problems that you're forming on your inside by not giving your body the things it needs. Before you make the effort to simply lose weight, you should think about *why* you want to lose weight. Do you want to do it simply because you think it will make you more attractive, or do you want to do it because you know that it will help your overall health to get closer to your ideal weight? There is a huge difference between being at your ideal weight and being downright skinny. Some people take "skinny" too far and turn it into a health problem. Be cautious when you strive to reach a body image that qualifies as skinny. You have undoubtedly heard about women who take the aspiration of getting skinny too far and turn it into an eating disorder such as anorexia or bulimia. While most medical professionals agree that these disorders are just as much mental as they are physical (if not more so), that does not mean that you can avoid falling into these categories just because you think you would never fall so low. The truth of the matter is that you may be within your ideal weight, even if you think you aren't. *Do not look to the media to tell you what your ideal weight is.* If you do, then you're referring to air-brushed images and women who also have the time and resources to spend all day with a personal trainer. One thing to look out for is your friends and family urging you to eat because your weight is scaring them. Another thing to be aware of is if your body is not functioning as well as it should because of your dieting and exercise. Your energy levels will plummet if you aren't getting the nutrients you need. If you realize that your

quest for a skinny physique is harming you then it's time to go see your doctor and get some help.

Be careful with diet aids. The truth of the matter is that the majority of the time, you don't really know what is in the diet aids you can buy at the store. You'll see claims like "fat blocker" or "advanced energy system," but unless you actually take the time to read the label and see what is in the pills, powder, or drink, you may not realize that you're being pumped full of caffeine or even ingredients that are going to give you stomach cramps or embarrassing anal leakage. Yes, that's right: *anal leakage*. There is no miracle pill. You're sacrificing your health by popping pills or drinking drinks that might actually wind up harming you. Sure, you might lose some weight, but at what cost? Ask yourself this: would you take some mystery pill that you knew nothing about if someone promised it would make your hair shiny? Probably not. There is something about weight loss that can make some women desperate and maybe even a little wacky. Unless you have some medical reason to lose a huge amount of weight through any means possible (in which case you should be doing so under medical supervision anyhow) you should strive to lose weight the old fashioned way...by decreasing your caloric intake while increasing your physical activity. This is the sure-fire way to lose weight while also giving yourself the best chance of keeping the weight off. Diet aids are rarely a permanent solution because once you stop indulging in the diet aids then you start to gain the weight back. If you are absolutely resolute on taking a diet pill or some type of weight loss supplement then do so after having consulted with a physician. Most doctors will probably try to talk you out of using a diet pill – and rightfully so – but they may be able to steer you toward the least dangerous diet aid.

SLEEP IS IMPORTANT

You can't scrimp on sleep for too long. Many women are familiar with sleep deprivation. If you have ever had a baby, went to college, or just partied late into the night you're familiar with how your body feels after not having had enough sleep. You may drag around a bit the next day, but you can recover relatively nicely as long as you're able to catch up on the sleep over the next couple of days. Your body isn't designed to not get sufficient sleep over a long period of time, though. If you consistently scrimp on sleep – whether out of necessity or from your own choice – you will notice that you are more prone to illness,



you can't think as well, and you may also find that you encounter mood swings a lot more than you would have if you had sufficient sleep. Simply put, your body needs sleep. If you deprive your body of the rest it needs, then your body will not operate at its best. Even if you are able to take the time to rest without sleeping that's only going to tide you over for so long. For example, if you work two jobs that force you to work long hours you might scrimp on your sleep because you have no other choice, but as the days go on you will undoubtedly notice that you are unable to function as well as you were able to before you started missing out on sleep. Even if you have the entire weekend to sleep, you still need consistent sleep in order to function at your best. What is the optimum amount of sleep that you should get? Most people say that eight hours is the ideal amount of sleep to get every night, but some people need more while others need less. The trick is to not deviate from the amount of sleep that you know you need in order to

function. If you find that seven hours has always been sufficient then make that your goal...to get seven hours of *consistent* sleep every night. If you have found that eight hours just doesn't cut it, and you're a wreck without ten hours every night then aim for that. You need to pay attention to your body when it comes to sleeping because sleep deprivation and good health simply do not go hand in hand.

Your body panics when deprived of sleep. Sleep deprivation studies show that people's moods start to swing wildly when they are deprived of sleep. People can actually hallucinate when they haven't slept, and some people have likened sleep deprivation to being on a drug. In less dramatic instances, sleep deprivation can make you less aware of your surroundings. You might not react to things as quickly as you normally would (such as when driving) and you might also find that you get a lot more grumpy than you would have been if you had enjoyed a full night's sleep. Some studies have shown that being perpetually sleep-deprived can make it harder to lose weight. It boils down to this: your body needs sleep, and if you don't get the sleep you need then your body will definitely react. Your body uses sleep as a way to rejuvenate and to repair anything that needs to be repaired while also warding off any viruses or germs that might be floating around in your body. It's no wonder your body starts to panic when deprived of sleep.

Women get deprived of sleep a lot. As a woman you probably get the least amount of sleep in your household (if there are people living with you). There is an old joke that when a woman says she's going to sleep she then heads off and does various chores that last for about an hour and a half before collapsing into bed whereas the man of the household says he's going to sleep and then he just goes to sleep. Women who are in families generally try to make sure that the children in the household are getting enough sleep, but when it comes to their own sleep they figure that they can get away with less. A common problem is that the only time many women get to themselves is late at night when everyone

else has gone to bed, so women will sacrifice sleep in order to get an hour or two of peace and quiet (or time to get things done, in some instances). Women who have had babies know that no matter how equal the marriage may be, it's usually the woman who is up with the baby especially if the woman is breastfeeding the baby and not utilizing bottles at all. In this instance there's simply no getting around sleep deprivation. Temporary periods of time fraught with sleep deprivation are one thing, but it's when it becomes a chronic habit is when you need to worry about the effect it is having on your body. Take into consideration the fact that you're making it even harder for your body to function than it already is, and then decide if maybe your two hours of peace and quiet might be condensed to half an hour so you can get some decent sleep. Your body will thank you.

