

Insights *for Women*

BROUGHT TO YOU BY BLANCHARD VALLEY HEALTH ASSOCIATION

*Helping
you
lead
a healthy
life*

Taking Care of you

Most of us are juggling the demands of family or careers—or both.

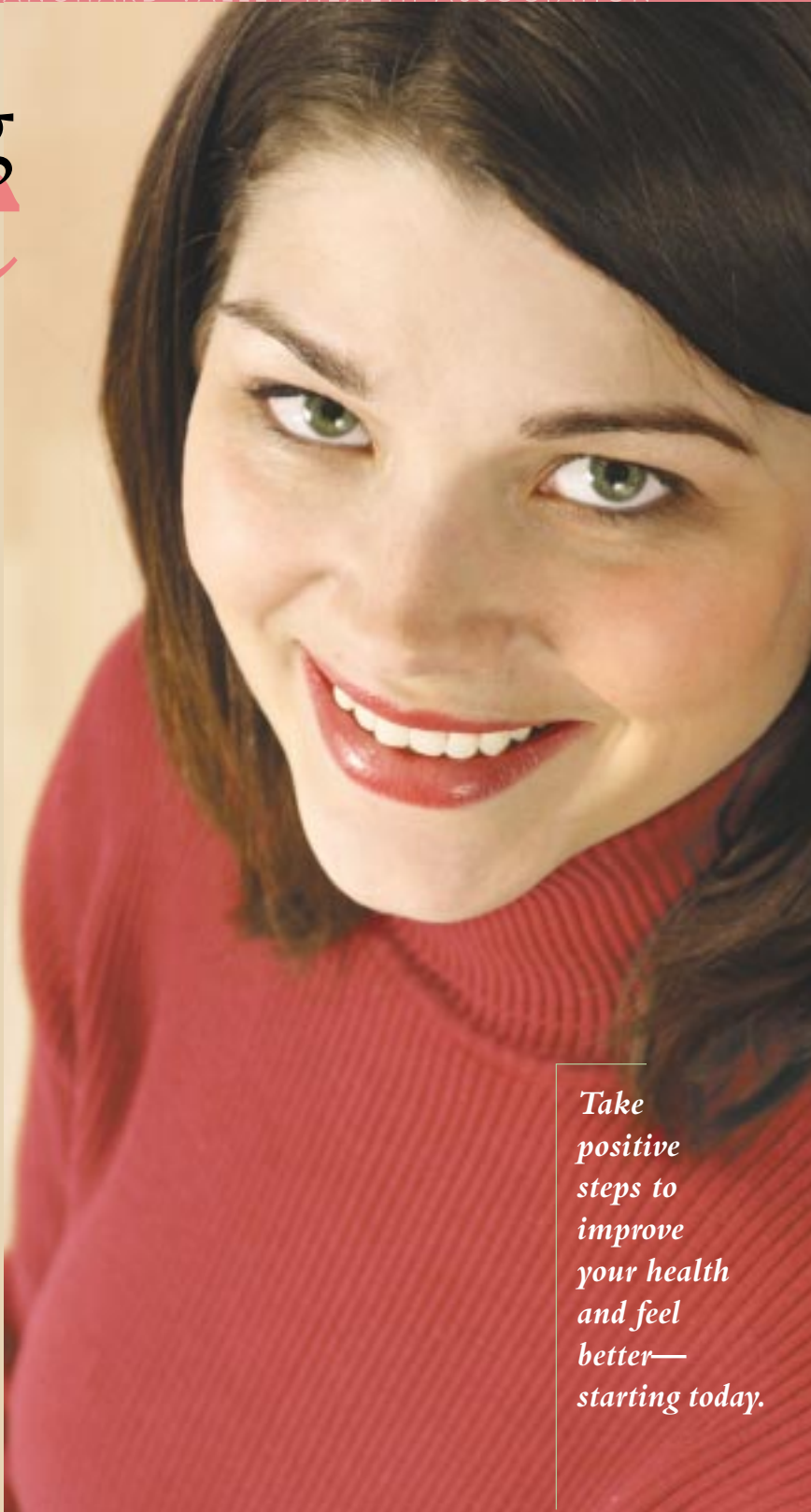
But being busy women can mean short-changing ourselves of the very things that help keep us healthy and able to be there for those who need us. Or for some of us, our hectic lives affect our wellness and leave us feeling overwhelmed and dissatisfied.

OK, maybe we need to do less and delegate more, but one thing we can't make others responsible for is our health.

Ownership—take it now. Make a commitment to take a proactive approach to your health care and wellness.

So, what does that mean? The American Medical Women's Association offers these steps to good health:

- Seek information that helps you optimize your well-being and prevent illness.
- Eat a healthful diet and make physical activity a daily priority.
- Control stress and get enough rest. Understand how too much of one and not enough of the other affects your health and daily happiness.
- Take action to change factors that affect your health, such as joining a smoking cessation or weight-loss program.
- Deal with chronic conditions, such as asthma, high blood pressure and diabetes.
- Work with your physician on a plan to keep you healthy that includes regular visits and screenings. ←



*Take
positive
steps to
improve
your health
and feel
better—
starting today.*



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of a
woman



Prep for

“Good parenting starts during pregnancy when you take steps that are in your baby’s best interest.”
—Lorie Thomas, M.D.

Caring for Your Baby

Forget pickles and ice cream. Here's what pregnant women really crave: a healthy baby.

Fortunately, most of the babies born in this country do have a good start in life. Still, if you're expecting, there's much you can do to boost your already favorable odds of delivering a healthy baby.

Consider the following advice from the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and other medical experts.

■ **Seek early and regular medical care.** Arrange for prenatal care as soon as you suspect you're pregnant. Then follow through with regular visits to improve your chances of having a healthy baby.

It's best to keep every appointment, even if you've previously had problem-free pregnancies. No two pregnancies are alike, and every baby deserves close monitoring.

■ **Eat wisely.** When you're pregnant, you need about 300 extra calories daily to help your baby grow. If you were of normal weight before your pregnancy, your doctor will likely advise a weight gain of about 25 to 35 pounds.

But even if you're gaining too rapidly, don't skip meals or go on a diet. Your developing baby depends on you for regular nourishment.

It's also in your baby's best interest (and yours too) if you take extra care to eat a well-balanced, low-fat, high-fiber diet. Every day, try for at least nine servings of bread, cereal, rice or pasta; four servings of vegetables; three of fruit; three of protein; and three of calcium-rich foods, such as milk, cheese or yogurt.

To protect your baby from serious defects of the brain and spine, you should also take a daily supplement of 0.4 milligrams of folic acid throughout your pregnancy. Most prenatal

vitamins have at least 1 milligram of folic acid. So if your practitioner has prescribed them, you're covered.

■ **With your doctor's OK, exercise.** This can help you stay in shape and feel better during your pregnancy; plus you'll be more physically ready for labor. Many women choose low-impact activities, such as walking or swimming.

Again, check with your doctor and be cautious. For example: If you can't talk comfortably while working out, take a breather. Also, don't exercise at too brisk a pace outdoors if it's hot and humid. Becoming overheated isn't good for your baby.

■ **Don't light up.** Smoking raises the risk of serious pregnancy complications, including delivering an underweight baby. If you're still smoking, the sooner you quit, the better. For help, contact BVRHC's Smoking Cessation Program for pregnant women at (419) 423-5141.

■ **Avoid alcohol altogether.** Drinking alcohol during pregnancy can cause fetal alcohol

syndrome—a condition in which babies may be born with facial abnormalities, heart defects and other severe problems. Because there is no known safe level of alcohol during pregnancy, don't drink at all.

■ **Use medicine with care.** You undoubtedly know that illegal drugs can harm your baby and, therefore, must be avoided. But what about prescription and over-the-counter ones?

Some can do damage, so tell anyone who prescribes medicines for you and may not realize you're pregnant—such as your dentist—that you're expecting. And always check with your practitioner before you take any over-the-counter medicine.

■ **Know what to stay away from.** Cat litter can contain a parasite that can infect a pregnant woman and seriously harm her baby. If you own a cat, get someone else to change the kitty litter. Also, steer clear of unpasteurized milk or raw or undercooked meat. Regular handwashing is also a good way to reduce your risk of infections that might harm your baby.

Don't use hot tubs, saunas or steam rooms. And avoid insecticides and products with lead, mercury or solvents, such as paint thinner.

■ **Pay attention to your body.** Let your doctor know right away if you experience any of these symptoms: pain of any kind; strong cramps; contractions at 20-minute intervals; vaginal bleeding or leaking of fluid; dizziness, fainting or shortness of breath; constant nausea or vomiting; or a decrease in your baby's movement.

