

PREVENTION

ULTIMATE GUIDE TO

WOMEN'S

HEALTH

AND

WELLNESS

ACTION PLANS FOR MORE THAN 100 WOMEN'S HEALTH PROBLEMS





Over the past century, remarkable advances in women's health care have almost doubled the average woman's life span, dramatically reduced maternal and infant mortality, and resulted in the development and delivery of medical services and treatments that previous generations could not have imagined. Women are not only living longer, they are also healthier than at any time in history. A new national focus on women's health in our country has provided women with greater knowledge and access to information about their health. Women's health issues have been integrated into medical research, health care professional training, and clinical practice. Additionally, one of the most important accomplishments over the past decade has been the recognition that women and men have different health needs, and that gender matters in understanding health and disease.

Consider this: In the year 1900, a woman had beaten the odds if she saw her 49th birthday: the average life expectancy for Americans was 48 years. The leading killers then were infectious diseases such as tuberculosis, smallpox, diphtheria, and influenza, and complications of childbirth. But thanks to the triumph of public health interventions including sanitation, vaccinations, health education, preventive health practices, safety and

environmental regulations, increased access to health care, new medical diagnostic and treatment interventions, and the implementation of national public health policies, at the dawn of the 21st century American women are living 30 years longer on average than they did a century ago. In fact, last year's census forms offered a three-digit space for entering one's age to accommodate the more than 50,000 Americans who are more than 100 years old. It is estimated that a baby born today has a one in three chance of living to be 100. Consequently, the challenge is to keep women healthy over the course of their longer life spans.

You see, the very success of public health interventions over the past century has resulted in a shift in the threats to American women's health. Today, the major killers of women are chronic illnesses, including cancer, diabetes, heart and lung disease, and stroke, as well as injuries and violence. As much as 50 percent of the causes of these conditions are linked to preventable behavioral, lifestyle, and environmental factors, including smoking (400,000 Americans die annually from tobacco-related illnesses), overweight and lack of physical exercise (300,000 people in the United States die each year from illnesses caused by or linked to obesity), injuries, unsafe sexual practices, and alcohol and substance abuse (more than 129,000 deaths). The simple fact is that more than any miracle drug that could be discovered, reducing health-damaging behaviors by

every American woman could reduce premature deaths by as much as one half, significantly decrease disability, increase quality of life, and dramatically cut health care costs.

That's why improving the nation's health today means focusing like a laser on prevention, putting it at the forefront of our country's health care agenda. It also means intensifying the national focus on women's health—a cause that for too long was neglected in the halls of public policy, in research, and in the delivery of clinical and preventive services.

Despite the tremendous progress that has been made in advancing women's health, many challenges still remain. They include rectifying health disparities for women of color, providing access to health care services for all Americans, and decreasing the toll that chronic diseases and conditions take, particularly on the health of senior women.

In the 21st century, improving women's health means addressing the social, biomedical, and environmental issues that will shape the health landscape of the future. Worldwide, a woman's income and level of education are the most powerful predictors of her health. So, prevention means ensuring economic and educational equity for all of our nation's women. Prevention also

means addressing mental illness, diseases that affect one out of five Americans each year, and developing strategies to eliminate environmental hazards from women's lives. It means safeguarding our nation's future by ensuring that every girl has a healthy start and healthy self-esteem and is protected from violence, tobacco, and drugs.

So at the dawn of the 21st century, let's remember the public health lessons of the past and apply them with advances from science to new health challenges facing us today and in the future. Let's do it by emphasizing the power of disease prevention and health promotion for communities and for individuals, by fostering and disseminating advances from research, and by increasing access to health care services for all Americans.

Knowledge is power when it comes to your health. Put prevention into practice and take an important step toward a healthier future for you and your family.

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