VICES

Do you smoke? Why, oh why, would anyone smoke nowadays with all the proof that it can dramatically increase your chances for cancer and all sorts of other



nasty elements? The answer is because some people begin smoking at an early age – when they think they're invincible – and then quickly become addicted and dependent upon the nicotine and other substances found in cigarettes. Other women feel as though there is a

distinct advantage to smoking because it suppresses their appetite, and therefore they feel as though the risk of cancers and other illnesses is a fair trade off for a svelte figure. Whatever your reasoning for smoking cigarettes (or whatever else it is you might smoke) you should know that it can also increase your risk of

serious medical problems when your smoking is in conjunction with certain medications. For example, if you smoke cigarettes while using certain types of birth control pills you are increasing your chances of all sorts of big problems. The best solution to this whole problem is simple: quit smoking. It's a seemingly simple solution, but quitting isn't really all that easy for most women. With cigarettes, you become not only physically dependent but you can also become habitually addicted to them. So you may not have big problems with getting over the nicotine addiction, but if you have always smoked a cigarette after dinner you might find that you have a hard time *not* smoking after a big meal. There are plenty of options for quitting smoking, and many women find that consulting a doctor is a great idea when making the decision to quit because there are some helpful methods that doctors can give you. If you're wondering when the best time to quit smoking is, then the answer is this: What are you waiting for? Quitting smoking is one of the biggest things you can do in order to improve your health in addition to improving the health of the people who surround you. Your spouse, your kids, and even your pets will benefit from your quitting smoking, so use this as the motivation you need to quit.

Do you drink alcohol? It's pretty annoying how you can hear a conflicting medical view regarding alcohol consumption because you never really know who to trust. Is a glass of red wine after dinner okay? Will a weekend of indulging in beer and martinis increase the odds of your losing a couple years off your lifespan? Most doctors will agree that the consumption of alcohol – as long as it is not excessive and is not a daily habit – is nothing to be too concerned about. Remember that alcohol often has a high amount of calories, so you may want to take care at how much you drink from a diet perspective. Also, you should pay attention to make sure you don't find yourself becoming dependent on alcohol in order to loosen up or even get through the day. Alcohol consumption can be a slippery slope...what starts out as an occasional drink in social situations might eventually evolve into something more dangerous. Some experts believe that there is actually an alcoholism trait that some parents pass on to their children

through genetic makeup, and this is something you should be concerned about if either one of your parents or grandparents had problems with alcoholism. You need to take a look at the bigger picture and decide if indulging in alcohol is in your best interests with regard to your health, or if maybe it might be best to simply abstain. If you have questions about what's best for your particular situation then you should speak to your doctor. Don't just assume that you need to abstain completely from drinking any alcohol because someone in your family has a drinking problem. You may be able to handle it much better than the other person.

Coffee in excess is bad. This goes for any caffeinated drink, at least the ones that you drink in abundance throughout the day. Studies have shown that some caffeine consumption may temporarily boost your cognitive sharpness, allowing you to think quicker and more clearly. This doesn't last for a long period of time, however, and you may find yourself relying on caffeine more and more in order to wake up in the morning and then to stay awake throughout the day. In moderation caffeine isn't really too much of an issue, but when you start relying on caffeine too much then it can have negative health effects as well as an addictive effect. Your body and mind may start to rely on the caffeine to keep going, and that means you will either wind up steadily increasing your caffeine intake in order to keep up with your body's demands, or instead you will need to quit caffeine to lose your dependency. Quitting will come with withdrawal symptoms, just like with any other chemical substance with which you become addicted. You might experience headaches, moodiness, and any other symptoms characteristic of withdrawals, but it depends largely upon your level of physical dependency and the rate at which you decide to quit. In other words, quitting "cold turkey" will result in a harder withdrawal period than quitting slowly. However you choose to limit your caffeine intake – or to quit it entirely – you will probably have to deal with a little bit of discomfort. The end result will certainly be worth it, however, because you'll no longer need to rely on caffeine to get going.

When you think of good health as a head-to-toe aspiration you begin to realize that every single part of your body has an influence on the other parts of your body. You can't just decide that you're going to get your back healthy yet ignore your kidneys, for example. It doesn't work that way. Think of your body as an all-inclusive system that can't work at its finest unless everything is working beautifully. This frame of mind can help you to see that when it comes to your health, all the parts matter.

HEALTH FOR YOUR STAGE OF LIFE

Just like men and women's health is different, there is also a variation in women of different ages. As women age, there are interesting things that happen in their bodies: pregnancy, menopause, and other occurrences can have a huge effect on your health. Although not every twenty year old is in the same health as other twenty year olds just as every fifty year old has varying health needs and concerns, there are some generalizations when it comes to health within certain age ranges that usually pertain to the majority of women within the age range described.

TWENTYSOMETHING

You're not invincible. You're probably tired of hearing this from people older than you, and while you may acknowledge it on an intellectual level you may be doing things that are contrary to this principal. Women in their twenties sometimes drink like there is no tomorrow, smoke as if they were chimneys, and hop into bed as though their partner was the last man on earth. Some psychologists call this tendency the "Personal Fable," which means that younger people feel as though there is nothing that can stop them and bad things will certainly not happen to them. Here is the bummer, Twentysomething: It's just not

true. All that drinking will eventually harm your body, not to mention put you in bad situations where you may do things you may not do sober. The smoking that doesn't seem to be affecting your health right now will catch up with you rather quickly, especially if this is the decade you happen to get addicted to nicotine. Sleeping around with a variety of men is an obvious issue, and even if you are using protection every single time, there is no guarantee that the protection will do its job. Essentially, you're rolling the dice with every man you sleep with. Of course, not every twenty year old woman does all these things. Some women in their twenties are already married with children. Just be sure to realize the boundaries of your body, and know that the things you do now will have a lasting effect on your health for years to come, no matter how invincible you feel right now.

Start a trend of good health now as a basis for life. You may not feel like going to the gym or picking the healthiest foods to eat right now, but the truth of the matter is that this is the absolute best time to get into the habit of doing so. Think about it; if you start a steady habit of exercising on a regular basis while also avoiding bad foods then you are setting the stage to be healthy as your age advances. There are plenty of women who are now in their forties and fifties who truly wish they would have began healthy habits back in their twenties because perhaps they would enjoy better health at the age they are now. Some women don't even start living healthy lifestyles until they are far into middle age! Think of healthy living now as an investment. It doesn't take much at this stage of life to get healthy, but the longer you wait the more difficult it gets. You can virtually guarantee that the choice you make now to get and stay healthy will be one that you will always be happy about. Trust this: there aren't many choices you can make in your twenties that you can be absolutely sure will yield great results, but this is one of them.

