

## The 8 Most Important Ways to Stay Healthy and Prevent Disease

**1 Don't Smoke.** If you do smoke, talk to your primary care provider about quitting. This is especially important if you are pregnant; smoking has harmful effects on both of you. You can also help yourself by following tips on websites ([www.smokefree.gov](http://www.smokefree.gov)) or talking directly with someone at the National Quitline (1-800-QUITNOW). There are additional resources available at [www.healthfinder.gov](http://www.healthfinder.gov); search for "smoking" once you've accessed the site. Smoking is a major preventable risk factor that is associated with early death. Common causes are emphysema, lung disease, and heart disease.

**2 Be Physically Active.** Walking briskly, mowing the lawn, dancing, swimming, and bicycling are just a few examples of moderate physical activity. If you are not already physically active, start small and work up to 30 minutes or more of moderate physical activity most days of the week.

**3 Eat a Healthy Diet.** Emphasize fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products; include lean meats, poultry, fish, beans, eggs, and nuts; eat foods low in saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, salt, and added sugars.

**4 Stay at a Healthy Weight.** Balance calories from foods and beverages with calories you burn off by your activities. To prevent gradual weight gain over time, make small decreases in food and beverage calories and increase physical activity.

**5 Drink Alcohol Only in Moderation.** If you drink alcohol, have no more than one drink a day. A standard drink is one 12-ounce bottle of beer or wine cooler, one 5-ounce glass of wine, or 1.5 ounces of 80-proof distilled spirits. Of course, if you are pregnant you should avoid alcohol altogether.

**6 Get The Screening Tests Recommended for You.**

**BODY MASS INDEX (BMI):** Have your body mass index calculated to screen for obesity. BMI is a measure of body fat based on height and weight. You can also calculate your own BMI by using the BMI calculator on the website for the National Heart, Lung, and

Blood Institute (<http://www.nhlbisupport.com/bmi/>).

**CHOLESTEROL:** Have your cholesterol checked regularly starting at age 45. If you are younger than 45, talk to your doctor about whether to have your cholesterol checked if any of the following apply to you:

- You have diabetes
- You have high blood pressure
- Heart disease runs in your family
- You smoke

**BLOOD PRESSURE:** Have your blood pressure checked at least every 2 years. High blood pressure is 140/90 or higher. Successful treatment will prevent heart disease and stroke.

**BREAST CANCER:** The USPSTF recently updated its guidelines and now recommends that mammograms begin at age 50. If you are between 40–49 years old or have additional risk factors, discuss the risks and benefits of screening with your physician.

**CERVICAL CANCER:** Have a Pap smear every 1 to 3 years if you:

- Have ever been sexually active
- Are between the ages of 21 and 65

**COLORECTAL CANCER:** Have a test for colorectal cancer starting at age 50. Your doctor can help you decide which test is right for you. If you have a family history of colorectal cancer, you may need to be tested earlier.

**DIABETES:** Have a test for diabetes if you have high blood pressure or high cholesterol. If you are diabetic, tight glucose control is very important. Maintaining HbA1c less than 7.0 will reduce vascular, heart, and kidney disease as well as blindness and nerve damage.

**DEPRESSION:** Your emotional health is as important as your physical health. If you've felt "down", sad, or hopeless over the last two weeks or have felt little interest or pleasure in doing things, you may be depressed. Talk to your doctor about being screened for depression.

**CHLAMYDIA AND OTHER SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS:** Have a test for Chlamydia if you are 25 or younger and sexually active. If you are older, talk to your doctor about being tested for Chlamydia or other sexually transmitted diseases.

**HIV:** Have a test to screen for HIV if you:

- Have had unprotected sex with multiple partners
- Are pregnant
- Have used or now use injection drugs
- Exchange sex for money or drugs or have sex partners who do
- Have past or present sex partners who are HIV-infected, are bisexual, or use injection drugs
- Are being treated for sexually transmitted diseases
- Had a blood transfusion between 1978 and 1985.

**OSTEOPOROSIS (Thinning of the Bones):**

Have a bone density test beginning at age 65 to screen for osteoporosis. If you are between the ages of 60 and 64 and weigh 154 pounds or less, talk to your doctor about being tested. Your doctor may also suggest that you have an earlier screening based upon your individual risk factors.

**7 Take Preventive Medications If You Need Them.**

**ASPIRIN:** Ask your doctor about taking aspirin to prevent heart disease if you are:

- Older than 45;
- Younger than 45 and also:
  - a) Have high blood pressure
  - b) Have high cholesterol
  - c) Have diabetes
  - d) Smoke

**BREAST CANCER DRUGS:** If your mother, sister, or daughter has had breast cancer, talk to your doctor about the risks and benefits of taking medicines to prevent breast cancer.

**HORMONES:** Do not take hormones to prevent disease. Talk to your doctor if you need relief from the symptoms of menopause.

**8 Stay Up-to-Date with Your Immunizations.** Have a flu shot every year starting at age 50. If you are younger than 50, ask your primary care provider whether you need a flu shot. Have a pneumonia shot once after you turn 65. If you are younger, ask your primary care provider whether you need a pneumonia shot.

**Sources:** Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) Fact Sheet "Women: Stay Healthy at Any Age – Your Checklist for Health", based on research findings from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF).