

# Women's Health

**H**ealth care for women includes the entire spectrum of a woman's life, not just pregnancy and childbirth. Medical problems can affect women and men differently. Some serious medical issues, such as cardiac disease and heart attack, may be overlooked because symptoms in many women are not clear-cut. Many research studies in the past did not include women participants; therefore, conclusions from those studies may not be valid for making health care decisions about women. At each stage of a woman's life, there are important preventive health care steps to follow in order to provide early detection of medical problems, or to prevent them entirely. Simple steps include healthy eating, regular exercise, and medical checkups. It is important to be informed about women's health issues and discuss them thoroughly with your doctor.

The March 22/29, 2006, issue of *JAMA* is a theme issue that includes articles about many aspects of women's health.



## WOMEN AND MEN ARE DIFFERENT

Men and women have many of the same health issues, but their symptoms may be completely different. For example, heart attacks in women may be "silent" (without the chest pain that often heralds a heart attack in a man). Some medical problems are more common in women than in men (depression, obesity, osteoarthritis), but men have a greater chance of developing other diseases (alcoholism, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, Parkinson disease). Lifestyle factors, especially smoking, affect a woman's chance of developing diseases, such as lung cancer, that were previously thought to be more likely in men.

## MAINTAINING GOOD HEALTH

- Exercise daily.
- Eat a healthy, balanced diet, low in saturated fats.
- Have at least 5 servings of fruit and vegetables every day.
- Do not smoke.
- Follow cancer prevention guidelines (for lifestyle and for cancer screening).

## SPECIAL CONCERNS FOR WOMEN

- Prenatal care, even starting before planning a pregnancy, is an important factor in increasing the chance of delivering a healthy infant and decreasing the chance of a pregnancy-related maternal complication.
- Obesity is a major medical problem for many women and contributes to developing heart disease, type 2 diabetes, some cancers, osteoarthritis, and sleep apnea.
- Heart disease is the number one cause of death for women in developed countries.
- Women often focus on health care for their spouse and children, while neglecting their own health. Taking time to maintain good health is crucial, for yourself and for your family members.

Sources: National Women's Health Information Center; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; American Cancer Society; American Heart Association; Heart Healthy Women

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## FOR MORE INFORMATION

- National Women's Health Information Center  
[www.4woman.gov](http://www.4woman.gov)
- American Heart Association  
[www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org)
- American Cancer Society  
[www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)

## INFORM YOURSELF

To find this and previous JAMA Patient Pages, go to the Patient Page Index on JAMA's Web site at [www.jama.com](http://www.jama.com). Many are available in English and Spanish. A Patient Page on how women and men are different was published in the January 22/29, 2003, issue; one on women and heart disease was published in the December 25, 2002, issue; one on preventing cancer was published in the May 26, 2004, issue; one on obesity was published in the April 9, 2003, issue; and one on risk factors for heart disease was published in the August 20, 2003, issue.