Enjoy your health at this stage of life. How annoying is it when older women tell you that you should really enjoy your youth while you have it? For most

twentysomething women, it seems like a trite thing to say, but what you may not realize is that it's absolutely true. Generally, the younger you are, the more easily you will recover from infections and illnesses. You will probably be more energetic and limber, and you won't pop and creak every time you go from a sitting to a standing position. The thing you may not realize is that, for many women, these things are actually right around the corner. You'll start to notice changes in your body and health as early as your late twenties or early thirties. You can avoid or delay some of these changes by being as healthy as possible now that you are in your twenties, but now is definitely the time to backpack across Europe or go bungee-jumping. It isn't that older women don't do these things, but your health in your twenties makes it much easier to tackle big things than you would in your later years. Of course, there are plenty of women in their forties and fifties who are actually healthier and more fit than some women in their twenties, but in general these ideas ring true.

THIRTYSOMETHING

There are special health concerns with pregnancy. Many women decide that their thirties are the ideal time to have babies, although some women begin earlier and other women begin later. The thirties seem to be a relatively common decade for women to jump into motherhood, and therefore there are certain health concerns that women at this age should be aware of before getting pregnant. One thing to take into consideration is that you should try your best to get as healthy as possible *before* getting pregnant, because this will provide a greater chance of your pregnancy being as smooth as possible (keep in mind that there is no guaranteed method to ensure a smooth pregnancy because you never really know what is going to happen, but whenever you can get the cards stacked in your favor it's a good thing). Here are a few things you should try to do before getting pregnant:

- Have a preconception check-up with your doctor.

- Get to – or near – your ideal weight.
- Wean off any prescription drugs that aren't okay during pregnancy (this should be done in conjunction with your doctor's advice...never stop taking a prescribed medication without consulting with your doctor beforehand).
- Stop smoking or drinking.
- Establish a regular exercise regimen far in advance.
- Start taking prenatal vitamins or multi-vitamins with sufficient folic acid before attempting to get pregnant.

Doing these things will set you up with a great foundation for a healthy pregnancy. You should also keep in mind that at age thirty-five you are considered to be of an advanced maternal age, and this means that you will be subject to other tests and concerns that women younger than you may not have to deal with. For example, your doctor will probably suggest an amniocentesis, which involves long needles and scary risks. Remember that you aren't required to submit to risky tests that are considered by your doctor to be optional, and you should make the decision based on what you and your partner are comfortable with for your pregnancy.

Birth control may have to change here. If you are like some women, you have been on birth control pills since you first started having sex, probably in your late teens or early twenties. What some doctors don't tell you when you first start taking the pill, however, is that most women cannot stay on the pill continually for decades. Eventually your body is simply going to start freaking out, for lack of a better term. Some women find that their emotions start to go haywire while other women have a physical reaction to the pills. It may be surprising at first, especially if you have been on the pill for a long time without incident and if you don't realize that it's the pills that are doing it to you. Keep in mind that if you have been taking your pills religiously for years and then start to feel a little like you can't control your emotions that it may actually be your body saying, "Enough

with these birth control pills...I can't take it anymore!" The good news is that there are plenty of other forms of birth control to choose from, and it may just be a case of having to take you down to a lower dose of birth control pills in order to get you functioning at your optimum level again. Just be sure to keep this in mind so you don't think you're going insane if all of a sudden you feel as though you're riding an emotional rollercoaster.

Are the signs of aging freaking you out? The thirties are an interesting age to be for a woman. At this point, a woman's body is usually starting to exhibit some signs of aging, such as gray hairs, wrinkles, and a slowing down of the metabolism. If this sounds familiar then there are some things that you should know with regard to aging and your health. First of all, know that aging is inevitable and there is no surgery or procedure that can be done to freeze you in time so you don't age anymore. You should also make the bold attempt of accepting the aging process and realizing that you're still a beautiful and vibrant woman. This isn't easy for every woman, but it will serve you well if you can embrace this frame of mind. The reason why you should try to do this is twofold: The better your mental health is, the better your physical health is in many cases, and also because there are some procedures offered by plastic surgeons and other medical professionals that may make you look younger but are detrimental to your health. How much are you willing to risk in order to feel pretty? Wouldn't it be easier to simply try to accept who you are instead of going under the knife in an attempt to look younger?

FORTYSOMETHING

Uh-oh, here comes perimenopause. Perimenopause is the time when your



body starts to prepare for menopause, but you aren't actually in the active stages of menopause yet. How do you know if you are in perimenopause? Some tell-tale signs include hair growing where it never has before (such as on your chin or neck...this is referring to dark, thick hair that you will probably promptly attack with tweezers), a slowing in your metabolism, and a drop in sexual desire. Many women don't even really take notice when they enter into this stage of life because usually the signs are relatively subtle or can be chalked up to something else. If you pay

attention to your body, however, you will probably notice the changes and might even be a little shocked that you're already approaching menopause. You should know that this does not have to be a highly annoying part of your life, and that things like regular exercise and a healthy diet can help you to not be adversely affected by the symptoms of perimenopause. If you have concerns you should talk to your doctor, and remember that if highly dramatic things start happening to your body this may be a sign of something else completely and you should get it checked out by a doctor.

All done with babies? Although there are some women who just start having babies in their forties, the majority of women have already had children and may be thinking about stopping for good. If you are married then you need to have the talk with your husband as to which one of you will do the honors of getting “fixed” if you decide on a permanent medical solution to preventing pregnancy. Some men get squeamish at the thought of having a vasectomy, but you should remind your husband that while a vasectomy is a quick outpatient procedure, getting your tubes tied (tubal ligation) is major abdominal surgery and will take you much longer to recover while also carrying with it much more risk. There are other methods to ensure you don’t get pregnant again...you can go for abstinence, but if you’re married that probably won’t go over well with your husband. You may want to look for alternative means of birth control, but since none of them are one hundred percent effective there is always the underlying possibility that you might get pregnant and that’s a scary possibility for a woman in her forties who has decided that her child-bearing days are over. Have a talk with your doctor to decide what the best route is for you to make sure that you don’t wind up pregnant after you’ve decided that you’re all done.

