

Top Five Health Concerns of Women

Women have unique health needs, risks, and concerns, influenced by lifestyle, employment, genetics, and age. Heart disease, cancer, osteoporosis, depression, and autoimmune diseases are the most common health risks for women.¹ However, these risks are often overshadowed by concerns about weight, stress, sexual life, and body image in the younger years.

Health Concerns by Age. Health needs and concerns change as women progress through life. Dr. Nancy Goler, a Kaiser Permanente ob-gyn and medical director, states that the concerns of women range from stress, cancer scares, and sexual problems, to weight control, diet, and heart disease. Younger women are concerned about birth control, pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases. Weight management and diet become a focus for women in their 30s. Menopause and breast health become more important as their bodies change, especially when they start knowing women with these diagnoses. With age, health worries expand to colon cancer, hypertension, and stroke.²

1. **Weight Is a Hot Topic.** Women are most concerned about their weight, according to a recent survey by [Meredith Corp/NBC](#). The same study shows that women are more concerned about their physical image than their self-image—who they are inside.³ This explains the growing demand for cosmetic and bariatric surgeries. Activity and diet form the essential equation for weight reduction but stressful, over-programmed lives lead to decreased physical activity, unhealthy diets, and an attraction to quick fixes (surgery, laser, etc.).
2. **Stress Impacts Health.** Stress causes or contributes to many health issues. Careers, care of young children and aging parents, long hours, our 24/7 technology diet, and economic pressures of our society make stress levels very high. Working moms go from their busy jobs outside the home to demands of the household, often managing solo. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, about 40% of children are born to single mothers. Today, one in three children are being raised without a father and nearly half live below the poverty line.⁴ Stress from life pressures often results in headaches and tension in the shoulders and neck. Emotional concerns often reside in the abdomen and pelvis, the “emotional heart.” Stress management is a powerful tool for better health.
3. **Sex and Relationships.** Sex, relationships, and health issues



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with the breasts or reproductive areas affect most women but are often ignored when perhaps they should come first. Younger women want information about relationships, sexually transmitted infections, birth control, and their reproductive areas or breasts. Approximately half of sexually active people will be infected with an STI by age 25, from benign (e.g., human papilloma virus) to more serious infections.⁵ However, few have the courage to openly discuss their concerns and seek information. Pregnancy, breastfeeding, and child rearing become very important as women enter childbearing years. Infertility and problems with intercourse are common and a major issue for many women. Menopause brings many questions and concerns as the body changes. Bring

your sexual questions (that you feel you are too embarrassed to ask) to a trusted healthcare professional.

4. **Looking to Feel Better and Look Better.** Cosmetic surgery and laser treatments are growing businesses after the childbearing years as women seek a more attractive appearance. Liposuction, laser treatments, tummy tucks, and breast augmentations and reductions are becoming more common. Gastric and bariatric surgeries are becoming more prevalent. Stress, commitments, and limited energy often drive busy women to the surgical route, which may yield instant results. Postoperative pain and recovery with these procedures are often underestimated. Regardless of which route is chosen, self-discipline with attention to exercise and diet are essential to continue feeling well. Holistic approaches may avoid surgeries altogether or facilitate healing after procedures.
5. **Breast Cancer Scare.** Even though breast cancer is the most common cancer in women, the prognosis is very good with early detection. Fear of breast cancer rises when women know others with this diagnosis. Although genetic predisposition and environmental toxins are a concern, breast cancer has significant lifestyle factors that can be controlled. Stress negatively impacts health and the sympathetic nervous system has been shown to promote the body's acceptance and spread of cancer.⁶ Studies have also correlated prolonged bra wear and bra tightness with breast cancer risk.⁷ Although the claims of the connection between bra wear and breast cancer have been disputed, proper bra wear and self-care of the breasts can greatly increase breast health.

Back to Basics—Fighting the Big Health Risks. Heart disease, cancer, stroke, osteoporosis, and other health issues emerge with aging. Stress management, diet, exercise, and healthy living are women's biggest weapons to fight the diseases that they face in their later years. Studies indicate that stress, poor diet, and inactivity can be major contributors to heart disease, cancer, and strokes, the three leading causes of death in women.⁸ Osteoporosis can be prevented or minimized with proper diet and activity. Focus on stress reduction, a good diet, and activity to be healthy and stay healthy.

Heart disease is the leading killer of women but this risk is often ignored. The earlier that healthier behaviors are adapted, the lower the overall risk for heart disease or strokes. Women can reduce their risk of heart disease by modifying lifestyles to include exercise, stress management, and a healthy diet.¹

How Do You Start? Start with a good night's sleep! Then, ask yourself, what brings you energy, joy, or makes you laugh? With those answers, make time for those things regularly. Being rested and feeling positive energy will give you the motivation to become healthier. You probably already know how to be healthy—you need the energy and motivation to do it! If you don't know what these things are anymore, start small to find them—and build from there. A good therapist, personal trainer, or even a friend can help you get into balance and move forward.

Many women are now seeking complementary and alternative healthcare after becoming dismayed with the Western medical approach and fears of hormone therapy. Holistic approaches effectively treat many women's health concerns, from sore shoulders to breast issues or back pain to pelvic problems. Find a therapist with knowledge, experience, and compassion with women's health.

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