Finally, check with your doctor about the availability of childbirth classes. These can help give you an idea of what to expect during labor and delivery, and help you feel more confident when the big day arrives. ◀



Plan to bring your baby home safely

Starting with the very first car ride home from the hospital—and for every outing that follows—you'll want to keep your baby safe.


Here's how to plan ahead to protect your precious passenger, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics.

■ **Even if your home is only a few blocks away, use a car seat.** Accidents can happen no matter how short the trip. So every time your baby travels by car, make sure your baby is properly secured.

■ **Make sure your baby rides in a rear-facing car seat until your baby is at least 20 pounds and at least 1 year old.**

■ **Always make sure your baby rides in the rear of the car, ideally in the middle.** The rear is the safest place for all kids 12 and younger.

■ **Never—for any reason—put a rear-facing seat in the front seat of a vehicle with an air bag.**



When you're pregnant, your body provides everything your baby needs to grow. It's no different after your baby is born. Your breast milk is the perfect first baby food. And if you're deciding whether to breastfeed, you'll want to consider the many health benefits of breastfeeding—for you and your baby.

For babies

Breast milk has all the protein, sugar, fat, water and vitamins a baby's brain and body need. And it has antibodies that can help protect a baby from illness, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). Breastfed babies are less prone to ear infections, allergies, pneumonia, meningitis, vomiting and diarrhea

Breastfeeding

Good for you and baby

than are formula-fed babies. Breast milk is easier to digest than formula, so your baby may have less gas and constipation. Breastfeeding may also protect against sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).

For moms

Women who choose breastfeeding enjoy some benefits as well. Breastfeeding releases a hormone that helps the uterus return to its normal size more quickly and reduces bleeding after delivery, according to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG).

If you breastfeed, you will also burn more calories, so you may lose the pounds of pregnancy faster. Breastfeeding may lower your risk of osteoporosis, ovarian cancer and premenopausal breast cancer.

Off to a good start

You'll want to learn about breastfeeding before your baby arrives and start as soon after delivery as possible. There's nothing more natural than breastfeeding, but you and your

newborn may still need a little practice.

The two most important things for successful breastfeeding, says the AAP, are how you hold your baby and how he or she takes your breast—called “latch-on.” For the proper position, turn the baby's entire body toward yours. A baby is latched on correctly when the entire nipple and much of the areola, the dark area around the nipple, are in the infant's mouth.

Follow your baby's lead on when to feed and for how long. Nurse when your baby is hungry, usually eight to 12 times a day in the first few weeks. Your baby will likely let you know by nuzzling your breast, making sucking motions or becoming more fussy.

Also let your baby take the time he or she wants, typically 10 to 15 minutes on each breast. Alternate which breast you offer first.

The AAP recommends that you breastfeed your baby for at least a year. For the first six months, your baby will probably not need water, juice or other food. After that, you

should gradually add iron-enriched solid foods.

For questions or problems, consult BVRHC's Lactation Center hotline at (419) 423-5518. ←

How do I know if my baby is getting enough milk?

Your breastfeeding newborn can't say, “I'm full, Mom.”

But you still can tell whether your baby is getting enough of your milk. Look for these signs in the first several weeks.

Your baby:

- Nurses often—every two hours or so.
- Gains weight after the first week.
- Makes gulping sounds when nursing, which means your baby is swallowing milk and not just sucking.
- Is drowsy and content after feeding, sleeps well and is alert when awake.
- Wets at least six diapers with pale yellow urine and has two or more small, loose yellow bowel movements a day.

Sources: American Academy of Pediatrics; American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

BVRHC
Lactation
Center
hotline: (419)
423-5518



Plotting a sneeze-free garden

If you love to garden, but your nose would rather run, don't despair. You can pick plants that are less likely to aggravate your allergies.

It helps to find out what plants cause reactions so you can avoid them. But in general, choose native plants and less lawn, says the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology. Select trees, shrubs and plants that are insect-pollinated rather than wind-pollinated. They usually have bright, showy flowers whose pollen is heavy and sticky and less likely to be in the air.

For example, apple, cherry, pear, plum, magnolia and dogwood trees may be better choices than maple, elm, poplar, oak, cypress, sycamore, pecan, walnut, willow or palm trees. Azalea, boxwood, hibiscus and lilac are good shrub choices. Roses, daffodils, daisies, geraniums, iris, tulips, petunias, snapdragons, sunflowers and zinnias are flowers that may cause fewer reactions.