They say you’re at your sexual peak here. There are plenty of instances in movies and on television of female characters in their forties who have insatiable sexual appetites. The assumption is that women of this age are at their sexual prime, and for some women this is actually quite true. It may be a result of a hormonal shift, or perhaps it has more to do with women of this age being more sure of themselves than they ever have been before. For whatever reason, don’t be surprised if you find yourself feeling quite amorous at this age. There are a couple of things to keep in mind on this topic when it comes to your health. Foremost is that just because you aren’t in your twenties anymore does not mean that you can’t be exposed to sexually transmitted diseases or get pregnant (unless you have had surgery to prevent pregnancy). Unless you are in a monogamous relationship with a trusted partner then there is always the possibility for something unpleasant coming from a sexual encounter. Don’t think

that your age makes you immune, or that the men your age would surely tell you if they had an STD, because men in their forties are no more eager to discuss their STDs than men in their twenties or thirties. The second important thing to remember with regard to your health is that it is not necessarily indicative of something wrong if you don't hit your so-called sexual prime here because not every woman does. If you are concerned about your lack of desire then visit the doctor to rule out any underlying problems that may be causing you to miss out on your peak.

FIFTYSOMETHING

Mammograms aren't fun, but they're smart. Make no mistake about it...there is nothing fun about getting your breast squeezed between two plates while the technician fumbles with the controls to capture the image inside your breast. Are mammograms fun? No. Are mammograms a good idea? Yes! There are some things that you simply cannot discover during a breast self-exam. Mammograms can find all sorts of things that can be cause for alarm. As you progress in age so does your chance of developing breast cancer, and that's why it is so incredibly important that you get mammograms as recommended by your doctor. Remember that sometimes the best things come from a little discomfort (think about childbirth...that was certainly no picnic in the park but the results were amazing), and there is really something great about getting an "all clear" with regard to your breasts. Don't avoid this very necessary procedure because it can wind up saving your life.

You might be surprised at how mentally sharp you feel. This is certainly not to say that women in their fifties are supposed to be dimwits, but instead is to point out the fact that many women at this age have a much clearer vision of who they are and where they are going in life. With age comes wisdom, and many fifty year old women start to shed the whole concern for what other people think about them and don't worry so much about a few gray hairs or some extra

pounds. Since mental health is directly related to physical health, this can be a great time to be a woman. You can walk into a room and not worry about who is looking at you and what they may be thinking...basically you aren't twenty anymore, but it can be a great feeling. After all, a positive attitude does wonders for your physical well-being.

Ask before diving into hormone therapy. For many women in their fifties, the onset of menopause automatically meant that it was time to jump onto estrogen replacement therapy. It is supposed to lessen some of the more annoying symptoms that come along with menopause and was supposed to have other benefits as well. Research is now showing that taking estrogen might actually increase the odds for certain serious illnesses, and now it is not something that is automatically recommended for every single woman. The only way you can decide if this is the right idea for you is to talk to your doctor and weigh the pros and cons. Don't just accept what the doctor says without weighing both the benefits and the risks. Ask questions and do research on your own before making the decision.

SIXTYSOMETHING

It's never too late to get healthy. Even though you can join AARP and get the senior citizen discount at the movies it doesn't mean that you're too old to get healthy and fit. You do need to take care when starting up a new exercise program, but women of all ages are given this warning. When you are in your sixties, however, you may be prone to more injuries and may not have optimum balance and coordination (this is certainly not to say that all women of this age have issues like this because there are plenty of sixty year old women who are far more graceful than women half their age), so be sure to take things relatively slow and not push yourself too hard in the beginning. Don't be frightened to start something new! You're not too old to try weight training or aerobics classes. You're not past the age when you can try Pilates for the first time. Perhaps you

would like to try a dance class or something equally thrilling that you have always wanted to try. In other aspects of your health you may also want to try something new. Have you always wanted to try out vegetarianism? Do you want to try to quit drinking coffee every morning? Whatever it is you want to try in order to get healthy then go ahead and try it...just be sure to take it slowly and to get your doctor's okay before getting started.

Don't get overloaded on medications. This is usually the age when a lot of women start to notice a marked increase in the amount of medication they take, either because their doctors recommend the medication or because they make the decision to start taking supplements and herbal medications in an attempt to stay or get healthy. What you must remember for the benefit of your own health is that just because something is sold over the counter it does not mean that it will not have contraindications with the medicine your doctor prescribes. When your doctor asks you for a list of the medications you are currently taking you need to tell him or her absolutely everything, from the prescribed medicine for hypertension to the multivitamins you purchase at the grocery store. This is also not the time to jump on board with a bunch of hyped-up supplements that you see advertised late at night on television. Remember that there is no miracle drug that is going to make your memory completely sharp, there is no fantastic pill that will safely and effectively melt fat from your midsection while you sleep, and there is no incredible pill that will erase the wrinkles from your face. Perhaps these things sound like Godsend to you, but they might actually be something that will be to your physical detriment. Another thing to take into consideration is the idea that you should not readily agree to take every single medication your doctor suggests because if you do this you might eventually wind up taking a dozen pills or more a day. Before agreeing to take any new medication, ask a few questions about it:

- Why do you think I need this medication?
- What are the risks associated with this medication?

- Will any of the other medicines I take be a problem if I take this medication?
- How long will I be on this medication?
- What other options do I have besides taking this medication?

You're not being a pest by asking these questions. Instead, you are being your own health advocate, and that's an excellent idea. Any doctor who makes you feel silly about asking completely legitimate questions is a doctor who should be replaced with a different doctor who is not so medication-happy.

There may be noticeable declines at this age. Things start happening in your sixties that you may not necessarily be prepared for. You may start to notice that your hearing is not nearly as crisp as it once was, and maybe your eyesight is changing for the worse. This does not mean that everything in your body is going to crumble, and many women in their sixties do not even notice any such declines. The trick here is to pay attention to your body and to the status of your health. If you feel as though your eyesight might be getting worse then go get your eyes checked. If you feel like your hearing just isn't what it used to be then visit your doctor to get your ears checked. The reason why you want to stay on top of these things is obvious: If you are not functioning at full capacity then you need to know this and adjust accordingly. For health's sake, a woman in her sixties who cannot see as well as a decade ago should consider getting glasses (or a stronger prescription if she already has glasses) because otherwise she is going to get behind the wheel of a car and wind up in an accident. The same goes for hearing loss, because accidents can happen when you can't hear all the things that are going on around you. You also want to make sure that these changes aren't a result of something else, and seeing your doctor and having some tests run can rule out anything like that. Acknowledge any declines you notice – don't try to just ignore them – and then do the things you have to do in order to still live your life to your full potential.

