

HEALTH TIPS FOR WOMEN | EVERY **MAN**

Your parents were right, of course. Eat your fruits and vegetables. Go run around. Make friends. Stay busy. However, if you still don't trust that mom and dad knew it all, here's guidance from EVMS experts to lead a healthier life. After all, it's time. May is women's health month and June is men's health month.



SCREENING TIME

Last year, a U.S. Public Health Service task force recommended a controversial change to routine breast cancer-screening guidelines. The group now advises screening not begin until age 50 when the longstanding recommendation was to begin at 40. Eric Feliberti, MD, Assistant Professor of Surgery, understands why the recommendation changed; the incidence of breast cancer during that decade is relatively low. However, he still suggests women start being screened at 40.

“We see in practice every day a good number of women, particularly African-American women, who don’t have any symptoms and are diagnosed because of getting a screening mammogram,” he says.

Discuss the issue with your doctor to be sure you understand the risks and benefits of screening before 50. “The downside to screening is it may lead to unnecessary tests and even biopsies that turn out negative and have a cost and cause anxiety,” Dr. Feliberti says. Some consider genetic screening that should be reserved for women who have a first-degree relative — mother or sister — who developed premenopausal breast cancer or ovarian cancer. “Breast cancer can be scary and intimidating to most women,” Dr. Feliberti adds. “The best thing they can do is stay informed through their doctors. The more they know, hopefully the less anxiety they’ll have.”



BABY GRAND

Fifty percent of pregnancies are unplanned. And the best predictor of a pregnancy’s outcome is the mother’s health at conception, says Christine Matson, MD, Professor and Chair of EVMS Family Medicine and the Glenn R. Mitchell Chair in Generalist Medicine. So that means if you are of reproductive age and not using effective birth control, any doctor’s visit should be considered a pre-pregnancy visit.

Smoking and obesity, Dr. Matson says, are the leading causes of premature births. Obesity also is a leading cause of maternal deaths at delivery, as well as a risk for increased likelihood of a cesarean section. If you are overweight or obese, Dr. Matson says that planning to become pregnant should provide additional motivation to start exercising, eat healthfully and take folic acid, a supplement that reduces the risk of birth defects.

Need further incentive? Consider this: Obesity begins in the womb. If you are obese while pregnant, your child is more likely to become an obese adult.

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The Boxer Rebellion



Okay, let’s get this out of the way. There are no good studies about the effect of boxers or briefs on infertility. That’s the word from Victor Brugh, MD, Assistant Professor of Urology.

What’s the best way to have the healthiest sperm? Be the healthiest you. Eat well. Exercise.

Dr. Brugh says many men think having sex more often will increase their sperm count. That’s not the case. Every other day when your partner is ovulating is the most effective.

If a man is diagnosed with a low sperm count, he can learn about options through his urologist or infertility specialist.

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Timing Is Everything



If you’re a man over 40, an African American or someone with a family history of prostate cancer, you should have a rectal examination and a PSA blood test at least every couple of years, says Ray Lance, MD, Associate Professor of Urology and the Ann and Paul Schellhammer Professor in Cancer Research. The blood test will determine whether a biopsy is necessary.

Dr. Lance says the recommendations for treating prostate cancer vary and may include surgery, radiation or close observation, depending upon the age and health of the patient. Younger patients are more likely to have all or part of the gland removed through robotic surgery, he notes, because it improves their long-term prognosis. While the surgical results depend upon age, more than 90 percent will recover full urinary control in six months or less, and upward of 70 percent will recover from erectile dysfunction within 18 months.

Healthy aging ought to become a priority by the time you are middle-aged. Diet and exercise are keys.



ROCK of Ages

Whether you are a man or a woman, Robert Palmer, MD, Professor of Internal Medicine, Director of the EVMS Glennan Center for Geriatrics and Gerontology and John Franklin Chair in Geriatrics, says the key to aging well is being healthy at every decade of life.

“If you are healthy at 50, you are more likely to be healthy at 60. If you are healthy at 60, you are more likely to be healthy at 70 and so forth,” Dr. Palmer says. “So healthy aging ought to become a priority by the time you are middle aged.”

Diet and exercise, which become more important as people age, are keys. He says the trick is not to do too much if you’re out of shape and you’re 60 or older. Do something more than you have been doing — even something as simple as walking a city block then two, three, four and more.

Stretching and balance exercises, like those included in Tai Chi and yoga, become important

as well. Exercise also helps improve energy, mood and memory. “The studies that have looked at cognitive function have focused more on walking,” Dr. Palmer says. “That would be my number-one recommendation.”

Because women live longer on average, screening for conditions such as osteoporosis becomes important with old age. People over 60 also should be immunized against shingles and pneumonia, as well as the flu.

Communication is an important part of prevention and quality of life. Make sure you talk to your doctor about changes as you age. There may be ways to address a variety of conditions. For instance, incontinence might be a concern, but there are treatments that can eliminate or lessen the issue.

“On the average,” Dr. Palmer says, “men and women should be able to live a good quality of life at least until the mid-80s, and some data says for women until 90.”

Have a full and well-rounded life. Unstructured time is not good for anyone. Have a plan each day.



CHANGE OF Heart

Taking care of your heart means exercising, maintaining a healthy weight, watching what you eat and avoiding smoking, says John Brush, MD, a cardiologist and Professor of Internal Medicine.

The key, Dr. Brush says, is exercising three or four times a week for about 40 minutes to get your heart rate up and break a sweat. Losing even a small percentage of your weight — perhaps five percent — will improve your cardiovascular risk factors. Match that with a restricted-calorie diet high in fruits, vegetables and fiber and low in saturated fats.

Statins, cholesterol-reducing drugs, may help decrease the risk for heart attack for those who have diabetes, have extremely high cholesterol or have suffered a heart attack or stroke. Consult with your doctor about your risk. “But the best thing of all is not having to use a statin,” Dr. Brush says. “The best thing of all is lifestyle modification. There are no side effects to natural reduction of cholesterol.”



MIND Matters

To keep your mind healthy, Stephen Deutsch, MD, PhD, Professor and Chair of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences and the Anne Armistead Robinson Chair of Psychiatry, has a variation on an old saying: An idle mind is the devil’s workshop.

“Have a full and well-rounded life,” he says. “Unstructured time is not good for anyone.” Have a plan each day. Socialize. Exercise. Engage in interests and hobbies you enjoy. “When things are fun,” Dr. Deutsch says, “they are more likely to capture your interest, and you are more likely to do them.”

Get enough sleep. If you find yourself not feeling refreshed in the morning or being excessively sleepy during the day, that’s a tipoff you’re not getting enough quality shuteye.

“You need to have a bedtime ritual,” he says. “You need to go through the appropriate stages of sleep, including REM, the deep-dream state. That doesn’t mean you may not have a night out during the week, but, in general, over the course of a month, people need to practice good sleep hygiene.”

Consult your physician if you have persistent problems with diminished motivation, diminished appetite, anxiety, sleep disturbance or recurrent intrusive thoughts. □