Other good advice: Avoid working outside on windy days or days with a high pollen count or humidity. Wear a paper mask to mow or rake. Keep gardening tools and clothing outdoors and shower immediately after you are finished.

For more information on this topic, consult *Allergy-Free Gardening: The Revolutionary Guide to Healthy Landscaping* by Thomas L. Ogren (Ten Speed Press, Berkeley, Calif., 2000).

Fresh fridge advice

Most of the housekeeping you do probably isn't for safety's sake. But cleaning your refrigerator can help keep your food safe from harmful bacteria.

To keep your fridge fresh and clean, follow these tips from the American Dietetic Association:

- Keep your refrigerator below 40 degrees Fahrenheit to prevent the growth of bacteria. Place a refrigerator thermometer on the middle shelf and check it regularly.
- Regularly clean the inside of the fridge using a clean sponge and warm, soapy water.
- Store an open box of baking soda in the fridge to combat odors.
- Wipe up spills immediately, especially raw meat juice.
- Keep the front grill free of dust.

Folate may lower risk of cancer

Folate, or folic acid, helps prevent birth defects. But now there's word of another potential benefit. A study in the *International Journal of Cancer* has linked folate to a decreased risk of colorectal cancer in women.

The study found that women reporting the highest daily folate intake—more than 367 micrograms—had a 40 percent lower risk of getting colon or rectal cancer than those reporting the lowest intakes.

Folate is found naturally in leafy vegetables, beans, lentils, orange juice and seeds. Folic acid is the synthetic form of folate. It's found in vitamin supplements and, since 1998, has been added to grain products such as cereals and pasta.

This doesn't mean that folate is the only key to preventing colorectal cancer. The American Cancer Society also advises:

- Maintain a normal weight.
- Limit high-fat foods and eat plenty of fruits, vegetables and whole grains.
- Exercise regularly.



Protecting Yourself From Peril

The Heart of a Woman

Fatty deposits and clogged arteries. Doesn't exactly sound feminine, does it? But heart disease is very much a woman's disease.

In fact, more American women—and men too—die from heart disease than any other cause.

Yet many women still worry more about their husbands' risk than their own.

"More women need to be aware of risk factors for heart disease and what they can do to protect themselves," says Lloyd Van Winkle, M.D., of the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP).

Heart disease starts when cholesterol and fat deposits on artery walls interfere with blood flow to the heart. In some cases, the deposits completely block the flow, causing a heart attack.

The stage can be set for this by having any of the following risk factors: an inactive lifestyle, a poor diet, being a smoker or having diabetes, high blood pressure or unhealthy cholesterol levels.

A woman's risk for heart disease starts to increase around age 45. Women with relatives who have had heart disease are more likely to develop it themselves. And race also appears to play a role in risk. African American women are 35 percent more likely to die from heart disease than Caucasian women.

Keeping your heart healthy

Obviously, you can't change your race or family history. But you can control some risk factors. To protect yourself:

Embrace activity. Physical activity for at least 30 minutes most days of the week helps

you maintain a healthful weight and protects against high blood pressure and high cholesterol.

Research indicates that women who walk for 30 to 45 minutes three times weekly reduce their risk of heart attack by 50 percent.

In addition to walking, the AAFP says good activities include bicycling, swimming and using a treadmill or stationary bike.

Eat well. You can help your heart by eating fewer saturated fats, such as meat and high-fat dairy products, and fewer trans fats, such as baked goods containing shortening and hydrogenated oils. Eating more poly- and monounsaturated fats, found in vegetable oil, fatty fish, olive oil and canola oil, helps to raise "good" cholesterol.

Keep blood pressure in check. Blood pressure that's too high can damage artery walls, allowing fat and cholesterol to collect on them.

Lifestyle changes such as maintaining a healthful weight, exercising regularly, eating less salt and following a diet rich in fruits, vegetables and low-fat dairy products can help bring blood pressure down. A doctor may also prescribe blood pressure-lowering medications.

Control cholesterol. Cholesterol is a substance that helps move fatty acids through the blood. There are two types—one good, one bad. The good kind (HDL) moves fats efficiently through the bloodstream and, eventually, out of the body. The bad kind (LDL) builds up in the arteries if there's too much of it.

Regular exercise, maintaining a healthful weight and eating fewer items high in saturated fat, such as high-fat dairy products and meat, can help bring cholesterol to healthy levels. There also are cholesterol-lowering medications.

Don't smoke. Smoking promotes the buildup of fat and cholesterol in the arteries.