SEVENTYSOMETHING AND BEYOND

Look for exercise classes designed for ladies your age. Just because you are seventy it does not mean that you shouldn't indulge in the fantastic benefits of exercising. You do need to be careful when taking an exercise class, especially if you haven't taken one in quite some time. This should not deter you from trying out a few different classes to see which one you enjoy the most and derive the most benefit from. You probably don't want to join up at a kickboxing class unless this is something you have been doing all your life, but consider finding a gym or aerobics studio that offers classes designed for mature women. You are bound to find something fun if you look around and do a little research. Examples include:

- Water aerobics classes, which are easier on your joints.
- Fit-sit classes, where you exercise while sitting in a chair
- Tai Chi classes, which are designed for people of all ages
- Dance classes specifically designed for older women

Plenty of gyms and aerobic studios recognize the need for senior citizen exercise classes and have answered the call with some great classes. Not only will these classes help you to stay healthy, but you may meet some new friends and have the added benefit of active socialization.

Better health means more independence. As you approach an older age you may be concerned about the level of independence you will be able to have. Most women do not care for the idea of relying on children and other relatives in their later years, and many women find the idea of living in an assisted living facility quite distasteful. One of the things you can do to ensure your independence as you age is to stay as healthy as possible. If you can avoid debilitating diseases, ailments, and injuries then there is really no reason that you can't maintain your living space as you have in years past (unless there is a

financial issue involved to where you can no longer afford to live on your own). Don't think that just because you are of advanced age it automatically means that you can't improve your health. There is always time to try to make your health better, whether you're seventy or seventeen.

There is plenty of more time for some ladies this age. Now is not the time to get fatalistic and start thinking that your life is over. Think of it this way...if you live to the age of ninety-something (which plenty of women do) then you still have twenty years of life to enjoy. Think about how much you can do in twenty years and how much you can see in that long span of time. For this reason, you should not stop trying to improve your health. The fact that you are in your seventies is simply not a valid excuse for not continually striving to be as fit as you can possibly be. You want to make sure that you are as healthy as possible no



matter what age you are, and if you do indeed live to see ninety or one hundred then you'll want to do it with the best health you can have. Don't think of these years as your time to wind down and stop striving for good health. Instead, think of it as a continuation of your quest for great health even as you continue to get older.

No matter what age you are, you should always try to be as healthy as possible. There is no magic age when it's an ideal time to get healthy, although the earlier you begin the more likely it will become a habit throughout your lifetime and much more beneficial to you overall. There is also no age that you can reach where there is simply no point in trying to be healthy, because this is a noble aspiration at any age.

DO THIS NOW TO GET HEALTHY

You might read through books about getting healthy and think to yourself, Okay, okay, enough with the witticisms and such...just tell me plain and simple what I need to do to get healthy right now. If that is what you are looking for, read on. You may be surprised at how easy it is to get healthy.

SOME THINGS ARE ALWAYS HEALTHY

Think about what your doctor is always telling you to do. There are things that almost every doctor will tell everyone because these things are generally regarded as healthy no matter what the circumstances are:

- Get exercise.
- Don't smoke.
- Don't drink a lot of alcohol.
- Don't take illegal drugs.
- Eat fruits and vegetables.
- Don't eat a bunch of fatty foods.
- Don't have unprotected sex.
- Keep your stress level low.
- Get enough sleep.

If you don't make any other changes in your life, at least take a look at the above list and change your life accordingly in order to follow the smart advice. Following these tips will inevitably make you healthier and will set your body up with the foundation it needs in order to ward off illness. When you peruse the above list you'll realize that the things mentioned are not all that hard to do; it's just a matter of making an effort.

What makes you feel your healthiest? Most people have some time in their lives when they have felt their healthiest, whether it's before having kids or maybe when playing sports in high school. You should try to remember at what point in your life did you feel the healthiest, and then figure out what was different about that time as opposed to right now. Did you weigh less then? Were you getting more exercise? Was there less stress in your life? If you can pinpoint the factors in the past that made you feel healthy and then incorporate them into your life in present day then you have a better chance of coming out of it as healthy – or nearly as healthy, or healthier – than you were back in your glory days. If there has never been a time in your life when you have felt particularly healthy then you may want to instead think back to a time when you felt the *least* healthy, and then try to avoid the same lifestyle as you had back then. When your health was lousy, what were the things you were doing in your life to perpetuate the lousy health? Did you smoke cigarettes? Were you staying up all night partying and then scrimping on sleep? Use this as a tool to make sure you never wind up back in the position of having the worst health of your life. Make it your goal to reach a point where you can honestly say that your health has never been better than it is right now.

KISS: Keep It Simple, Stupid. You don't have to join a gym in order to work out. You don't have to hire a nutritionist in order to eat right. You don't need to invest in expensive Feng Shui décor in order to make your room as conducive to a good night's sleep as possible. It's not a difficult task to get healthy. You can do simple things to get healthy that will be just as beneficial as the things you would hire someone else to tell you to do. If you have the money to hire people to do all the things mentioned – personal trainer, personal chef, et cetera – then go ahead and do it...just know that these things are certainly not necessary in order to get healthy. If you don't believe this, then think about those people who live on farms; many of them are extremely healthy and the reason for this is because they get physical exercise daily while also eating natural foods right off their own farms. There is no personal trainer there telling them how to exercise

and there is no nutritionist standing over their shoulders to tell them what to cook. They just keep it simple, and that's the way that they stay healthy. It's not so hard that you should be intimidated about the process.

STOP MAKING EXCUSES

If not now, then when? Think about yourself, only think of yourself a year ago. If you could go back a year and have a talk what would you say? Perhaps one of the biggest things you would suggest to your year-ago self would be to start taking better care of yourself. Every day that goes by is another day that you could have decided to get your health in order, and another missed opportunity if you don't take advantage of it. What are you waiting for? Are you awaiting some magical motivation, or perhaps even some sort of health scare that will shock you into improving your health? Now think about yourself a year from now. How do you think a conversation with year-from-now you would go if you started taking control of your health right now? What do you think the conversation would be like if you let another full year go by without doing a single thing to improve your health? You owe it to yourself to make this the day that you start to improve your health. Even the smallest changes can make a huge difference over the long term. In fact, there are some women who claim to have lost vast amounts of weight from small changes like not putting dressing on their salads or taking a walk around the block after dinner every night. Other subtle changes like one less cigarette every day can help you too (although it's far better to stop smoking altogether, but you undoubtedly already know that). If you are waiting for some motivation to start making the healthy changes you need to make then let your motivation be the fact that you can be much healthier in a year than you are right now if you only make some changes starting today. You don't need a fancy program or expensive equipment in order to improve your health; you just need motivation.

