

Women's Health Preventing Top 10 Threats

The biggest threats to women's health are mostly preventable. Here's what you need to know to live a longer, healthier life.

From the Mayo Clinic

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Many of the leading threats to women's health can be prevented — *if* you know how. Consider this top 10 list of women's health threats, compiled from statistics provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other organizations. Then take steps to promote women's health and reduce your risks today.

No. 1 — Heart disease

Heart disease isn't just a man's disease. Heart disease is also a major women's health threat. To prevent heart disease:

- Don't smoke or use other tobacco products. Avoid exposure to secondhand smoke.
- Eat a healthy diet rich in vegetables, fruits, whole grains, fiber and fish. Cut back on foods high in saturated fat and sodium.
- If you have high cholesterol or high blood pressure, follow your doctor's treatment recommendations.
- Include physical activity in your daily routine.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- If you choose to drink alcohol, do so only in moderation. Too much alcohol can raise blood pressure.
- If you have diabetes, keep your blood sugar under control.
- Manage stress.

No. 2 — Cancer

The most common cause of cancer deaths among women is lung cancer, according to the American Cancer Society. Breast cancer and colorectal cancer also pose major women's health threats. To reduce your risk of cancer:

- Don't smoke or use other tobacco products. Avoid exposure to secondhand smoke.
- Include physical activity in your daily routine.

- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Eat a healthy diet rich in fruits and vegetables, and avoid high-fat foods.
- Limit your sun exposure. When you're outdoors, use sunscreen.
- If you choose to drink alcohol, do so only in moderation.
- Consult your doctor for regular cancer screenings.
- Reduce exposure to cancer-causing substances (carcinogens), such as radon, asbestos, radiation and air pollution.
- Breast-feed, if you can.

No. 3 — Stroke

You can't control some stroke risk factors, such as age, family history, sex or race. But you can take these steps to reduce your risk of stroke:

- Don't smoke.
- If you have high cholesterol or high blood pressure, follow your doctor's treatment recommendations.
- Limit the amount of saturated fat and cholesterol in your diet. Try to avoid trans fat entirely.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Include physical activity in your daily routine.
- If you have diabetes, keep your blood sugar under control.
- If you choose to drink alcohol, do so only in moderation.

No. 4 — COPD

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is a group of chronic lung conditions, including bronchitis and emphysema. To prevent COPD:

- Don't smoke. Avoid exposure to secondhand smoke.
- Minimize exposure to chemicals and air pollution.

No. 5 — Alzheimer's disease

There's no proven way to prevent Alzheimer's disease, but consider taking these steps:

- Take care of your heart. High blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, diabetes and high cholesterol may increase the risk of developing Alzheimer's.
- Avoid head injuries. There appears to be a link between head injury and future risk of Alzheimer's.

- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Include physical activity in your daily routine.
- Avoid tobacco.
- If you choose to drink alcohol, do so only in moderation.
- Stay socially active.
- Maintain mental fitness. Practice mental exercises, and take steps to learn new things.

No. 6 — Injuries

The leading cause of fatal accidents among women is motor vehicle crashes, according to the CDC. To reduce your risk of a deadly crash:

- Wear your seat belt.
- Follow the speed limit.
- Don't drive under the influence of alcohol or any other substances.
- Don't drive while sleepy.

Falls and poisoning also pose major women's health threats. Take common-sense precautions, such as having your vision checked, using nonslip mats in the tub and placing carbon monoxide detectors near the bedrooms in your home.

No. 7 — Type 2 diabetes

Type 2 diabetes — the most common type of diabetes — affects the way your body uses blood sugar (glucose). Possible complications of type 2 diabetes include heart disease, blindness, nerve damage and kidney damage. To prevent type 2 diabetes:

- Lose excess pounds, if you're overweight.
- Eat a healthy diet rich in fruits, vegetables and low-fat foods.
- Include physical activity in your daily routine.

No. 8 — Flu

Influenza is a common viral infection. While a case of the flu isn't usually serious for otherwise healthy adults, complications of the flu can be deadly — especially for those who have weak immune systems or chronic illnesses. To protect yourself from the flu, get an annual flu vaccine.

No. 9 — Kidney disease

Kidney failure is often a complication of diabetes or high blood pressure. If you have diabetes or high blood pressure, follow your doctor's treatment suggestions. In addition:

- Eat a healthy diet. Limit the amount of salt you consume.
- Include physical activity in your daily routine.
- Lose excess pounds, if you're overweight.
- Take medications as prescribed.

No. 10 — Blood poisoning (septicemia or sepsis)

Septicemia is a life-threatening infection marked by the presence of bacteria or their toxins in the blood. Septicemia commonly arises from infections in the lung, urinary tract, abdomen or pelvis. Often, it isn't preventable — but you can take steps to avoid infections and to protect yourself from illnesses that weaken your immune system:

- Wash your hands often.
- Keep your vaccines current.
- Seek prompt medical care for any serious infection.
- Change tampons at least every six to eight hours and avoid using superabsorbent tampons.
- Wipe from front to back after urinating and urinate after sex.

Your bottom line: Take health threats seriously.

It's important to understand common women's health risks, but don't feel intimidated. Instead, do whatever you can to lead a healthy lifestyle — including eating healthy foods, staying physically active, getting regular checkups and paying attention to your environment. Preventive measures can go a long way toward reducing your health risks.