



A Proactive Woman is a Healthy Woman

Women—you often care for kids, partners, parents health—so how's *your* health?

Here's a List of Important Women's Sexual Health Issues

1. Choosing your Health Partner—Visiting your gynecologist is important for having good sexual health, so find a gynecologist you're comfortable with. A women's wellness exam will cover a pelvic exam, a pap smear, breast exam and also gives you time to ask any pertinent questions about your sexual health.

2. Pap Smear with HPV Testing — This is a screening test for cervical cancer and usually takes less than two minutes to do. According to the Mayo Clinic, detecting cervical cancer early with a Pap smear gives you a greater chance at a cure. Turns out, if you don't have High Risk HPV, you don't even get cervical cancer. Ask your Dr. about the newest Pap smear and HPV test recommendations for your age group.

3. A Good Sex Life— Bet you weren't expecting this near the top of the list, but having a fulfilling sex life is very important to your wellbeing. Often our sex life gets left out of health conversations and we, as women, should pay attention to this aspect of our lives just as much as the other components of our health. While we're bombarded with Viagra commercials on TV and in print, there's never much discussion about sexual dysfunction in women. In fact, it's estimated that 43 percent of women will experience some sort of sexual dysfunction in life. Female sexual dysfunction can happen at any age and takes a variety of forms. Often it's treatable. So if you're having problems with orgasm, with sexual arousal or desire, discuss it with your doctor.

4. Testing, Testing—STD testing is helpful if you're sexually active. Get tested every year as a general rule if you're not in a long-term, monogamous relationship — or, ideally, after each new partner with whom you have unprotected sex. Better yet, avoid any infections by having protected sex in the first place. STD tests are not one-size-fits-all; the type of test you get depends on age, level of sexual activity and sexual history. To determine what sort of test to get, talk openly with your healthcare provider. Then, depending on your risk and history, you'll either get a blood test, swab test, or both. A swab test can tell if you have STDs like chlamydia, herpes and HPV. However, a blood test is more accurate and can test for STDs like HIV, which can't be detected in a swab test. Many STDs are treatable and curable, just like any other infection. In fact, more than half of the population will have an STD in their lifetime, so it's a lot more common than you think.

5. Pain During Sex—Pain during sex isn't fun—but it can happen. Be honest with your partner about it and then discuss it with your doctor. Natural options include using more lube. Or, maybe employ more foreplay, which can often turn on a woman's natural lubrication. Vaginal skin stays pliable, youthful and comfortable with friction with topical estrogen, so that may be in order. Also, be sure to rule out infection, STD or problems with your uterus or cervix (especially if you're having sex too soon after childbirth). Just don't be afraid to talk about it.

6. Infertility—A Centers for Disease Control survey found that 6 percent of American couples have fertility problems. Infertility affects men and women equally, despite the stereotype that women are more responsible. It's a medical problem that affects one's ability to reproduce. If you've been trying to get pregnant for at least a year, it might be time to talk to your doctor. Take heart: 85 to 90 percent of fertility problems are treatable.

7. Contraceptives— Did you know half of all pregnancies in the US are unplanned? That's a huge number when we're living in an era where birth control has never been more accessible, thanks to the Affordable Care Act, which requires private insurers to offer contraception coverage with no cost of co-pays. A small amount of money spent on contraception can actually save you a lot of money in the long run.

Source: Jennifer S. Hayes, DO, FACOOG

If you don't have a relationship with a healthcare provider or gynecologist where these issues can be openly and comfortably addressed, we can help. Call (727) 540-0414 and schedule an appointment with Dr. Jennifer Hayes or Sharon Welsh, ARNP at Visionary Centre for Women. We've dedicated our lives to specializing in minimally invasive solutions for our patients' optimum health.