Take control of your health. You are the person who is responsible for your own health. If someone is going to take control of your health, it has to be you. It doesn't matter if someone close to you decides that he or she is going to get you healthy once and for all, because if your heart isn't in it then it's not going to stick. It can be helpful to have someone assisting you in your quest to get healthy, and it's always nice to know that someone cares enough about you in order to take interest in your health. On the other hand, if you don't care so much about your health then you may start to resent anyone who is trying to get you healthy. It's a double edged sword, really, and the only way to avoid it is to take control of everything yourself. You should be the one to make the decisions about your health, but more importantly you should be the person who decides that the time has come to get healthy. Do you need motivation to take control of your health? Just know that nobody else can make the decision for you, so it's up to you. It doesn't matter what the status of your health is...what matters is you taking control of your health *right now* instead of putting it off another day.

Your family's influence only goes so far. Maybe you grew up with parents who were overweight, and so you just naturally assumed that you would be overweight your whole life...you figured it was in your genes, so why even fight it? The truth of the matter is that most people are overweight because of lifestyle, not because of some genetic predisposition. It's time that you got something through your head right now: you are not doomed to live like your parents. You cannot use that as an excuse, at least not as a valid one. Many women use this excuse for other bad habits too, such as smoking, drinking, and other vices. They claim that they witnessed their parents doing it, so they naturally assumed it was okay, and forevermore they are destined to repeat the pattern. Nothing could be further from the truth! Although it is true that parents are a huge influence on their children, there is simply no truth to the idea that you are destined to have the same bad health habits as your parents. You are your own person, whole and complete, and you make the decision whether or not to follow the bad example of the people around you. Don't blame your physical maladies

on someone else if they are nothing more than the result of poor health habits. It's time to take control of your health, and to take responsibility for the things you do.

GIVE UP THE HYPOCHONDRIAC TENDENCIES

Sometimes a sneeze is just a sneeze. Some women love drama. Do you know that the term “hysterical” is a feminine word? That’s why it sounds so similar to “hysterectomy.” The word was invented by doctors who were of the frame of mind that only women could be hysterical, and therefore it made perfect sense to dub the term with a word that had a root base within femininity. Although not all women are hysterical and histrionic, it’s true that there are some women out there who are absolutely convinced that there must be *something* wrong with them, even if they can’t put their finger on it. Of course, there are men like this too, but women must take care not to get paranoid when it comes to their health if there is no real reason to panic. If you spend more time at your doctor’s office than you do grocery shopping, there’s a problem. This is assuming, of course, that there is not something seriously wrong with you...if you are that sick then you would probably be hospitalized, wouldn’t you? If you find that every cough, sneeze, ache, or pain makes you immediately jump to the conclusion that you are going to die from some exotic disease then you may indeed fall into the category of hypochondriac behavior. There is no shame in asking your doctor, “Doctor, tell me the truth. Do you think I’m a hypochondriac?” Your doctor may actually welcome this discussion because it opens up the lines of communication to talk about something that may be a real problem for you. It’s true that you may not be a hypochondriac in the clinical sense – there are certain things you must do for a certain amount of time before you can actually qualify for a diagnosis of something like this – but it may indeed be that you spend far too much time worrying about the diseases and illnesses that you *might* contract instead of worrying about living life right now. If this sounds like you then you need to figure out a way to stop fretting about what might happen

and start thinking about how you can improve your health now so you never have to deal with those exotic diseases that you are so afraid of. After all, the best defense is a good offense, right?

On the other hand, don't ignore illness. The flip side to having hypochondriac tendencies is that you may just choose to ignore every sign of illness you encounter, even if you know that the culmination of your symptoms potentially point to something bigger. Some women ignore illness because they simply don't have the time to deal with it, while other women ignore it because they are too scared that it may be indicative of a bigger problem and they figure they are better off just not knowing. It's usually okay to ignore an occasional cold or stomach ache, but when these things don't go away or are coupled with other alarming symptoms then it's time to head to the doctor to get checked out. There aren't documented instances when ignoring a major medical problem made it magically disappear. Pay attention to your body and don't ignore it when it's trying to tell you something.

Pay attention to your family's medical history. The reason why it's important to know about your family's medical history is because there are certain diseases and ailments that can be passed on from one person to another in their genes. You may not actually inherit a disease, but having family members who have it may give you a predisposition to it. That's why doctors will ask you whether people in your immediate family have diabetes, heart disease, and other illnesses. If you don't know your family's medical history then make a point of finding out. You may discover something that you didn't know that might push you to get



healthier...maybe you didn't realize that the majority of your father's family suffers from Type II Diabetes, and the realization of that might be enough to get you to start taking your health seriously. If you do not have access to your family's health history, either because you are adopted, or you don't speak with your family, or everyone in your family has passed away, then you can always consult with a genetic counselor if there comes an instance when you simply have to know (such as before deciding to have a baby or some other instance). One thing is for sure: you should not ignore your family's medical history because your older relatives may be a glimpse of what is in store for you. You can avoid certain ailments with healthy living, but some conditions are pervasive regardless of your lifestyle.

Do you really want to get healthy? How long will you spend reading about the process of getting healthy before you actually take notice and do something about it? Here is what you should do right now:

- Go to your kitchen and immediately throw out any foods or drinks that are bad for you.
- Take a deep breath and relax.
- Go take a walk around the block for a little exercise.

When you have completed these tasks you're ready to read more about the other things you need to do to get healthy.

THE SUPERWOMAN SYNDROME

Although not all women have this issue, it is definitely a prevalent one among most women: the tendency to take on every task and to prove that you can handle it all. Perhaps this stems from years of men thinking that women were frail and inept, and now women want to prove that this is far from the truth. Or maybe it's because most women find themselves doing the bulk of domestic

duties while still holding down a job. For whatever reason, women must take care not to bite off more than they can chew because your body will react if you try to do too much.