"As far as your heart's concerned, enjoying the good life means eating right, exercising and seeing your doctor for conditions such as high blood pressure."

—Pretti Attavar, M.D., BVHA cardiologist





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Smoking combined with birth control pills raises the risk of blood clots that can trigger heart problems, Dr. Van Winkle says. Women who use birth control pills but don't smoke are not at increased risk for heart problems.

If you're a smoker, quitting can help your heart right away. Within a few hours, your body begins carrying oxygen more efficiently, and after a week, your circulation improves. You can lower your risk for heart attack by a third within two years after quitting, the AAFP says. Quitting isn't easy, but it's possible. Ask your doctor about medications and classes that can help.

Manage diabetes. Women with diabetes have three to seven times the risk for heart disease as women without diabetes.

Controlling diabetes by taking medications, keeping weight at a healthy level and eating well can help reduce the risk.

See your doctor regularly. Your doctor can provide the screenings you need to detect changes, such as high blood pressure or cholesterol, that put your heart at risk. <

The female heart attack—know the danger signs

We've all seen the classic TV heart attack: It's a man, and he's grasping his chest.

But in real life, heart attacks can be quieter, causing only mild chest pain or discomfort—and they happen to women too.

And additional symptoms, including pain in the neck or shoulders, nausea and fatigue, are more likely to indicate a heart attack in women than in men, says the American Academy of Family Physicians.

Other signs may include:

- Discomfort in the arm(s), back, jaw or stomach.
- Shortness of breath.
- A cold sweat.
- Light-headedness.

Women may hesitate to get help because they don't recognize signs of an attack, and according to the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, many women still view heart attack as being a man's problem. But acting fast is crucial. Wait no more than a few minutes—five at the most—before calling emergency help if you are showing signs of a heart attack.

Sun Safety

Protecting yourself and your family

Enjoy the outdoors while still respecting the sun.

The sun—let it shine, but do respect its power.

A little sunshine can be a welcome thing, but even on cloudy days, the sun can penetrate and leave its mark.

So before you venture outdoors, there are a few things you should know about sun safety.

Effects of the sun

Without the proper protection, you may get a painful sunburn. Or worse, too much sun can eventually lead to skin cancer. More than 90 percent of all skin cancers occur on sun-exposed skin. The face, neck, ears, forearms and

hands are the most common places for skin cancer.

Skin type is the most important factor in determining your risk for skin cancer. Some risk factors for skin cancer include:

- Fair skin.
- Blue, green and hazel eyes.
- Light-colored hair.
- Tendency to burn rather than suntan.
- History of severe burns.
- Freckles or lots of moles.
- A family history of skin cancer.

Even people with darker complexions can get a sunburn. Everyone is at risk of getting

The truth about tanning

Tanned, golden skin used to be considered healthy. But a suntan is actually the result of skin injury.

Tanning occurs when the sun's ultraviolet rays enter the skin and it protects itself by producing more pigment, or melanin.

Indoor tanning is just as bad for your skin as sunlight. Most tanning salons use ultraviolet-A (UVA) bulbs. Studies have shown that UVA rays go deeper into the skin and contribute to premature wrinkling and skin cancer.

If you still like the tanned look, you can skip the sun damage and "fake it" with sunless tanning lotions and cosmetics.

Sources: American Academy of Dermatology; American Cancer Society

skin cancer or other serious health problems from too much sun.

Tips for safe fun in the sun

Here are some tips from the American Academy of Dermatology to help you protect your skin when outdoors.

- Use a broad-spectrum sunscreen with an SPF (sun protection factor) of at least 15 on all exposed skin, including the lips, even on cloudy days.
- If you go swimming or plan other water activities, be sure to use a water-resistant sunscreen.
- Reapply sunscreen as directed, usually every couple of hours—even the water-resistant types.
- Wear a broad-brimmed hat, sunglasses and protective clothing.
- Sit in the shade whenever possible, such as underneath an umbrella or trees.
- Plan outdoor activities early or late in the day to avoid peak sunlight hours (between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.).

Remember: The sun's rays penetrate even on cloudy days and can be reflected off sand, tile, water, snow and buildings. That makes it important to practice sun protection habits when you're outdoors, regardless of the season.

Children should learn sun safety too. According to the National Institutes of Health, sun exposure during childhood and teen years is a major contributor to developing skin cancer. Encourage your children to protect themselves from skin-damaging sun exposure by practicing sun safety habits. ←

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