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Women's Health Foundations: A Guide to Lifelong Wellness (Up to Age 65)

Establishing a strong foundation for women's health involves balancing clinical prevention, hormonal health, and daily lifestyle practices. This guide outlines the essential pillars of health maintenance and disease prevention for women from early adulthood through age 65.

Preventive Clinical Screenings

Routine check-ups allow you to catch health changes early, when they are easiest to manage. Essential screenings up to age 65 include:

- **Cervical Cancer Screening (Pap Smear & HPV Test):** Ages 21–29: Pap smear alone every 3 years.
 - **Ages 30–65:** An HPV test alone every 5 years, a Pap smear alone every 3 years, or both tests combined (co-testing) every 5 years.
 - **Breast Health (Mammograms):** Biennial screening mammograms are recommended for women aged 40 to 74. Consult your provider by age 40 to assess your specific family risk factors.
 - **Colorectal Cancer Screening:** Recommended for all adults starting at age 45 through age 75. Options include non-invasive annual stool tests or a colonoscopy every 10 years.
 - **Cardiovascular & Metabolic Checks:** Track your blood pressure annually and get a fasting lipid (cholesterol) panel and blood glucose (diabetes) test every 3 to 5 years. You can track your baseline vitals using the [Home Diagnostic Kit List](#).
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Hormonal and Reproductive Milestones

Understanding your body's natural transitions empowers you to manage symptoms effectively rather than suffering through them.

Reproductive Years & Family Planning

Prioritize optimal preconception health, reproductive choices, and routine screenings for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) based on behavioral risk factors. If planning a pregnancy, a daily prenatal vitamin with folic acid is essential to prevent neural tube defects.

The Menopause Transition (Perimenopause to Postmenopausal)

- **Perimenopause:** Typically beginning in a woman's 40s, estrogen levels fluctuate unpredictably, causing irregular periods, hot flashes, mood shifts, and sleep disturbances.
 - **Menopause:** Defined officially once you have gone 12 consecutive months without a menstrual period (the average age is 51).
 - **Postmenopausal Support:** The permanent drop in estrogen increases your risk for bone loss (osteoporosis) and cardiovascular disease. Discuss the risks and benefits of hormone replacement therapy (HRT) or non-hormonal therapies with your provider early in this transition.
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Lifestyle Pillars for Disease Prevention

Daily habits form the ultimate shield against chronic illnesses like hypertension, type 2 diabetes, and breast cancer.

Bone-Preserving Nutrition: Estrogen protects bone density. To combat post-menopausal bone thinning, ensure your diet includes adequate calcium and Vitamin D. Prioritize lean proteins, leafy greens, and healthy fats while minimizing processed sugars.

Strategic Exercise: Aim for 150 minutes of moderate cardiovascular activity per week. Crucially, integrate weight-bearing and strength-training exercises at least twice a week. Lifting weights or doing resistance exercises stimulates bone modeling, preserving skeletal strength as you age.

Sleep and Mental Wellness: Chronic stress and poor sleep elevate cortisol, which destabilizes metabolic health. Protect your sleep environment and utilize mental health strategies to navigate anxiety or depressive transitions.

Key Medications and Interactions to Watch

As you manage your health, be highly mindful of over-the-counter choices:

- **NSAID Use:** If you take NSAIDs (like Ibuprofen) for menstrual cramps or joint aches, always take them with food. Review the [Pain Management Guide](#) to protect your stomach lining.
 - **Medications to Avoid Over 65:** As women approach the 65-year milestone, certain common drugs like Diphenhydramine (Benadryl) should be phased out due to increased risks of confusion, sedation, and falls, as noted in the [Five Common Medications to Avoid](#) resource.
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Take Action: Your health needs change with every decade. Use your next annual wellness exam to map out a personalized screening schedule that aligns perfectly with your current age, lifestyle, and family history.

The above information was reviewed and validated by David Campbell-O'Dell, DNP, APRN-IP, FNP-BC, FAANP