TOO MUCH IS BAD

Very few people can pull off a full schedule all the time. Everyone has that one friend – that one *perfect* friend –who seems to be able to take care of everything and everyone and still look fabulous. It is almost as if that person enjoys a full schedule and wouldn't have it any other way. You can never really tell if that is actually the case, or if instead this person is anguished inside because she can't get a moment to herself. It's true that there are some ever-energetic folks who can't seem to get enough to do, but most people who are over-scheduled aren't very happy about it. You need to realize that you need time off once in a while, if for nothing else then you sorely need it for your health's sake. Some people just don't understand that there is a direct correlation between your stress level and your health. You can't have a full schedule all the time with plenty of work, school, kids, volunteering, housework, and whatever else consumes your day without some breaks once in a while (unless, of course, this is just the thing that makes you happy). Sometimes women have no choice but to burn the candle at both ends because there is no one else there to work, take care of the house, and do all the other things that need to be done in order to keep things going. Women like this must make a concerted effort to find ways to slow down, even though it's not an easy task. If you are fortunate enough to be a woman who does not necessarily have to take care of all the things you take care of, but you just do it because you think you can, or worse, you're afraid that someone else might not do as well of a job as you do, then it's time to reevaluate things. Stop taking on more tasks. Delegate some tasks out to other people. If you give this a try and find that you are miserable then you can always go back to being Superwoman, but odds are you'll enjoy not being so busy.



Stress levels are a real concern.

The effects of stress on the body are amazing. Have you ever told a friend that he or she looks awful and his or her response was, "I know...I'm so stressed out." Stress will eventually take on a physical manifestation if left unchecked. The people around

you will be able to tell that you are embroiled in stress because after a while there is simply no hiding it. Stress can make you break out with a nasty bout of acne, it can make you have dark circles under your eyes, and you might start to gain weight as a result of stress (some women actually lose weight instead of gaining weight when stressed out). In addition, you might lose sleep and be unable to concentrate on your daily tasks. The effects of stress on your body are a whole different ballgame. When your stress level is elevated your body will produce more cortisol in reaction to it. Cortisol is a hormone that comes from the adrenal gland, and so that means that your body is taxing your adrenal gland and pumping your body full of hormones that can eventually result in medical problems. A certain amount of cortisol in your system is normal, but constant supply of this hormone in the amounts your body produces when you are stressed out is not good. In other words, spending your time steeping in stress on a constant basis is bad for your health. If you thought high levels of stress only resulted in a few sleepless nights, think again. You have to remember that your mind and your body are part of a bigger system, and therefore your body will always react to what your mind is doing. If you don't believe this, then try a small experiment: You will want to sit in one spot for this entire exercise. Spend a few minutes relaxing and thinking about serene and calm things, and then check your heart rate. Next, take a few minutes to think about the things in your

life that stress you out, such as bills, work, school, or anything else that is on your mind and makes you feel a anxious. Once you have spent a few moments thinking about the stress in your life, check your heart rate again. In the vast majority of cases your heart rate will be significantly higher when you think about stressful things than it was when you were pondering calm and serene things. You'll notice that you didn't necessarily change anything with your body...you didn't get up from your sitting position so it wasn't physical activity that elevated your heart rate. Instead, it was simply the *mere thought* of stressful things that got your heart pumping faster. Now that you know that the mere thought of stress can have physiological effects on your body, imagine what constant and actual stress does to your health.

Figure out what you can say no to. Superwoman has a problem: she doesn't know how to say no. Sometimes women won't say no to new projects and other things because they don't want to offend the asker. Other times women are so worried that they will be thought of in a poor light for saying no that they instead say yes. Of course, there are some women who just seem to think that they can actually do everything, so what is the harm in taking on another project? Here is a good test as to whether you should decline an offer to take on another project: when you are initially approached to take on the project, is your first inclination to think to yourself, Oh dear, how do I say no to this without getting into trouble/hurting someone's feelings/losing my job? If that is the first thing that pops into your head then it is a great indication that you shouldn't be taking anything else on right now. It's a good idea to follow your first instinct with things like this, especially if you are already feeling a little stressed out to begin with. If you have real issues with saying no (in other words, if the thought of telling someone no makes you really nervous) then maybe you should practice with the people close to you. Try this: the next time your kids ask you to do something that you really don't have time to do, or if your husband asks you for something that you can't pull off, gently tell them you can't do it. Once you learn how to say no to the people close to you then you can move on to declining offers from other

people. If you find that the opposite is the problem...that is, that you have no problem saying no to other people but saying no to your family is torture...then start with other people and work your way to your loved ones. Remember that saying no to something when you truly don't have the time to do it does not make you a bad person, or any less of a mother or wife. If anything, it makes you a better person because you aren't packed to the gills with things to do. Wouldn't it be great to have a little extra time on your hands? How much more efficient would that make you? If you have any hopes of keeping your stress level down then you need to learn how to say no.

RECOGNIZE YOUR TENDENCIES

“That’s just how I am.” If you are the kind of woman who burns the candle at both ends then you have probably had to defend yourself to people who tell you that you need to relax a little. Maybe you justify things by telling people that you enjoy being busy and that’s just the way you like your life to be: full of activities and responsibilities. Have you ever stopped to think, however, if this is actually a true statement, or instead is something that you say to get people off your back? Sometimes women can tell people something enough that it actually becomes true to them...in other words, if you tell people that you like to be busy enough times then eventually you start to actually believe it yourself. Is it actually true that you prefer being busy? If you take the time to think about it you may actually discover that you *don't* like being so incredibly busy and you don't really like having such a high stress level all the time. If you aren't sure, then think of it this way: what if you could get rid of a quarter of the things you have to do...would you be happier, or would you be bored out of your mind? Chances are that you would enjoy having a little more time to relax and spend time doing something other than obligatory projects. Of course, there are some women who would go a little crazy without having their hands in everything, and if that is *truly* the way that they are then that's fine. If you are like most women, however, when you tell people that being busy is your favorite way to be, you're actually just making an

excuse for your hectic life and not necessarily telling the truth. How can you hope to be healthy if you are constantly pushing your body and mind beyond what you should?

Is it by choice, or because it's expected of you? Some women fill up their schedules because they think that's what they're supposed to do. Other women do it because they feel as though they might lose their identity if they don't have a ton of stuff to do. There are other women still, however, who really don't have much of a choice about being busy. Single moms, for example, might find themselves having to work full time while taking care of their kids all by themselves. Some single moms have to take on two or three jobs just to make ends meet, and some single moms attend school on top of everything else they need to do. It isn't only single moms who invite stress into their lives out of necessity. Some women find that they have to care for an ailing spouse or parent while also handling all the other necessities of life. In these instances, it is all too easy to allow health to take a back seat to everything else. These women trudge through everything regardless of illness or fatigue, and usually this means that it takes longer to get over any illness...or the illness winds up getting worse before it gets better. If you are a woman who is in this type of situation to where you find yourself stressed out but with nowhere to turn for help, you should know that there are actually some things that you can do. For example, there are plenty of local organizations that supply respite care to caregivers and single moms. If you feel weird about asking for help, just stop for a moment and imagine how nice it would be to have an afternoon to yourself once in a while. You become a better caregiver/mother/worker when you actually have some time to rest once in a while. If people offer you help then you should seriously consider accepting.

Why not slow down? Really, why shouldn't you slow down? There are dozens of reasons why you *should* slow down, including your health and your mental stability. If you are one of the lucky women who can actually slow down the pace

of things – either by declining new requests or by outsourcing some of the things you usually do – then why in the world wouldn't you? Do you really think that the world will come crashing down if you don't personally handle everything at work, home, church, school, or wherever else you are involved? The truth of the matter is that there will always be someone who can do just as good of a job as you can, although you may need to be the one to train someone if they are going to do as well as you do. Have you ever actually made an effort to slow down? Your health will truly benefit from a slower pace in your life, so if your hope is to be healthier then there is so much more to it than exercising and eating right. The way that you deal with stress – and the amount of stress you allow into your life – play a major role in whether or not you are healthy. Keep this in mind when you try to decide whether or not to accept a new project someone asks you to do.

PEOPLE COUNTING ON YOU

Kids take a lot out of you. What an understatement it is to say that kids take a lot out of mothers. Consider the fact that pregnancy alone is an incredible process that can sometimes be to the mother's physical detriment, and then think about the years thereafter when mothers lose sleep in order to care for the children. When you add the additional stress of simply being a mother, then you begin to realize that the position of "Mom" is something that can actually hurt your overall health. Considering that most moms do their best to always put their own needs last, it is no surprise that mothers really need to make a concerted effort to pay attention to their own needs. Some moms actually feel guilty any time they put their own needs first because they feel as though their kids should always be the main priority and anything less makes them a bad mom. If you find yourself feeling this way often then you should realize that no kid wants a harried mom who waits on the kids hand and foot (okay, *most* kids don't want that), and would greatly prefer having a mom who is generally healthy and refreshed and who teaches them how to be relatively self-sufficient. This is certainly not to suggest that you ignore your kids, but instead that you don't fall

into the trap of going from mother to indentured servant. Every mother knows that it's tempting to forget about yourself and put everything into your children, but this is simply not good for your health, or for your sanity.

Women become caretakers frequently. Whether you are taking care of the kids, or an aging parent, or someone else who cannot care for themselves, it is most often women who wind up taking care of everyone. This is whether or not the woman is employed or in school...it all just seems to fall square on a woman's shoulders to care for the people around her. This is a noble calling, of course, but you need to make sure that while you care for everyone else you are also caring for yourself. If you look at official statistics, the difference between the number of women acting as caretakers and the number of men providing the same type of care to loved ones is dramatic. Women even seem to fall into the position of caretaker when the person being cared for is not even a blood relative (for example, a mother-in-law). If you have no choice but to become someone's caretaker (or if you do it eagerly by choice) then you need to pay attention to your own health as well. It's a tough task to care for someone else yet still care for yourself, and that is why you need to make a conscious effort to not always put everyone else ahead of you. Besides, if you get too tired or ill to take care of yourself, how in the world will you take care of everyone else? Take that into consideration before you start to feel guilty about taking time to yourself to build your energy back up.

Are you trying to prove something? While you are reflecting on why you allow yourself to get so exhausted sometimes, you should take into consideration the possibility that you might actually be doing everything to prove something to someone. Are you trying to show your husband that he made the right decision by marrying such a strong woman? Are you trying to demonstrate to your daughter that women can indeed do everything? Are you attempting to change your parents' opinions that women cannot do very much in the world? It's important to recognize if you are running yourself ragged because of some innate

desire to prove something to someone or perhaps even to the world. Once you realize that you're taking on too many tasks and doing too many things just because you are trying to – essentially – impress someone, then that may give you the fuel you need to slow things down. You should also realize that some people will never change, regardless of what is presented to you. If your uncle has always said that women are worthless, yet he sees you juggling a job and a family with what appears to be the greatest of ease, he may maintain his chauvinistic stance regardless. Instead of trying to change the world and everyone in it, first concentrate on prioritizing your own life and making sure that you are getting the rest that you need in order to stay healthy. Change your health before you attempt to change the world.

Women are consistently exhausted and stressed out beyond belief, simply because many of life's responsibilities seem to land on women more often than men. It's that stress that can be extremely detrimental to women's bodies and seriously affect their health. Women feel no qualms about popping vitamins in an attempt to stay healthy, yet many feel an enormous amount of guilt any time they take some time to themselves (even though deep down they know that relaxation will actually enhance their health). You can indeed balance your work, your home life, and your social interests without stressing out and allowing your health to decline.

CONCLUSION

Women's health is different from men's health, but one thing does unify both men and women: the more effort you put into being healthy, the more your body will reward you with strength, stamina, and longevity. It's important to remember that you are solely responsible for your health. It doesn't matter if you have the best doctor, the most amazing personal trainer, and a fantastic nutritionist. These people are mere augmentations to your responsibility to your body. When it comes right down to it, nobody can make you healthy if you don't want to be healthy.

You also need to remember that even though the act of being a woman is innately exhausting, what with motherhood and all the other things that naturally fall upon women instead of men, you should still take the time to focus on your health. Sometimes it's difficult to take time for yourself, especially if doing so actually makes you feel guilty. Remember that the more refreshed you are, the more effectively you can handle everything life throws at you including illness and fatigue.

There is no excuse not to be concerned about your health. Now is the time to take control of your health. ...

.....*What are you waiting for?*



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